

Criterion V: Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness

1. Evaluate the program Trends most relevant to program planning, for example, range of course offerings, number of courses, enrollment, investments in faculty development and support, student academic needs and demands.

Strength V – 1: The General Education Program was designed with an eye to the program’s flexibility in terms of student academic needs and demands. A set of learning outcomes were set for the various kinds of courses in the program, but content is (mostly) open; as a result, faculty and departments can introduce courses that will serve student and program needs alike. Since its inception, X courses have been introduced, including X, Y, Z, which demonstrate the General Education Program’s intentional design in the service of student needs and demands. In fact, students in the Graduating Senior Survey report being ‘Satisfied’ with the General Education Program’s offerings at a rate of 94%, up 2% from 2012. Our faculty questionnaire provided a more mixed picture of this, with some praising the variety of courses and others concerned that there were too many course offerings. That said, the faculty questionnaire also demonstrates that most faculty (greater than 51% of respondents agree or strongly agree) believe that the various General Education components meet the stated goals for said component; it is also noteworthy that few believe the various components do not meet the set goals (fewer than 27% disagree or strongly disagree).

Strength V – 2: The enrollment in the General Education Program is roughly stable since X, with about Y student credit hours per year. Additionally, the number of courses per semester remains stable, with around X courses being offered per semester. It is safe to say that the program continues to offer students a comprehensive education, and that the various departments that support the General Education Program continue to offer the services of their faculty in this regard. This result also addresses some misperceptions that there are too many courses being offered as part of the General Education Program.

Weakness V – 1: Some courses in the General Education Program are offered very rarely or inconsistently. Student Advising notes that this kind of course scheduling makes it very difficult to advise students. Courses that might fit a student’s academic goals but are offered inconsistently are a difficulty both for advising *and* can color a student’s perception of the program.

Weakness V – 2: There is currently no quality control or oversight, at least at the level of the General Education Program as a whole, after courses are initially vetted. With faculty turnover in the teaching of General Education Courses, and the increasing employment of PTLs in the teaching of General Education courses, the lack of oversight is troubling. That said, the Graduating Senior Survey indicates that this concern is not particularly pressing, with 89% of graduating seniors reporting that they are satisfied with the quality of General Education courses (up 3% from 2012) and 83% of reporting that they were satisfied with the intellectual challenge in General Education courses. The faculty questionnaire provides a slightly different picture, with a number of faculty giving voice to concerns regarding the rigor of particular courses within the General Education Program. The concern raised in the faculty questionnaire may be mediated by the fact that nearly 1 in 4 respondents to the questionnaire have never taught a General Education course – further inquiry may be warranted here. Finally, this weakness is being addressed by the constitution of a General Education Subcommittee on Assessment (GESA).

Opportunity V – 1: Comprehensive Education, which has been a hot topic this year, is a potential selling feature for EMU. Harnessing the General Education Program’s commitment to Comprehensive Education and its focus on Global and Civic Engagement may be a way to help EMU’s students reach their employment and career goals. A recent survey conducted by Hart Research Associates demonstrates that 91% of employers agree that students should have educational experiences that teach them how to solve problems with people whose views are different from their own, 87% agree that students should learn about ethical issues and public debates in their field, 82% agree that all students should take courses that build knowledge, judgment, and commitment to communities, and ensure the integrity and vitality of democracy, and 80% agree that all students should acquire broad knowledge in liberal arts and sciences. (ref) These are all outcomes to which the General Education Program substantially contributes.

Opportunity V – 2: There is an opportunity to provide General Education specific development and teacher training, and to cultivate a spirit of interdisciplinary, engagement, and an appreciation for comprehensive education at the instructional staffing level. Currently, a large number of General Education sections are taught by PTLs, new faculty, and on a rotating basis among standing faculty. This provides an opportunity for various kinds of professional development. We suggest looking into web-based training and resources for faculty teaching General Education courses, workshops, and/or a forum on General Education, which would provide an opportunity for interdisciplinary and pedagogic development and research focused around Comprehensive Education.

Opportunity V – 3: The faculty questionnaire suggests there are opportunities to expand the current General Education Program. Faculty favor the investigation of additional offerings in health, writing, languages, and technology. The technology component is one that is noted in the formative documents for the current General Education Program. As a result, we have suggested a way of addressing technology, and recommend follow up on this suggestion. I am still working on this.

Threat V – 1: Students can, and do, take courses that satisfy our General Education Program at other institutions. As a result, students can graduate from EMU having had little exposure to our program. If the program has value to employers, EMU as an institution, and EMU students, this threat requires further investigation.

