



14 February 2020

GECAP met on 27 January and 11 February to discuss and vote on the following motions. The final votes on these motions were: four in favor and one not in favor of Motion 1 and all in favor of Motion 2. GECAP is asking that this proposal be presented at the February Senate meeting and voted on at the March meeting to give time for Senators to consult with their constituents.

Introduction: GECAP has investigated the extent to which students are receiving exposure to all six Learning Outcomes at least twice in the General Education Program and the results are concerning. While completing this investigation, GECAP discovered an additional concern, that a majority of students fall into large-credit exception programs, raising questions about the integrity of the core General Education experience for students. We are calling for two changes to the General Education Program to address these concerns. Let's take each in turn.

Motion 1: Starting in Fall 2021 we require that students hit each of the six Learning Outcomes at least twice in the General Education Program, phasing out the Modes of Inquiry requirement.

Rationale: When the Senate passed the new General Education Program in 2014 it did so with the promise to students that “[t]his signature program is designed to ... develop, improve, and ultimately showcase the skills and learning you acquire through your studies. By the time you complete this program you will have become a stronger writer, a more confident speaker, a more sophisticated user of information, and a more critical thinker. You will be better prepared for your university studies and your life outside the university.”¹ However, by not requiring students to cover each of the outcomes at least twice (and the evidence being clear that students are not getting them through the Modes of Inquiry requirement), we are not entirely fulfilling our promise.

Working with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE), GECAP has examined a sample of first-time, first-year students who enrolled in Fall 2017 and had completed a Tier III capstone course. The sample size was 97. On the up side, nearly 100% of these students were getting Written Communication (WC) and Critical Thinking and Problem Solving (CTPS) across the Tiers. Less than half, however, were getting exposure to Information and Technology Literacy (ITL) (48%), Oral Communication (OC) (36%), and Civic Engagement and Intercultural Knowledge (CEIK) (46%) across the Tiers. Only 59% were getting Quantitative Literacy (QL) in both (see Table 1).

¹ See <https://www.njcu.edu/doc/clickheretoviewthegeneraleducationproposaldocx>.

Table 1: Percentage of Sampled Students Getting Each Outcome in Tier I, Tier II, and Both Tiers I and II

Learning Outcome	Tier I	Tier II	Both Tier I and II
CTPS	100%	99%	99%
ITL	85%	80%	48%
OC	67%	48%	36%
QL	99%	60%	59%
CEIK	60%	75%	46%
WC	99%	99%	98%

The current program requires students to take courses in each Mode of Inquiry at least twice in their Tier I and II courses. This is not what is happening in practice. In our sample, we discovered that while 88% of students took at least one course in each Mode, only 47% took at least two in each. Over half of the students in the sample were not getting two courses in each Mode! At least 40% of the students in our sample were enrolled in large-credit programs, which have nine-credit exemptions/substitutions. Other students had received other forms of waivers and substitutions. We need a program that nearly all students can complete without any such waivers or substitutions.

By replacing the Modes of Inquiry requirement with a Learning Outcomes requirement we are not looking to reduce the potential disciplinary/interdisciplinary breadth of our students' academic experiences. We are, however, recognizing that the Modes of Inquiry requirement is not achieving the disciplinary/interdisciplinary breadth we had hoped for. Students tend to gravitate towards General Education courses that keep them within their disciplinary comfort zones. History majors, for example, tend to take courses in History, Political Science, Philosophy, and English. Because any program can offer courses in any Mode it becomes possible for students to complete the program without having far-ranging disciplinary/interdisciplinary experiences. The Department of History offers courses in three of the four Modes; Political science in all of them. Some programs even require majors/minors to take anywhere between three and twenty-one credits of General Education courses in their own departments. If we measure the success of the Modes requirement on the basis of pushing students to think about the big questions from multiple perspectives, we are far from this ideal.

That is why we are urging you to support this motion. Creating a Learning Outcomes requirement does not inherently limit students' intellectual horizons. In point of fact, there are aspects of the new approach that will broaden them. Every first-time, first-year student will complete at least two courses with the CEIK outcome. This is a game-changer in terms of the University's commitment to serving the larger community and enhancing and further solidifying our reputation as being at the forefront of inclusive

teaching and pedagogy. Even though research skills are central to the academic enterprise, the General Education Program has surprisingly few ITL courses. Imagine the possibilities of posing one of the big questions and working with your students to locate and evaluate the research out there to address them. Any faculty member in any discipline can do that. There is also a tremendous opportunity to enhance our offerings in Digital Humanities.

