

October 19, 2021

We, the General Education (GE) Board at SUNY New Paltz, are writing to request a longer timeline for the implementation of the new GE-framework. Having recently ushered in a new General Education Program (GE4) on campus in Fall 2019 we have direct and recent experience with both curricular development and implementation. In addition, members of the GE Board have reached out to individuals across campus to develop a better understanding of these processes, enabling us to draft what we believe is a realistic, if not ambitious, implementation timeline. We have gathered information from former GE Board Chairs, admissions, records and registration, curriculum committee, department chairs, and faculty members. Based on this experience and information, and in light of the current work conditions due to the COVID-19 crisis, we believe at least three years are required for full implementation.

GE plays an important role in shaping students' learning experiences and developing their knowledge and skills across a variety of disciplines. At SUNY New Paltz, over a quarter of a student's credits are GE courses (32 out of 120). For this reason, we want implementation to be thoughtful rather than rushed. The new GE-framework offers a more diverse and inclusive approach to education and implementing it will shift how we frame education at New Paltz. We want time to discuss these ideas and re-envision what a SUNY New Paltz degree offers. A GE program is not simply a list of course offerings and student learning outcomes; it provides the foundation for learning and shapes how students see and understand the world.

Developing a local General Education Program is complex and relies on voluntary faculty labor. While students who matriculated in Fall 2019 were our first GE4 cohort, the process to create GE4 began ten years earlier. We aren't advocating for a ten-year timeline, but this process is instructive. Faculty are very invested in the general education curriculum and there are competing views about what will best serve our students. There is also always a question about what will make the SUNY New Paltz curriculum unique. For example, SUNY New Paltz's GE3 included a Diversity course requirement that was moved to a degree requirement as part of the GE4 program development. The faculty reset the GE revision process in Fall 2015 following an impasse. The GE Board developed a proposal in Fall 2015 that they presented to faculty in December. The proposal moved to the Curriculum Committee in Spring 2016. The final proposal was passed by a vote at a Faculty Meeting on May 4, 2016 with 217 in favor and 14 not in favor. The success of this effort, which took eight months, rested on the extensive efforts made by the GE Board and Curriculum Committee to collect faculty feedback at various points in the process. There were three academic years between passage of the GE Program and offering that program to students. Part of the delay was that an implementation plan was not created until after the vote. Still, the curricular implementation involved the work and cooperation of multiple units across both academic and student affairs.

Updating GE involves coordinated effort between individual faculty members, departments, faculty governance, central committees, schools, and a variety of offices, including Records and Registration, Admissions, enrollment, and Student Advising. There are many tasks, some that require months, and many that cannot be done concurrently. We have laid out a timeline for how long it will take us to accomplish all of these tasks. This estimate, 3-years, is optimistic. It assumes that there will not be significant debates as faculty develop, discuss, and vote on a GE proposal that aligns with the SUNY GE Framework.

Only after the SUNY BOT votes on a new SUNY GE Framework and the SUNY Provost issues final implementation guidance, expected in early Winter 2022, can our work on campus begin. As

addressed above, this work is initiated by faculty governance. Nothing can move forward until faculty develop and approve a new General Education Program that reflects the new framework. When the program is approved faculty must then review and, in many cases, revise and even create new courses.

The new GE-framework introduces significant changes to curriculum offerings that will require faculty to reassess what they teach. Two new knowledge and skills categories have been introduced - Diversity: Equity, Inclusion and Social Justice and World History and Global Awareness. Further, SLOs have been changed in other categories. Course development is a time-consuming and labor-intensive endeavor. It often requires faculty to do research, read new materials, and devote more time to course preparation. Further, the introduction of the World History and Global Awareness category means some faculty and departments will be more affected by the changes to GE than others. While some faculty and departments will experience little to no disruption, others will be required to examine and revise up to 60% of their curricular offerings. Labor will be distributed unevenly. Departments such as these may even need to revise their major/minor plans and have those approved. Due to the new knowledge and skills areas and the revised SLO's a tremendous amount of courses will need to be reviewed by the curriculum committee. This is labor intensive work, particularly for new and significantly revised courses. Only after this work has been done will the college begin to create publicly facing marketing materials for prospective students. It is important to note here that the admissions office will need these materials one year in advance of the GE launch for matriculating students. Then, of course, records and registration must begin the process of updating Degree Works and re-coding courses. Departments will also have to create new course schedules based on adjusted offerings and projected demand for GE courses.

The timing of these curriculum changes is particularly difficult because faculty are already exhausted from learning new teaching modalities, developing new technology skills, revising their classes to be remote or hybrid, supporting students who are struggling with learning and mental health due to the COVID-19 crisis, and dealing with their own personal crises and grief caused by the pandemic. Currently, we do not have enough faculty to cover many of the empty positions in faculty governance. Four out of ten seats for faculty representatives on the General Education Board are empty and we have been unable to fill them. Faculty who are serving on central committees and a part of faculty governance are overworked and exhausted. We need more time and resources to revise our university's GE program.

Sincerely,

Anne Deutsch
Chair of GE Board

Rebecca Longtin
Deputy chair of GE Board

On behalf of the GE Board at SUNY New Paltz