

# RESPONSE TO FEEDBACK

## GENERAL EDUCATION WORKING GROUP

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The working group, collectively, appreciates the opportunity to respond to the feedback received via the deans and FAC. We are pleased to note that our colleagues have responded positively to the proposal overall. In particular, we note that none of this feedback expressed concern with the specific program goals that form the foundation of the new curriculum.

Some of the faculty take issue with certain features of that curriculum. What follows is a list of these issues with our responses. We hope that this focus on disagreements will not obscure the many points of agreement.

## ADDING A PHYSICAL EDUCATION REQUIREMENT

We support the recommendation to add 1 credit hour of PE, preferably an improved version of EXS 177: Fitness for Living.

In the current accounting for 120 credit hours, Majors have 62, Religion 14, GE 34, and Electives 10. Given that most university courses are 3 credit hours, increasing the GE hours to 35 and reducing elective hours to 9 will not unduly burden students.

## LOCAL COMMUNITIES: PRINCIPLES OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

We have made many changes to the course, based on feedback from colleagues. Many faculty (and students) have expressed strong support, but some still have concerns, in particular:

### I. The course is too micro-oriented for our global student body

First, this course is not about Laie. It is a course that shows students how to engage respectfully and productively in the community and environment in which they live. The students are here now, so Laie and the broader region serve as an accessible and

relevant case study. In Local Communities, students can move beyond the classroom to learn from and with the community; serve in the community; and practice, here and now, the principles of civic engagement they are learning. Further, the principles they will learn and skills they will develop in this case study are readily transferable to the different communities in which they will land after they leave.

Second, although the geographic focus for the case study is narrow, the course has a broad, interdisciplinary focus. In this respect, its focus is no more narrow than a traditional survey; its breadth unites the disciplinary foci of many traditional disciplines. The course has a robust service component, which both fulfills a core GE outcome with broad faculty support and is one of the most effective 'high impact practices' identified in the literature on general education. It is also an introduction to civic engagement, which heads the list of key outcomes in many national discussions of GE today.

Local Communities is also paired with World Communities. In the first, students will gain an in-depth understanding of this particular place and its connections to the broader world around it. This will give them a deep foundation on which to build their broad study of global communities in the second. The local focus at the beginning opens to a broad, global perspective.

Finally, that the university is located here, is not accidental or unimportant; exploring the Parable of Laie with our students can add value and purpose to their studies here. We hope the course will instill in students a deep sense of their role and responsibility in fulfilling BYU Hawaii's prophetic mission.

## **2. No required course on US history/politics**

This is also true of our current GE program. A course of this sort would be nice but, given our international student body and limited GE hours, we believe it is a better use of resources to focus on local and global concerns. We do recommend that World Communities be strengthened with an additional unit on the principles of American democracy or something similar. We also note that there already are relevant courses students can choose to take as a GE elective (US History, American Government), and we encourage interested instructors to form a teaching group and propose a section for INQ 110/120.

## **3. Can we staff the course?**

This is another concern we share, though any new GE course will face the same question. Specifically, for Local Communities, instructors will not need to be experts on the local community or Hawaii to teach the course, but some will need preparation. In fact, one of the strengths of the course is that it will have instructors from a variety of disciplines who can bring their perspective and methods to the overall concept of engaging in a local community, as all BYU Hawaii faculty must do. Professional development in local history, ecology, culture, economics, etc. can take place in workshops with expert faculty and community members. In addition, the

teaching group responsible for the class will be able to assist new instructors as they prepare to teach in the course.

This will likely be a team-taught course in the manner of World Communities, in which individual instructors will be responsible for a discussion section of the course that will meet once or twice a week. We are also exploring the possibility of making the course count for 2 credit hours with a 1 credit hour lab for the service component, providing further flexibility in scheduling.

### **Some final points about the course:**

Establishing a core course that every first-year student takes allows EIL to design a companion course to help ease their students' transition into standard courses.

Local Communities is the course that makes our proposed program unique. It sets us apart from other universities. In an age of increasingly virtual education, actual brick and mortar universities need to strengthen ties to their local communities and take advantage of local resources to survive. Local Communities can help do this. Finally, with its service component, the course has the potential to do much good.

## **INQUIRY & ANALYSIS VS CONTENT**

Our proposed GE outcomes focus on skill development, and specifically the skills of academic inquiry and analysis, over more traditional content delivery. Again, many faculty (and students) support this orientation, but it has generated a few concerns and suggestions.

### **1. The proposal focuses too much on skill development at the expense of content**

In our judgment, this is a false dichotomy; skills and content go hand in hand. We're proposing a particular approach to teaching content, one that puts the learning framework front and center. This is especially important in first year GE courses, so that students acquire good habits and expectations from the start.

The focus of our current GE program is also skill development, but its skill-based learning outcomes were applied, *post festum*, to an older GE curriculum of largely traditional, content-focused coursework. We believe the current focus on skills is the right approach. It's also necessary, given WASC's recent specification of skill-based program outcomes. We have organized the curriculum specifically to help students meet our outcomes.

