

# ANNUAL REPORT 2008–09

# GENERAL EDUCATION

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## GENERAL EDUCATION

### ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN RELATION TO UNIVERSITY MISSION AND GOALS

#### Goals and Objectives Achieved during 2008–09

Much of 2008–09 was dedicated to addressing the Higher Learning Commission's critiques of the general-education program and its assessment.

#### Addressing HLC-Identified Problems

The Higher Learning Commission's Report to the University identified several problems with the current GER. Below is each of the problems with the general-education committee's and university's responses to date (see Appendix for complete excerpts; the italicized pieces below are from page 10):

- *Lack of sufficient courses in the disciplines that meet the upper level writing, oral and creative thinking "intensive" course criteria*

Action: Deans, department chairs, and faculty have stepped up to create more writing, oral, and critical-thinking intensive courses (seven have been approved), and two departments have sought programmatic approval. Biology is the first program to have sought and gained approval for programmatic certification in all three intensive areas. History has sought and gained approval for writing-intensive in its major and minor. Other departments, such as chemistry and political science, have shown interest in programmatic approval as well. We anticipate more successful applications in the upcoming year.

- *Delayed development of "oral intensive" courses in those disciplines that do not have much background in rhetoric*

As stated above, some progress has been made in this area; we will be instituting closer assessment of the intensives within the majors; more data should help direct planning and action.

- *Deans' ability to exempt students from meeting the requirements*

Colleges need flexibility to help transfer students, in particular, to graduate on time, so this option cannot be completely erased; however, the deans moved away from freewheeling exemptions of students from general-education requirements, but major problems still exist, particularly in STEM, primarily because of department-level issues.

Compliance was discussed in several venues: Deans' Council, Chairs' Meetings, and Academic Senate

The table below provides completion rates for Spring 2006, Spring 2007, and Fall 2008; spring 2009 data not yet available.

GENERAL-EDUCATION COMPLETION							
Marie Cullen, Office of Degree Audit							
	A&S	BUS	EDUC	ENGR	FPA	HHS	Total
Spring 2006	32/105 (30%)*	24/55 (44%)	23/71 (32%)	44/70 (63%)	27/40 (68%)	46/82 (56%)	196/423 (46%)
Spring 2007	36/106 (34%)	52/59 (88%)	43/93 (46%)	28/37 (76%)	31/37 (84%)	70/111 (63%)	260/443 (59%)
	CLASS			STEM			
Fall 2008	41/48 (85%)	49/55 (89%)	35/50 (70%)	14/41 (34%)	28/37 (76%)	34/46 (74%)	201/277 (73%)

\* Numbers with slashes indicate completed GER/total graduates, and then percentage of total graduates who have completed GER.

Science departments have had a particularly difficult time managing the intensive requirements. As they moved out of A&S and into STEM, their problems migrated with them. Engineering programs have generally done pretty well meeting the requirements. Biology is now programmatically approved for the intensives; at least some of those numbers should improve in upcoming years. Chemistry has requested

certification; it has gained critical-thinking certification. With some revision, the other intensive proposals should be approved as well.

The 2009–10 academic year should provide stable data for CLASS, in particular. It's not feasible yet to know whether the improvement is due to changes in implementation or to the migration of the science departments.

Education and FPA have made great improvements, and BUS and HHS have remained stable. The HLC site team recommended a 90% target for GER compliance. Since not even the most GER-compliant colleges manage that target, attaining that number will require more work. As more programmatic certifications are proposed and approved, this figure should improve, but more will need to be done.

A bright spot, however, is that the overall GER compliance number increased substantially in just one year (about from 59% to 73%), which suggests that tightening advising and exemptions has worked.

- *Difficulty of assessing writing across a major*

The GEC is working on two initiatives that should help YSU to determine how well its students are writing. Both of these ventures are collaborative, primarily with the Assessment Council under the leadership of Sharon Stringer.

First is the state-mandated Voluntary System of Accountability, which requires YSU to pilot a standardized test that measures critical-thinking and writing abilities in freshmen and seniors. The VSA team (Bege Bowers, Julia Gergits, Tom Maraffa, Sharon Stringer, and Steve Taraszewski) has recommended using the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), an instrument that has students read multiple texts and write analytic essays. This test will be administered to freshmen in the fall of 2009 and to seniors in spring of 2010. Since writing and critical thinking are two key general-education goals, this test will have direct implications for GER.

