

Proposal to Revise General Education at SUNY New Paltz

Submitted for Faculty Consideration April 27, 2016

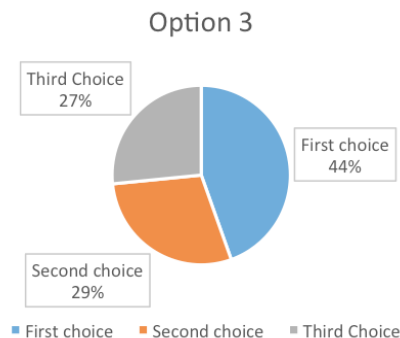
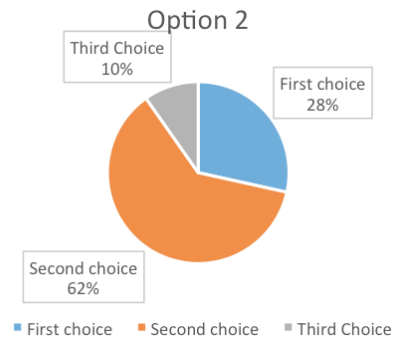
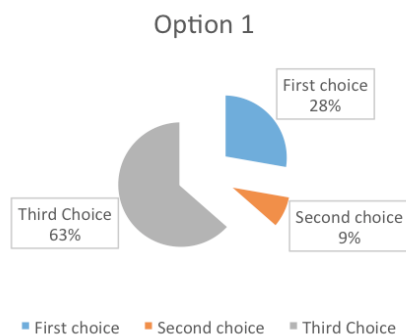
This proposal is the product of 1) a detailed set of propositions developed by the GE Board in the Fall of 2015 and 2) a wide-ranging collection and analysis of responses by the Curriculum Committee in the Spring of 2016.

Data and Option Selection

The GE Board proposed three options (pp. 24-28), all of which addressed the central concerns of high-credit majors, the needs of transfer students and the impact of “seamless transfer,” the implications of new rules for student aid (TAP), and the impact on faculty of changing requirements.

Based on data collected from the campus community through focus groups, the faculty survey, chairs’ reports, and individual comments, the Curriculum Committee has determined that **Option 3** has garnered the most support as the new GE plan.

- The majority of participants preferred Option 3, with 44% choosing it as their first choice. Options 1 and 2 both had 28% support as first choice. Option 1 had the largest response as the third choice (63%) and Option 2 had 62% as a second choice.



- Three quarters of the respondents to the faculty survey favored either Option 2 or Option 3; those who chose Option 1 had the least commitment to this option, while those who

chose Option 3 had the most commitment based on the ranking of levels of support for each of the GE options proposed.

- While Option 1 did not have enough support to garner sufficient faculty attention, those who were in favor of Option 1 expressed a desire for students to have “freedom of choice.” The Curriculum Committee finds that there is also “freedom of choice” in Option 3, given the diversity of classes in each category from which students can choose.

Summary of Focus Group Report - Preference for Curricular Options

- A majority of faculty prefer Option 3, and a significant portion is strongly opposed to Option 1. However, Option 1 has some supporters; it is widely perceived to be the most student-friendly option, with the most potential to empower students to determine the course of their learning. Option 1 fared well with professional faculty (though this was a small sample). Option 2 is seen as a simplified plan, about which few felt strongly one way or the other.
- Some faculty feel torn between student choice and empowerment vs. the University’s responsibility to provide a broad education. Some faculty started at Option 1, but in the course of the conversation were convinced that language was important, and student choice was not what it should be about: *“I was convinced that a quality education should have that breadth.”*

Proposal for Faculty Vote: Categories

The Curriculum Committee presents for a vote of faculty support Option 3. A vote of “yes” indicates faculty support for starting on the road to implement Option 3. A vote of “no” indicates faculty support of defaulting to the current GE III.

