

APPROVED

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Office of Academic Affairs and Research
Associate Vice President
University Programs

201 Keen Johnson
521 Lancaster Avenue
Richmond, Kentucky 40475-3163
(859) 622-2076 Fax (859) 622-6518

TO: Council on Academic Affairs

FROM:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Aaron Thompson".

Aaron Thompson
Associate Vice President

DATE: January 17, 2007

RE: General Education Course Syllabus Policy

The Division of University Programs would like to submit the attached general education course syllabus policy which was approved by the Provost's Council in November 2006 to the Council for approval.



General Education Course Syllabus Policy

Background

When the University General Education Committee designed the new general education program, the Committee strongly favored two changes to the syllabus of an approved general education course to ensure program coherence. The General Education Program Guidelines required each of these changes as conditions for course approval.

First, faculty members are required to include on the syllabus the general education goals addressed by the course. This requirement is intended to keep both faculty members and students focused on addressing general education goals in a systematic and coherent manner. This is very important, since student mastery of these goals will be systematically and regularly assessed as a requirement for continuing certification for general education.

Second, faculty members are required to write a core of student learning objectives that are common to all sections of an approved course. Individual faculty members, however, may add objectives to the core objectives. During the design phase of the course approval process, the Committee wanted faculty members to examine what knowledge and skills students were expected to acquire in a specific course in light of the general education goals addressed by the course. This requirement is intended to improve program coherence and address some of the challenges of assessing student mastery of general education goals in multi-section courses.

As part of the program assessment of general education, the General Education Coordinator and the General Education Assessment Coordinator regularly review the course syllabus for each section of an approved general education course. Courses are approved to address general education goals and to ensure some consistency in student learning objectives across sections of each course. Thus, program coherence is undermined and assessment data are compromised when individual faculty members choose to pursue different goals and different student learning objectives than were stated on the original approved syllabus.

Recommendation

The General Education Committee has no faculty members to instruct approved general education courses. The Committee therefore delegates instructional responsibilities to faculty members in the University's five colleges under the conditions outlined in the General Education Program Guidelines. If one or more sections of an approved course do not comply with these conditions after approval, then the Committee has several options, which are outlined below, for resolving these problems. Given the use of general education courses as supporting courses in specific programs, these options are not optimal in that they may impose costs on both offenders and innocent bystanders. For this reason the best solution is to enlist the Deans' support for and assistance in achieving and maintaining an effective and coherent general education program.

The Deans need to require compliance with the syllabus policy in all approved general education courses and require department chairs to collect and monitor electronic copies of the course syllabi from all sections of approved general education courses each semester. Department chairs should normally have electronic copies of course syllabi by the end of the third week of a semester. To simplify this process, the General Education website provides access to documents describing the goals and approved student learning objectives for each approved course in Blocks I – VII and option two of Block VIII (www.gened.eku.edu/faculty/syllabus). Faculty members may simply copy the relevant goals and approved student learning objectives from these documents for inclusion in the course syllabus.

The Deans will collect syllabi for general education courses from the Department Chairs. The General Education Coordinator will then ask Deans for copies of those syllabi shortly after the third week and begin reviewing the syllabi. At the end of the review process, the General Education Coordinator will forward a summary of issues to the Dean. If a department is not complying with course syllabus requirements, then the General Education Committee will not consider further course proposals from that department until compliance occurs. This applies not only to new courses, but also to requests to include approved courses in a new theme. Repeated non-compliance will strongly suggest that the course is really designed to address goals other than approved general education goals and will ultimately force the Committee to deny re-certification of the course at the end of the four-year cycle.

This proposal is intended to help the University achieve some coherence in general education. A coherent program is beneficial to our students and will make assessing the goals of general education feasible. Assessing student mastery of program goals is particularly challenging, since many intervening factors may explain student performance. By keeping both faculty members and students focused on a common set of goals and learning objectives, we can improve the assessment process.