Second is a pilot program using an assessment/e-portfolio program, in this case LiveText, to capture relevant GER data. Gergits is a member of the E-Portfolio Taskforce, chaired by Susan Leson. The Taskforce has assessed many programs, including LiveText, BlackBoard, E-College, and Angel. LiveText agreed to a pilot program. Various departments participated, including English, Nursing, Dietetics, Communications, and Accounting. Gergits used LiveText on a section of Composition II (English 1551) and experimented using the AACU LEAP Project writing rubric, a nationally developed and recognized instrument. Data can be captured and reports run directly from the program once rubrics have been tagged with specific learning outcomes. The first set of data will be available this summer.

If this pilot project is successful and the University agrees to implementation, the GEC would have a tool with which to gather data quickly and efficiently on all the learning outcomes and domains, not just writing without substantial additional work for departments or individual faculty members.

- *Delayed departmental response to option that allows departments to document assessment of “intensive” course requirements “throughout” the major courses (which would allow students to document satisfaction of requirements). (10)*

This point has been addressed above; it's closely related to lack of sufficient courses to complete intensive requirements.

## Higher Learning Commission Academy

YSU's proposal to participate in the HLC Academy was accepted, and the YSU's Academy team joined the fall 2009 cohort, which included attending an introductory workshop in Lisle, Illinois, and working with our HLC mentors. Sharon Stringer, the chair of this team, will provide details about the Academy activities in the Assessment Report. Briefly, addressing problems in general education forms one of the central goals of the team.

## Addressing GER Assessment Problems

The HLC site team recommended a site visit because of issues related to assessment with a special focus on GER: “Finally, the assessment plan in place for the new general education program needs to be expanded beyond assessment at the course level. A more complete assessment at the program level would enhance consistency and compliance with the general education requirements (27).”

The GEC, under Bill Jenkins' leadership, developed indirect and direct measures for the new GER. Indirect measurements included a senior GER survey, which has been expanded to include student engagement questions. In the ten years or so of its implementation, data have not changed much. Gordon Mapley did a careful analysis of the data and concluded that we can conclude nothing from it. The Assessment Office has used the NSSE, which includes GER questions, too, but again, none of the results have led to changes or amendments in the GER.

As a direct measurement, the GEC created a course-based assessment plan. In this system, one promulgated by the HLC and other organizations in the mid to late nineties, each general-education course had its own learning outcomes and assessment plan; each course was to be assessed using at least two tools, at least one of which was to be a direct measurement of student learning. The concept was sound; its implementation was at best difficult.

In departments with one or two courses, this system may work, at least at the local level. But in departments with many courses, such as English, or worse yet, many courses in several domains, such as Philosophy, assessing a multitude of goals using different assessment tools is nearly impossible. The resulting reports are essentially useless to either the department or to the GEC. As noted in last year's report, faculty members find this process time-consuming and pointless.

After a round of attempting to review and glean relevant data from course-based assessment reports, the GEC has recommended suspending course-based assessment. In its current form, it does not generate data that helps us to assess the effectiveness of the GER.

### **Focus Groups**

To begin constructing an assessment program that generates useful data, the GEC asked Jane Reid to lead Focus Groups for each of the general-education domains. We worked with her to develop questions that she'd ask of each group. We eliminated the Selected Topics domain because it has no coherence or consistency (it's very unlikely that this domain will survive a revision of the GER); she carried out Focus Groups on the other seven domains. Those reports are attached as appendices.

These initial Focus Groups included faculty members who teach courses in these domains. We made a special effort to include part-time faculty who teach a high percentage of many GER courses. As noted in the reports, this attempt was only partially successful. In some domains, such as math, the majority of the participants were full-time faculty who coordinate the programs, not those who teach the majority of those courses.

These Focus Groups generated substantial, albeit indirect, data and will direct further research by the committee. For instance, it's clear that consistency and quality problems are plaguing Composition I and II; Communication Studies 1545, on the other hand, seems to be well-organized and implemented. Personal and Social Responsibility has such varied learning outcomes that the individual courses seem entirely unrelated to one another.

Few participants understood the relationship between the various required learning outcomes and the individual domains, yet most felt that their individual courses worked well and contributed to students' development.

Summaries of these reports will be uploaded on the GEC web site before the end of the summer.

### **SurveyMonkey: GER**

Bob Hogue worked with Gergits to create and upload a survey for the GER. This survey was sent to all faculty, both part- and full-time, and to department chairs to gather their impressions of general-education and recommendations. Below is a quick summary. A longer, more detailed summary will be uploaded on the GEC web site; the full survey and comments are available upon request to Julia Gergits (jmgergits@ysu.edu).

