

Summary of discussions and actions taken by GEAC on March 9, 2007

(Note: These are not approved minutes but are instead a summary drafted by John Janovy, GEAC Chair. They are provided to offer a sense of GEAC's present work/thinking and to invite timely feedback. Please direct any responses or questions to Prof. Janovy or to your college GEAC rep. To learn more about our gen ed reform efforts, please check out <http://www.unl.edu/svcaa/gened>.)

GEAC began discussion and editing of the draft proposal for an ACE Committee presented by GEPT. This committee is to be responsible for governance and oversight, including assessment, of the ACE program. GEPT had been charged, by GEAC, with defining the composition and practices of this committee. GEPT did develop and approve a draft which was the document considered by GEAC on March 9. The ACE Committee description is as follows:

(1) A proposed governance structure for the ACE curriculum process:

Any University course submitted for ACE certification must be recognized as an ACE-eligible course by the college in which the course will be housed and offered. *(Wording approved by GEAC vote on 030907.)*

The respective College curriculum committees will forward proposals for consideration of ACE certification to the ACE Committee. *(Wording accepted by GEAC on 030907 without formal motion or vote.)*

ACE Committee Responsibilities

(The following four items numbered were approved by formal vote by GEAC on 030907.)

Responsibilities of the ACE Committee (or its designee) shall be as follows:

1. To review and approve college requests for ACE certification.
2. To approve non-substantive changes regarding the ACE program and to make formal recommendations to the undergraduate colleges regarding substantive changes in ACE requirements.
3. To serve, with the Dean of the Office of Undergraduate Studies, as the academic planning and assessment oversight group for the ACE program.
4. To remove ACE certification provided there is evidence that the department offering the course is not meeting terms of the ACE agreement or providing opportunities for students to fulfill the stated outcome(s).

ACE Committee Membership

(Actions on the following sections of the ACE Committee proposal from GEPT are still pending.)

1. The ACE Committee will report to the Dean of the Office of Undergraduate Studies.
2. The ACE Committee will consist of representatives from the following constituencies:
 - a) Eight faculty members consisting of one representative from each of the following colleges: Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources; Architecture, Arts and Sciences, Business Administration, Education and Human Sciences, Engineering, Fine and Performing Arts, Journalism and Mass Communications
 - b) Two undergraduate student representatives appointed by the ASUN
 - c) The Dean or designee of the Office of Undergraduate Studies (non-voting)
 - d) One non-voting representative appointed by the Faculty Senate

Membership on the ACE Committee will consist of two or three-year staggered terms. Faculty members can be elected or appointed, depending upon the bylaws of the respective College Curriculum Committees.

ACE Committee Procedures

Substantive actions, including approval of courses for ACE credit, will require positive votes by six of the eight College faculty representatives.

(2) Issues discussed but not resolved:

There were a number of issues discussed by GEAC on March 9, including administration of transfer students and representation and voting procedures of the ACE Committee. The latter issue was acknowledged as a relatively difficult one to resolve, and it very likely will be a matter brought before the open forum scheduled for March 26 (2-3:30, city union). The options and consequences for representation and voting are as follows:

- a. One representative from each of the undergraduate colleges, with actions requiring unanimity.

This model ensures that colleges have complete control over their own curricula, but sets up a condition in which colleges each have veto power, thus can, and perhaps may, interact with one another in an obviously competitive and hostile manner.

- b. One representative from each of the undergraduate colleges, with actions requiring 75% majority.

In this model colleges give up some control over their curricula, but the 75% majority (currently 6 of 8) would promote discussion and resolution of conflict prior to actions.

- c. One representative from each of the undergraduate colleges except Arts and Sciences, which would have three (out of 10) because A&S teaches ~70% of the general education courses. Actions would require a vote of 80% majority.

In this model, colleges still give up some control over their curricula, but the college housing most of the ACE program has, theoretically at least, a disproportionate impact on voting. It was not obvious to GEAC what the implications of this kind of a committee structure might be relative to interactions between the colleges.

(3) The March 26, 2007, forum:

GEAC named 3 items for the open forum agenda: a status report, overview of unresolved issues, open discussion.

(4) An ACE course proposal form:

GEPT also discussed an ACE Course Certification Request Form and voted, on March 2, 2007, to approve the following draft (item (2)) and forward the course proposal form to GEAC for consideration. There was only a brief discussion of this form by GEAC on March 9, although we did receive information relative to another university's handling of general education course proposals and approvals. At present, the draft certification request form is as follows:

Request for certification of an existing UNL course for ACE credit:

1. Course number, name, and current description from the UNL Undergraduate Bulletin:
2. Learning Outcome(s) to be satisfied by this course:

a. _____

b. _____

3. Outcomes or skills to be reinforced by this course:

_____ Writing	_____ Communication	_____ Historical Perspective
_____ Math/Statistics	_____ Critical Thinking	_____ Teamwork
_____ Ethics	_____ Problem Solving	_____ Social Responsibility
_____ Human diversity	_____ Global Awareness	_____ Civics

4. Attach a syllabus for this course. Syllabi attached to this proposal request must contain enough information to allow faculty members from other disciplines to determine whether the course meets the intent of the ACE program. The following information must be provided:

- a. Faculty contact information (in case committee members have questions about the proposal).
- b. A brief description of opportunities this course will provide for students to acquire skills necessary to achieve the Learning Outcome(s) listed above (if not included in the syllabus).
- c. A brief description of the assignment(s) designed to provide students with opportunities described in b and the product expected (if not included in the syllabus).
- d. Graded product(s) required for demonstration of the Learning Outcome(s) (if not included in the syllabus).