### **2. Replacing the INQ core with courses in formal logic and moral reasoning**

This suggestion is interesting but unnecessary; it would also be very difficult to implement. More to the point, we believe the proposed curriculum will better engage students in critical thinking and ethical reasoning. A critical thinking course on a topic of real interest is more likely to engage students than a course on formal logic. In

addition, it's vital that these skills be reinforced across the GE curriculum, not simply taught in one dedicated course. English 101, INQ 110 and 120 are all designed specifically to develop basic critical thinking skills, including careful reading and analysis, making logical arguments, and so on. GE courses in level 2 should build on these skills. Math 107 will teach formal logic. Every section of the INQ courses should teach ethical reasoning, and the proposal requires that integrity, in the deep sense of the word, be a fundamental outcome of every GE course. The curriculum is designed precisely to foster the pursuit of excellence and truth.

### **3. Freshman students are unprepared for “inquiry” and need some basic foundational content classes first**

With AAC&U, we define “inquiry” as

a systematic process of exploring issues, objects, or works through the collection and analysis of evidence that results in informed conclusions or judgments. Analysis is the process of breaking down complex topics or issues into parts to gain a better understanding of them. (Inquiry & Analysis Value Rubric, AAC&U)

Although we would expect to see development in students' skills in inquiry and analysis over the course of their education, both can certainly be done at the freshman level. Inquiry-guided learning is flourishing at many US universities, and also in high schools and elementary schools. As we further develop these courses, we are certain that, with help from colleagues across campus, we can target them to our freshman students.

There is no realistic way to provide a comprehensive content base on which students could then build, given our credit hour constraints and the lack of consensus on just what that content should be. Furthermore, it would be highly difficult to specify the common skills that such a set of classes might provide. The GE working group has taken an approach that starts with skills and then teaches these skills in a variety of content contexts.

While it makes some sense to say that freshman students may be better prepared to ask particular great questions if they have a content foundation in a specific academic discipline, it is equally true that if we present content to students who lack the inquiry and analysis skills that form the basis of our GE core courses, their ability to make sense of, retain and use what they are learning is limited.

The recommendation that we focus on content is in some measure an argument for sticking with a venerable (1960s) model of GE, in which students take a variety of introductory courses in many different disciplines. There is a growing consensus nationally that this model is not very effective. In particular, it does little to ensure that students acquire the key academic skills at the heart of the proposed GE program or that they become active, engaged participants in their education.

## **SECOND LANGUAGE REQUIREMENT**

It is our understanding that the language requirement is not up for debate. We know that some members of the faculty oppose the requirement, but our formal survey and informal discussions both suggest that the majority of faculty support it. Many US universities require second language study and – given our location in the world, our target area, and our mission – it makes sense for us to require it. It is also a great way to brand our university, help admissions choose students who will thrive in our international campus environment, and help them prepare for life in a globalizing world and church.

Some recommendations have been made:

### **1. Provide a broad range of “communication” alternatives to second language study**

We don't feel that any of the suggested alternative courses or tutoring options meet the goals or provide the benefits of second language study. We also don't think it's necessary to provide alternatives. There are many language study options on campus and we envision providing intensive summer courses in the future. Students can also take courses online or through study abroad with other universities in languages we don't offer.

We certainly support the idea of native English speakers tutoring EIL students, but a student who wants to avoid learning a second language, is unlikely to be an effective language tutor. With an across the board second language requirement in place, there will be many opportunities for students to assist or tutor each other. For example, a US student who is studying Chinese can partner, in the language lab, or in a dorm room, with a Chinese student studying English. We feel this is a better model, where each has much to share and much to learn. We expect interactions of this sort will improve all language learning across campus, including English.

### **2. Reducing 201 language courses from 4 to 3 credit hours**

With only 34 hours given to GE, this reduction was necessary so that language study could fit in the hours we have. It's not ideal, but we think it's a compromise worth making in the interest of a campus-wide second language requirement.

## **OVERSIGHT**

Some faculty have insisted that it will be difficult to ensure the quality of the proposed INQ courses. We agree. But this is an argument for building effective oversight not for sticking with traditional content courses taught in the majors. With our current program, GE has very little oversight of the content courses and no way to ensure they meet GE outcomes. In short, any GE program faces oversight problems.

To facilitate effective oversight we recommend:

1. A clear process for developing new courses & sections, with detailed support documents – an application form, descriptions of outcomes, shared rubrics, etc.
2. A consistent review process for GE courses, that ensures they continue to meet GE objectives.
3. That a coordinator oversee each core GE course – INQ 110, INQ 120, Local Communities, World Communities. Coordinators will facilitate teacher interactions, recruit and help train new instructors, ensure consistent assessment, and sit on the GE committee. They will need at least one course reduction per year.
4. Cross-disciplinary teaching groups for each of the core courses. For Local and World Communities, we envision one large teaching group for each course. For INQ 110 & 120, there will be several smaller teaching groups (3 to 4 instructors) depending on the number of different topics/options available to students. Teaching groups will develop core courses and, once a course is being taught, should meet regularly to share insights, assignments, rubrics, etc.
5. That the GE committee be given administrative support for coordination, scheduling courses, etc.

Finally, college deans will need to guarantee a certain number of core GE courses/sections each year or semester. Our current IDS program suffers because GE often has to beg for sections. Perhaps, as we hire new faculty, some percentage of their teaching can be earmarked for GE courses.