- Some of the results were predictable: 89% felt that effective writing is important for all graduates, yet 39% is unsure whether this goal has been met.
- Many felt that students write ungrammatically (49.1%).
- About half are comfortable teaching their majors to write as professionals.
- 72% felt that the composition courses should not continue in their current form.
- 48% were unsure whether the oral-communications course should remain as it is, but 40% were relatively satisfied with the current oral-intensive requirements.
- Critical-thinking received the most positive numbers, with about 83% comfortable with how their departments are teaching it.
- Many support mathematics as a vital part of students' education, but many are unsure of the effective-

- ness of 2623 (about 62%), and half are unsure whether it should remain in its present form.
- Science has similar support, with 83% agreeing or strongly agreeing that it is vital.
- Again, about half are unsure whether the current science requirements should remain.
- Artistic and Literary Perspectives shows somewhat less enthusiastic support but still strong with 78% agreeing or strongly agreeing that it is important.
- 89% think that Societies and Institutions is important to their students' success, and 57% are unsure whether it should remain at it is.
- 93% believe that Personal and Social Responsibilities is important to their students' success (the highest in the list).
- Selected Topics has the least overall support, but still a majority (nearly 67%) believe it is important and helps their students.
- Capstone data, the first the GEC has gathered, indicates that nearly 86% include appropriate research to their fields.
- Only 78% are sure that writing is included, which is problematic since it's a required part of all capstones.
- 78% also require a professional presentation, again potentially problematic.
- 64% include some form of collaboration.
- 84% include critical thinking (but another nearly 15% weren't sure).
- When asked if specific learning outcomes were met, nearly 50% said "somewhat likely."
- Goal 12: Diversity and Goal 9: "the relationships between physical, mental, and emotional well-being and the quality of life of the individual, the family, and the community" is viewed as somewhat more successful than the other domains.

Comments were detailed and, in some cases, angry. Only those who felt strongly about the GER provided input. In brief, most of the comments argued for a complete revision of the GER. Since not every person provided comments, the comments are skewed, and making generalizations based on them is not possible; however, they provide some useful paths for investigation.

We were able to gather more information on the state of general education at YSU than we've have for several years. Admittedly, these data are preliminary and will require follow-up, but they indicate clear directions for further inquiry, which is something that has been missing from GER assessment.

### **LiveText: GER Assessment**

As noted above, Julia Gergits is a member of the E-Portfolio Taskforce, initiated by the Assessment Council. Sue Leson chairs this committee. E-portfolio and electronic assessment are the most promising techniques for reasonable, useful assessment across curricula.

In brief, these electronic systems allow faculty or assessment teams to use standardized rubrics to evaluate student artifacts; these rubrics are "marked" with general-education and programmatic learning outcomes. Data then can be gathered on how well students are progressing, using benchmark courses or activities, and reports can be generated automatically and both student artifacts and assessment material can be archived nearly indefinitely without storage and filing issues.

The School of Education has used TaskStream for the past five years for this purpose. They use its assessment and archiving functions, but not the e-portfolio portion, which would cost more.

The E-Portfolio Taskforce has piloted LiveText in speech communications, freshman composition, and several upper-division capstones, all part of the general-education program. So far, we have focused on nuts and bolts aspects of how to use the program and create reasonable rubrics. Data should be available by the end of the summer.

Any information gathered through the pilot will also be preliminary, of course. Assessment is being done by the individual faculty members, using some standard rubrics and some individually created rubrics linked to the general-education learning outcomes. Information gathered from this project will provide more guideposts for revision and more assessment.

It is safe to conclude that we need such a tool available for assessment purposes. Without it, across-the-curriculum assessment is at best very difficult and time-consuming.



## Course-based Assessment

Many departments complied with the request to complete and submit this year's assessment reports, and many provided interesting data on their courses. This year's reports will be the last in this format and following this method.

It has been nearly impossible to glean information about GER from these reports. Usually, they focus on small aspects of courses that are, perhaps, relevant to the department (but not always) but have little to do with GERs. Most reports have simply stated that everything is fine; little information has been shared with faculty or departments; and neither the departments nor the GEC have done anything with data that have been gathered.

Most of the changes that have been made to individual courses have been done without support from GER-related data or assessment. For instance, Communication Studies and English have eliminated ABC-NC grading from their general-education courses without consulting the GEC and without curricular or pedagogical reasons. It was, as far as we can tell, propelled by the new funding formula, not pedagogy.

Another example of change without recorded or submitted data is the elimination of STEM 2600 and creation of several new lab opportunities. STEM 2600 never had an assessment plan or any assessment measurements; it ran for nearly ten years without learning-related data being gathered—as far as we know—or provided. The new lab structure was created to address administrative and staffing issues that were very real and important; pedagogy may have been an issue, but it does not appear to be the primary issue.