Threat V – 2: A number of faculty note a concern about the writing requirement. It is especially noteworthy that there is little agreement about whether the writing requirement is serving our students and faculty and whether it is enhancing student learning. This committee acknowledges that the nature of writing varies greatly among disciplines, varies greatly in its goals and scope, and should be understood as much more than simple writing skills. Understanding the nature of writing and its role in communication, and whether or not the General Education Program should be the place for addressing “remediation,” are complex questions. We leave this for future inquiry.

Threat V – 3: Faculty, by way of the faculty questionnaire, have given voice to some concerns regarding the number of courses in the program, the “poaching” and political nature of the distribution of courses, and concerns about fairness within the program. As noted earlier, the concern about the number of courses is not borne out by the data. The open nature of course proposals for the program should reduce, rather than expand, concerns about the political nature of the distribution of courses – course offerings are not entrenched in our General Education Program. The issue regarding the student credit hour poaching is *not* a General Education Program issue, rather it is an issue in how departments are

evaluated at the managerial level of the university. As a result, we are disinclined to the idea that there is a threat here that goes beyond a misperception of the program (and its results) and misdirected concerns.

2. Does the University have the fiscal and human resources, and the physical and technological infrastructure, to support the delivery of the General Education Program?

Strength V – 3: The General Education Program has at its disposal an instructional staff capable of providing a diverse, robust, and deep program from year to year. As noted above, students are satisfied with the quality and diversity of program offerings. Of course, as we note above, there is still a need for more staffing, support and training for new faculty and development for experienced faculty, and support for coordinating new initiatives and taking advantage of existing opportunities.

Weakness V – 3: There is little staffing and support at the macro-level of the program. This makes it difficult to make strategic plans, take advantage of opportunities, or even just manage the program as it stands. This might be addressed by implementing strategies similar to those employed by the Honors College, which has a similar breadth and similar set of concerns that go beyond the mere distribution of discipline based instruction. For example, one might develop a faculty advisory board, an assistant director, some dedicated advisors (or stronger connection to advising), and possibly a number of dedicated graduate assistants or other support staff. Need a more developed recommendation here.

Threat V – 4: As it stands, the General Education Program’s paucity of macro-level staffing, and its complete and utter dependence on department level decisions for course offerings and staffing, put the program at the mercy of decisions that are not guided by an overall vision or plan. We recommend investigating a different organizational design for the implementation and oversight of the General Education Program. A greater investment in the General Education Program’s macro-level (as noted in Weakness V – 3) might be a good place to start.

3. Consider whether the General Education operating budget, and other allocations, as well as the associated departments’ instructional budget targets, are adequate for maintaining and strengthening the General Education Program. Examples of other allocations include graduate assistantships, secretarial support, professional/technical support and equipment. Also, consider whether the faculty staffing necessary for programmatic delivery is appropriate.

Strength V – 4: There is little doubt that the General Education Program has (passively) at its disposal an outstanding instructional staff. Whether it is appropriately utilized and/or properly

Weakness V – 4: Since program delivery is mostly confined to the departments, it is very difficult to assess and control program delivery in terms of costs, staffing, and support. Further inquiry is required to assess whether or not there are hidden strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, or threats here.

Weakness: V – 5: The current resources for the General Education Program in terms of budget and allocations is as follows: (a) 100% teaching release for the Director, (b) 1 GAship, (c) \$20,000 for personnel, which includes summer stipend for the GA, honorariums for faculty involvement (FYS, assessment, GEAC, summer institute, etc.), (d) \$19,260 SS&M. This may be sufficient to maintain the

Commented [CF1]: I would make a distinction between “maintenance” and “sustainability and growth” ... Current staffing, at best, can maintain. In order to expand upon, develop a more strategic approach to EMU as a Comprehensive University, provide more opportunities to engage in intellectual conversation around the value of general education, etc. requires additional staffing. If you refer to the original Implementation Plan, there was an Honors College model applied there, along with great job description for Gen Ed Director, which cannot be achieved without additional support

program, but it is insufficient for the purpose of opportunity and threat management, initiatives, and innovations to the Program. **Recommendation?**

Opportunity V – 4: The General Education Program provides an outstanding venue to pilot programs that facilitate and increase interdisciplinary, integrative pedagogies, learning communities, portfolio based learning and evaluation, and other innovative practices that come from comprehensive education. For example, LEAP frameworks might get a start in General Education, or problem based course groupings, or faculty teams might be formed to address questions that transgress disciplinary boundaries, and so on.

4. Sustainability initiatives in which the General Education Program has participated during the review period.

- Launched Advisor Professional Development Series, which focuses on the value of liberal arts education.
- Plans in motion for a Summer 2015 Institute for faculty advisors.
- Plans in motion to participate in AAC&U High Impact & Student Success Summer 2015 Institute