

Office of Undergraduate Studies
2009-2014 Strategic Plan Retrospective

March 1, 2015
Excerpt on General Education

General Education

The University of Maryland's 2008 Strategic Plan *Transforming Maryland* called for a revision of the general education program. A task force led by Ira Berlin, Professor of History, drafted a new plan for general education that was approved by the Senate in April 2010. The Office of Undergraduate Studies has led the implementation of the new General Education program with the goal of providing a nationally recognized program that reflects the strengths and vision of the University of Maryland and increases the intellectual scope and challenge of undergraduate education.

The new General Education program (www.gened.umd.edu) includes two new and unique course categories: I-Series and Scholarship in Practice. The Diversity requirement was expanded and updated to include two types of courses: "Understanding Plural Societies" and "Cultural Competence." The Fundamental Studies requirements were changed to include both a requirement for oral communication and a course in analytical reasoning. The design of the general education program allowed for oral communication to be designed by any college, and as a result five colleges (Agriculture, Arts and Humanities, Engineering, Architecture, and Journalism) applied for and have had courses approved for this category. The option to waive Fundamental Studies English and Math by SAT score was eliminated.

Launched in fall 2012, the new General Education program has received national recognition. In December 2012, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* recognized the I-Series courses, the signature courses of the new program, in the article "At UMD, an Effort to Make Introductory Courses Extraordinary." The program was also highlighted in two presentations at the 2013 annual conference of the Association of American Colleges and Universities: "The I-Series – a General Education signature program engages students in real world challenges by evoking Intellect, Inquiry, and Imagination" and "Promising Practice: Engaging faculty in designing and implementing an outcomes-based general education program," and at the Transforming Institutions conference, in Indianapolis, in 2014: "Faculty Learning Communities: A Model that Fosters Individual, Departmental, and Institutional Impact." Additionally, in 2013, the Department of Communication received a National Communication Association Program of Distinction Award for its COMM 107, the oral communication course that is offering 4500 seats in oral communication in 2014-15.

Central elements leading to the successful implementation of the General Education program include the following:

- **Faculty-generated General Education learning outcomes that define each course category.** The General Education program was implemented according to best principles of curriculum design. The first step in this implementation was organizing twelve faculty boards (involving 67 faculty members) who, together with the Dean and senior staff from the Office of Undergraduate Studies, wrote learning outcomes for each General

Education category. These General Education Learning Outcomes serve as the basis for each course approved for the program.

- **Active and engaged Faculty Boards for each General Education category.** The 12 Faculty Boards of 6- 10 faculty members critically and collaboratively discuss and review courses submitted for General Education approval. The Faculty Boards maintain the highest standards for approving courses as they assess how courses are designed to meet the General Education Learning Outcomes. They provide feedback and guidance on course design when appropriate. Each year Faculty Board membership is refreshed via invitations from the Dean for Undergraduate Studies. Faculty investment in this work is evidenced by the high percentage of acceptance to these invitations as well as by the number of members who have maintained membership from year to year.
- **A robust online course submission site that directly articulates with the Student Information System (SIS).** The Office of Undergraduate Studies created an online system for faculty members to upload course information and syllabi for course review. The online submission system has facilitated the work of the Faculty Boards, ensured involvement of department chairs and deans in the submission process, and supplied a record of the course review process. Direct articulation of the system with SIS ensures timely identification of approved courses in Testudo. The system for course coding was completed through a collaboration with a committee chaired by Chuck Wilson, Associate Vice President, Office of Extended Studies, and included representatives from the Office of Undergraduate Studies, the Registrar's office, the Division of Information Technology, and the Office of institutional Research Planning and Assessment.
- **A funding model to sustain the offering of Fundamental Studies courses, and to encourage development of innovative courses in the I-Series category.** The Office of Undergraduate Studies in collaboration with the Office of the Provost developed the funding models for academic writing, professional writing, oral communication, mathematics, and I-Series courses. Funding for the development of new I-Series courses ensures that these signature courses of General Education, offered by all colleges, remain intellectually vibrant and relevant.
- **Widely disseminated policies to govern the transition from CORE to General Education.** The Office of Undergraduate Studies in collaboration with the Office of the Provost, UPAC, the Registrar, and the Transfer Credit Center determined the steps and policies for transition from CORE to the new General Education requirements. The Office of Undergraduate Studies negotiated transfer agreements with Maryland community colleges. The Office of Undergraduate Studies hosted workshops for advisors and faculty, developed information for dissemination on the web and in flyers, and collaborated with representatives from each college in the development of new 4-Year Plans.
- **Critical assessment of seats at each stage of implementation.** The Office of Undergraduate Studies in collaboration with the Enrollment Planning Team, Enrollment Working Group, and with deans of all colleges has ensured time sensitive availability of seats for all categories of General Education.