Moreover, while we have done a good job of thinking about WC across the disciplines, we have not been as successful with QL. Imagine courses where students work with polling data, censuses, scientific data, etc., to show how non-STEM faculty use these in their research. We need not pit a skills-based program against lamentations about the death of the liberal arts. If anything, we can use the Learning Outcomes requirement as a foundation for reinvigorating our General Education Program and do so in a way that addresses concerns raised in the Middle States self-study and are sure to be raised by the Middle States site visit team.

In order to ensure a program that offers a broad range of disciplinary/interdisciplinary options for students each and every term, we are calling for an expanded role for the Director of General Education to make certain offerings are relatively balanced across the outcomes and all programs/departments are fairly represented in the scheduling of courses (using such metrics as historic trends, faculty availability, budget, etc.). Thus, even though there will no longer be a Modes of Inquiry requirement the Director of General Education, in consultation with the the Provost, Deans, and Chairs, will ensure that the General Education Program remains true to its liberal arts roots.

Placing the focus on developing and honing students' essential skills are instrumental to student success at NJCU and beyond. From Fall 2021 on, we need to move to require students to practice each of the Learning Outcomes at least twice in the General Education Program.

Motion 2: Because over half of first-time, first-year students are receiving some form of nine-credit exemption/substitution in the General Education Program, we are calling for the reduction of the program at the Tier I level by 3 credits and at the Tier II level by 6 credits.

Rationale: We need a program that almost every student can complete without waivers, substitutions, or special considerations. By working backwards from our large-credit programs, we can accomplish this by shrinking the number of Tier I and II courses from ten to seven. Compared to our sister schools in the state, our 45-credit program is still one of the largest (Montclair State University is 42 credits, Ramapo College is 30, and the others tend to fall somewhere in between).

Students will not have a problem completing a smaller General Education Program with the new Learning Outcomes requirement so long as General Education courses are recertified to create more balance across the outcomes. Since English Composition I and II count towards WC and CTPS and all the required Math courses count towards

QL and CTPS by recertifying courses to address other two-outcome combinations we can facilitate a smooth transition to the revised program. Table 2 shows the current distribution of Learning Outcomes combinations by Tier.

Table 2: Distribution of Learning Outcomes by Tier

Outcome Combination	Number of Courses (as of 9/1/2019)
Tier I	
CTPS/WC	19
WC/OC	12
CTPS/OC	10
CTPS/CEIK	5
CTPS/ITL	5
CTPS/QL	4
WC/CEIK	3
ITL/QL	3
ITL/OC	3
Tier II	
CTPS/WC	21
CTPS/OC	10
CTPS/CEIK	9
WC/OC	6
CTPS/QL	5
ITL/QL	5
CTPS/ITL	4
WC/ITL	3
WC/CEIK	1
ITL/CEIK	1
ITL/OC	1
CEIK/OC	1

Outcome Combination	Number of Courses (as of 9/1/2019)
CEIK/QL	1

As you can see, we have too many Tier I and II courses with the WC and CTPS outcomes. Courses with the following combinations would go a long way towards creating a better balance among the Learning Outcomes and ensuring students get each of them at least twice over the course of the program: OC and CEIK; ITL and QL; ITL and OC; CEIK and OC; CEIK and QL. Rest assured, we will still be able to have some courses with the WC and CTPS combination. The following hypothetical shows how much flexibility there would be for students in meeting this new outcomes-based requirement:

All-University Requirements

1. English Comp I - WC/CTPS
2. English Comp II - WC/CTPS
3. Required Math - CTPS/QL

Tier I Courses

1. CTPS/WC
2. CEIK/OC
3. ITL/QL

Tier II Courses

1. CEIK/QL
2. WC/CTPS
3. OC/CTPS
4. ITL/OC

Tier III Requirement

1. Outcomes determined in consultation with instructor.

In this example, students hit WC 4 times, QL 3 times, CEIK 2 times, OC 3 times, CTPS 6 times, and ITL 2 times.

In order to be ready for a Fall 2021 start date we have asked for and received assurances from the Provost that General Education courses can be fast-tracked to receive certification in new Learning Outcome combinations.

Conclusion: As stated in the December 2019 report to the Senate, in the 5 years since the program's inception we have much of which to be proud. We've created a smaller

program that is tiered to allow students to hone the essential skills we've identified as key to success at NJCU and beyond. We've integrated a capstone component that culminates in the opportunity for students to present cutting-edge creative and scholarly work. But not all of our aspirations have been fully realized. These reforms are meant to get us closer to that fuller realization.

Respectfully submitted,

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