Data-driven, pedagogy-driven revision of programs and courses is still alien to many at YSU despite all the workshops, e-mails, and nationwide attention.

## Calls for Change

Members of the GEC met with the Senate Executive Committee and with the Provost to ask for their support as we undertake this process.

Several issues make GER revision essential:

- Coherent, logical, useful assessment of GER is nearly impossible under its current structure. The GER has thirteen learning outcomes and eight domains. Most universities have four or five learning outcomes with sub-divisions; courses are distributed within those LOs, not set aside in separate domains. We need a more coherent, assessable GER. The new version must include learning outcomes, assessment plans, and scheduling from its inception.
- The state's goals for YSU have changed (now “urban research institution”), and YSU has new mission and goals statements. GER must reflect and support that changed mission.
- The Student Success Committee and the Student Government association have recommended serious consideration be given to a freshman orientation course of some sort. Advising wants it to be an introduction to college demands and life; faculty members seem to prefer a freshman seminar approach. In either case, the first-year experience is something that the GEC should address.

To this end, the GEC will undertake revising the GER fall of 2009. Unlike the revision of 1995–99, we have an existing Senate-approved, HLC-approved GER with learning outcomes and an assessment plan. Our ambitious goal is to have new learning outcomes and strategic changes to the Academic Senate by February or March; it may take another beyond that to flesh out details and implement changes. Many pieces of the existing GER structure do not need to be changed, such as the communications and critical-thinking outcomes, which are universal and widely accepted both within and outside the University.

## Miscellaneous Activities

### Transfer Module

Gergits worked with OBOR to update YSU's transfer module material available online. She went to training for the new system of proposing courses for the transfer module.

### Assessment News

Gergits collaborated with Sharon Stringer (and Bege Bowers, our esteemed editor and colleague) to write, edit, and design the *Assessment News*, a newsletter that provides information on general-education and program assessment. We're aiming for one or two issues a year.

## Posters

Gergits, Bowers, and Stringer created two informative posters. One was for the Higher Learning Academy's team; it was presented at the HLC Annual Conference in Chicago. The second was for the Student Success Summit in Columbus, Ohio. Kathy Leeper, graphic services, took our copy and raw design and made it beautiful.

## Outreach to Deans, Chairs, and College Assessment Councils

Provost Khawaja recommended that Stringer and Gergits meet with deans, chairs, and others to facilitate assessment. To that end, we met with all the academic deans and those chairs whose department submitted a program report; during the summer, we plan to meet with the rest.

We met regularly with most of the college-based assessment councils that were formed this academic year. The deans agreed that each college needs such a support group. It's very clear that accredited programs are far in advance of non-accredited on assessment strategies and systems, although even some of them have problems. CLASS, a college in which no programs are assessed, has the most severe problems and meets the strongest resistance, even from its own assessment council.

## SOTL

Provost Khawaja asked Sherry Linkon to begin a new scholarship of teaching and learning initiative (SOTL). Linkon's new committee crosses between academic and student affairs divisions to focus on learning across campus, not simply within or across academic disciplines. Gergits is on this committee and will bring GER issues to them.

## Student Success Summit (June 23)

Stringer took seven people, including Gergits, to the annual Student Success Summit sponsored by PCHLAP, an OBOR-appointed committee dedicated to improving assessment and accountability in higher education. General education assessment was the subject of many sessions.

## Assessment Directors' Meetings

Working with many local Assessment Directors, Stringer has initiated a quarterly meeting of area faculty and administrators concerned with assessment and accountability issues. Many of the participants are from Pennsylvania, which is in Middle States, not HLC, so the discussion has been particularly interesting. Gergits has participated in these meetings.

## Tech Committees

Leson and Gergits have joined Mike Hrishenko's technical committee charged with writing a proposal for a new Course-Management System and reviewing other technical options. We were invited onto the committee because of the e-portfolio task force's recommendation that YSU plan to acquire or institute LiveText on campus. The LiveText proposal will be part of a large-scale technical plan.

## Strategic Planning Committee

Bowers suggested that Gergits and Stringer join the Strategic Planning Committee because our committee's issues were pivotal in changes and in the University's new mission. This committee drafts the new mission, vision, core values statements and created the criteria and forms for the Centers of Excellence.

## Plans

Plans for 2009–10 are mentioned above, but I'll list them here.