- **A website that promotes the distinctive characteristics of the UMD General Education program to prospective students, and serves as a resource for faculty, advisors, administrators, and matriculated students.** The Office of Undergraduate Studies developed and hosts the www.gened.umd.edu site that provides information regarding program expectations, transfer student options, and FAQs. This site also serves as the portal to the General Education course submission site, and to advising resources, including 4-Year plans.
- **The definition of the Scholarship in Practice category.** The Office of Undergraduate Studies sponsored a year-long faculty learning community (2011-2012 Lilly Fellows) tasked with translating the vision of this new course category into practice. This group of 10 faculty members working with senior staff from the Office of Undergraduate Studies drafted a faculty guide for creating a Scholarship in Practice course. Many of this original team have continued as members of the Scholarship in Practice Faculty Board and serve as resources in their colleges for faculty members who are developing Scholarship in Practice courses. Courses in this category are now known to engage students in work that is authentic to the discipline and include experiential learning, research, internships, and project-based learning. The Scholarship in Practice Learning Outcomes require students to evaluate, apply, critique, revise, and collaborate in order to develop a product or analysis. Courses are designed for students still choosing a major, as well as for students majoring in the discipline. Over 200 courses have been approved for Scholarship in Practice.
- **The transformation of over 1,275 courses according to the General Education Learning Outcomes.** General Education implementation provides a notable enrichment of the curriculum for our undergraduate students. All courses in the program were designed to meet General Education Learning Outcomes. The outcomes include expectations that courses include student-centered active learning. To support this significant course transformation process, the Office of Undergraduate Studies hosts workshops for groups of faculty, and provides individual mentorship to faculty. The large number of new and redesigned courses has poured new intellectual work, and new teaching and learning methods, into the undergraduate educational experience: more active learning, more student-teacher engagement, more flipped classes, more teamwork.
- **Support for the signature courses: the I-Series.** I-Series courses connect General Education to current and pressing questions of our time. With large enrollments, and populated by freshmen and sophomores, I-Series courses provide teaching challenges and opportunities. To support faculty members in meeting the learning outcomes for the I-Series (courses that expect students will come to “think in new ways”), the Office of Undergraduate Studies hosts the I-Series Faculty Learning Community, which meets five times each semester with an average participation of 30 faculty members at each meeting. Meetings are led by the Associate Dean for General Education and attended by the Dean for Undergraduate Studies, the Assistant Dean, and the Coordinator for General Education. The meetings promote intellectual discussion about teaching and learning, and provide an opportunity for collaboration among tenured/tenure-track faculty and lecturers who serve as I-Series course instructors.

- **Alignment of General Education with current UMD programs and undergraduate education initiatives.** The senior staff in the Office of Undergraduate Studies has collaborated with the Honors College, College Park Scholars, FIRE, The Academy of Innovation and Entrepreneurship and others to facilitate aligning program missions with the implementation of General Education.
- **An assessment process that engages faculty members in continuous course improvement.** The Faculty Boards for all categories of General Education have been engaged in reviewing category learning outcomes to develop criteria for assessment. Each category is at a different stage of assessment implementation. Oral Communication, Scholarship in Practice, and Professional Writing categories have rubrics available on www.gened.umd.edu. Diversity, History and Social Sciences, I-Series and Academic Writing categories are in development. The rubrics are used by faculty to assess student work; the data is reported and collected via the learning management system (ELMS). The Office of Undergraduate Studies collaborates with the Office of Institutional Research, Planning and Assessment to aggregate the data and present reports to the Faculty Boards for discussion. Data is being used by faculty members to inform curricular decisions. An “All- Faculty Board” meeting was held in September 2013: all boards agreed to complete the rubrics by March 13, 2015.
- **The support and recognition of faculty members who are engaged in General Education.** This exciting new curriculum is transforming undergraduate education, raising the quality of instruction, and raising the bar on learning. We are a stronger university because these changes have come directly from the faculty in our departments and colleges. The Office of Undergraduate Studies has recognized the role of faculty in General Education through letters of thanks from the Dean, a recognition event co-hosted by the President and the Provost on April 13, 2014, and by sponsoring a yearly Undergraduate Studies General Education Teaching Award.
- **Direct involvement of the Dean and senior staff of the Office of Undergraduate Studies.** Each Faculty Board is chaired by the Dean or a member of the Senior Staff in the Office of Undergraduate Studies. All aspects of the implementation and administration of the General Education Program are a high priority of the Office.