Below we show a chart comparing Option 3 to the Current GE III:

Category			Option 3 32–37 total credits minimum	Current GE III 33–42 total credits minimum (includes diversity)
Math			① Math	① Math may be exempt
Comp			① or ② 4 cred	① or ② 3 cred may be exempt

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Category			Option 3	Current GE 3
Art			① Art	
Lang			① or ② Lang	
Hum			① Hum	
NSCI			① or ② NSCI	② NSCI
SSCI			① SSCI	
USST			① USST	
West			① West	
World			① World	

Either way, the path forward involves improving the way faculty and college:

- present and “message” GE, as put forth in the Proposal (pp. 9 -19)
- Develop, administer, and assess GE courses, as put forth in the Proposal (pp. 19- 22)

Either way, faculty will need to work with administration to address problematic issues through modification agreements, such as when GE requirements (in either Option 3 or the current GE III) impede timely graduation in particular majors.

Proposal for Faculty Vote: Competencies

Survey data and focus group feedback indicated faculty indifference, confusion, and resistance toward a systematic approach to developing student competencies. This feedback reflects the Proposal’s description of GE III assessment as “an onerous task, ... providing little usable data to work from” (p. 35).

The GE Board recommended four competencies (oral communication, written communication, critical thinking, and information management), embedded in departmental curricular maps since this is the most efficient, flexible, and least burdensome means of assessment (pp. 32-37). The Curriculum Committee favors **embedding the competencies into curricular maps** so that departments can address progressive skills development (introductory through advanced) at specific points in their own curricula.

The Committee is unclear about addressing oral and written communication in two different GE contexts; consequently, the Committee recommends **a focus on the two SUNY-required competencies of Critical Thinking and Information Management**, with the understanding that the GE Board may choose to recommend the adoption of additional, SUNY New Paltz-specific competencies at a later date.

The Curriculum Committee presents for a vote of faculty support the embedding of the Critical Thinking and Information Management Competencies in departmental curricular maps. A vote of “yes” indicates faculty support of this initiative. A vote of “no” indicates faculty support of defaulting to the current Competencies as listed, defined, and assessed in GE III.

Rationale

The Curriculum Committee’s review of the survey data and other various forms of feedback from the campus community do not demonstrate an interest in a substantial transformation of General Education categories at SUNY New Paltz. With few exceptions, Option 3 is nearly identical to the Current GE III.

However, the Committee recognizes the community’s substantial interest in and support of the GE Board’s revisioning of General Education courses, as well as their suggestions about how General Education is presented and discussed at SUNY New Paltz (pp. 8-19). Therefore, we recommend that the GE Board work with the campus community to address the following concerns with the curriculum and assessment practices at New Paltz:

- High credit majors currently struggle with GE; in fact, Engineering students follow a modified GE requirement (8 of 10 categories).
- Little to no information is readily available to students and faculty on what GE is or what it means in a context beyond completing choices from courses their Degree Works report tells them they need.
- For students, communicating the relevance of GE has relied entirely on interactions during orientation and advising sessions, when students are typically not readily amenable to absorbing the information.
- Many faculty are only reminded of their courses’ place in GE and corresponding outcomes when they are among the random selection for a spring course-based assessment.
- New faculty are not informed of the GE curriculum and their courses’ part in it. Some have noted they taught GE classes unawares in their first years here.
- Assessment is widely perceived to not produce meaningful data and is viewed as a burden, one which more heavily weighs on adjunct faculty.
- Faculty and students have complained that some GE courses are not rigorous enough and that the opportunity to make interdisciplinary connections is often lost. Skills and competencies taught in GE may or may not be developed in future classes as students proceed through their education.
- SUNY-wide initiatives like Seamless Transfer and Applied Learning need to be considered as developments that substantively affect students’ curriculum. The latter especially provides opportunities to enhance student learning only if their value is fully embraced by the faculty.

Restructuring the GE Board

The GE Board proposed a model to restructure the Board and assess the GE more responsively. As this is a structural issue, the Faculty bylaws dictate that this aspect of the proposal should be directed to the Organization Committee for further action.