5. Attach a copy of the Department ACE Agreement.

(5) DRAFT ACE agreement for departments proposing courses for ACE certification:

GEPT did not get to a formal discussion of the Department Agreement on March 2, so this item is still up for discussion, change as needed, and vote, although GEAC did discuss parts of it on February 16, 2007. The draft agreement reads as follows:

The Department offering a course approved for ACE credit will ensure that instructors teaching an ACE course shall:

- a. Provide statements in the syllabus about the UN-L Institutional Objectives to be addressed, the Learning Outcome to be satisfied by the course, and Outcome(s) to be reinforced by the course. *(There was no opposition to this particular item in GEAC on 021607.)*
- b. Ensure that graded materials in the course involve generation of student products upon which the instructor provides guidance and comments, either individually or collectively, and which are appropriate for deposition in an assessment repository. The products may be papers, performances, exhibitions, or projects, i.e., they may encompass the full range of scholarly products typically generated by individuals at comprehensive universities. *(Although it seemed as if we did discuss this item in GEAC a little bit on 021607, my notes contain no suggested alternate wordings or serious reservations about the draft wording.)*
- c. Provide at least one example of such products from each of two students' for deposition in an assessment repository; one example should be from a student who is in the top 10% of the class and one example should be from a student whose grades are in the middle range for that class. The items should indicate the students' class and major. *(There was no serious opposition to this item in GEAC on 021607, although there was some alternative wording for parts of it suggested.)*
- d. Provide a brief reflection of students' achievement of the stated outcomes, to be placed in the assessment repository along with the student work.
- e. Engage in an on-going effort to develop common scoring guidelines for use in the assessment process. *(We had an extensive discussion of assessment issues in GEAC on 021607 and it did not seem to me like we came to any conclusions regarding the best way to start the assessment process, or, for that matter, how to get faculty members engaged*

in such a process. The idea of making a discipline-specific rubric, or perhaps an attempt to produce one, a part of the ACE Agreement was at least mentioned. This item is still very much up for serious discussion.)

(6) DRAFT guidelines for ACE courses:

GEPT discussed the idea of these guidelines only very briefly on 022307 and did not act on any of them. We did, however, discuss the matter of having a set of guidelines for each outcome and generally decided, by consensus instead of formal motion and vote that it was not a good idea for a variety of reasons. GEPT did not get to this item on March 2, 2007, so the whole idea of guidelines, and what they should be, is still awaiting serious discussion in committee. The draft that committee members now have in their files reads as follows:

The following guidelines are intended to help faculty members design their ACE courses so that the intent of the general education program is achieved insofar as possible given the resources available, diversity of departments offering ACE courses, and different levels of ACE courses. These guidelines are not intended to be regulations which dictate approval or rejection of courses, for ACE credit, by various curriculum committees or other governing bodies. Instead, they are to be considered endorsements of faculty efforts to increase the rigor of their courses as appropriate for the course level, the audience, and the discipline involved.

During several discussions and open forums with various groups across campus, the most concern was expressed about content and expectations of the proposed general education program in three areas: writing, historical perspective, and communication. In the case of communication, both oral and visual communication skills were mentioned as areas in which the typical UNL undergraduate curriculum needed strengthening. Our position is that "strengthening" and "rigor" are best accomplished by individual faculty members feeling empowered to ask that students perform to a certain extent and at a desired level, and that perhaps the least effective way to increase rigor and prepare our students for a changing and uncertain future is through committee rules, regulations, policy, and oversight. Thus we encourage all faculty members teaching ACE courses to use the Institutional Objectives, Learning Outcomes, ACE departmental agreement, and personal creativity to support any and all efforts to strengthen the UNL undergraduate curriculum.

(1) Writing:

It is expected that no matter what the subject, ACE courses will require some writing of the students, and that faculty members will provide guidance intended to help students improve their writing skills. Such guidance can be provided either collectively or individually, but should be given both prior to completion of writing assignments and as follow-up reactions. For those disciplines in which published papers are the standard of scholarship, it is expected that faculty members will ask students for a substantial amount of written work and that such work will either constitute or be integral to the product submitted for assessment. Faculty members are also encouraged to devise ways of getting students to write in a manner consistent with the primary literature in a discipline. Creativity in assignment design and administration is strongly encouraged, and faculty members also are encouraged to share their experiences relative to development of student writing skills.

(2) Historical content and perspective:

If the ACE course subject and discipline are ones that would be complemented by inclusion of historical perspectives, then faculty members are expected to add such content to the course and also to make sure students understand the role that such historical perspective plays with respect to their understanding of the subject and discipline. It is understood that such historical perspective is appropriate for a very large number of courses in several if not all colleges.

(3) Visual and oral communication:

If the ACE course subject and discipline are ones that would be complemented by inclusion of material or exercises involving visual communication, oral communication, or especially combinations of the two, then faculty members are expected to add such content to

the course and also to make sure students understand the role that such communication skills play with respect to both their understanding of the discipline and their own professional development. It is understood that such communication skills are appropriate subjects for strong reinforcement in a very large number of courses in several if not all colleges.

(4) Institutional Objectives and Learning Outcomes:

Faculty members teaching ACE courses should feel completely free to use the idealism expressed by the Institutional Objectives to justify assignments and other course activities relevant to the Learning Outcome for that course.