- Revise the general-education program to more appropriately fit YSU's new mission and goals and to be more readily assessed.
- Run focus groups to gather information from students.
- Revise focus-group questions to target specific issues from first set of Focus Groups and run new set of Focus Groups for faculty.
- Continue working to get more programmatic intensives proposed and approved.
- Continue work on e-portfolio and assessment program (LiveText).
- Update transfer module with new courses from 2008–09.
- Assume responsibility for TAGS

# Relevant Excerpts from

## *ASSURANCE SECTION REPORT OF A COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION VISIT TO Youngstown State University; Youngstown, Ohio; February 18-20, 2008*

In meetings with the deans, the General Education Committee members and members of the Assessment Council, a number of reasons were proffered for this outcome. Among them are:

- Lack of sufficient courses in the disciplines that meet the upper level writing, oral and creative thinking “intensive” course criteria
- Delayed development of “oral intensive” courses in those disciplines that do not have much background in rhetoric
- Deans’ ability to exempt students from meeting the requirements
- Difficulty of assessing writing across a major
- Delayed departmental response to option that allows departments to document assessment of “intensive” course requirements “throughout” the major courses (which would allow students to document satisfaction of requirements).

Those involved believe that departments will gradually submit assessment plans that document student completion of general education criteria, but there has been slow response to date.

Assessment of general education is done by the by the department and overseen by the General Education Committee. Recently, there has been an effort to broaden understanding of assessment, specifically through the first ever joint meeting of the Assessment Council and the General Education Committee. Members of both committees felt this was a positive and promising step forward, and they look forward to continuing the dialogue that has begun.

Challenge 3 (Assessment) and additionally where assessment and general education intersect has not been adequately addressed. On the positive side, the General Education Committee and the Assessment Council have recently begun to have joint meetings. (10)

The second regards the congruence between stated actions and measured outcomes, specifically in terms of student fulfillment of general education requirements. A fuller description appears in another section of this report, but the institution must determine how its students will all fulfill the expectations of the stated general education program as a graduation requirement. The current practice of allowing various academic units to exempt students from elements of the general education program to the extent that nearly half of all graduating students have not met general education program requirements violates the principle of actions following assertions. (16)

Finally, the assessment plan in place for the new general education program needs to be expanded beyond assessment at the course level. A more complete assessment at the program level would enhance consistency and compliance with the general education requirements. (27)



## FOCUS GROUPS: ADVISORS

1. What are the benefits of the General Education requirements in preparing YSU students to be productive and responsible citizens?

They felt that the general education requirements made the students well-rounded. The GERs are the difference between a technical education and a university education. It also allows the students to converse with a variety of people on a variety of topics. The GERs help the students to be empathetic to people from different cultures and in different plights. The courses supplement the technical courses that the students have to take for their majors with non-technical courses so that they are able to speak in a lay language as well as understand people (The example that was given was engineering students having to be able to talk to people who were not engineers.). Another gave the example of the requirements for science. Most high school students equate science with biology and chemistry, and they may have not enjoyed those classes in high school. They find out that they can take geography and other kinds of classes for the science requirement so they are exposed to an area that they had never been exposed to before. For the undetermined students, the GERs help them make choices about their majors. Also someone with a baccalaureate degree is expected to know certain things, e.g., when the civil war was. The GERs help make the students more responsible citizens. Lastly, it provides jobs for people who get doctorates in philosophy.

2. What are the challenges of the General Education requirements in preparing YSU students to be productive and responsible citizens?

They felt the GERs were complicated and restricted, and they felt that the old model was more simple since it was easier to know what a humanity requirement was compared to the names of the domains. Also the GERs are unique to YSU, and they gave the example of what does a PS mean to Toledo? They also felt that the GERs resulted in too many requirements for some majors. They also felt that the GERs were not transfer friendly, and it was mentioned repeatedly during the focus group that the transfer students have different standards than our own students with the GERs. A class may be equated with a writing intensive class when the student transfers to YSU, but it might not have been a writing intensive course at their other university. Later on in the focus group, they did not feel that the GERs were transfer friendly. A lot of times, they will come in with upper-division courses that are counted as GERs so the student does not have to take a lower-level course. One person almost told a student to transfer to KSU then come back, and s/he would be better off.

Another problem they identified with the GERs is that a student cannot take more classes in one area because they are interested in it and have the extra courses count for anything. Our students are discouraged from exploring an area in more depth. They also felt that the intensives were dysfunctional. They felt that it was an insult to the professors that the students are not getting writing intensive and critical thinking in each of their classes. They felt that intensives should be the province of the majors, and the classes in the majors have to provide the intensives, and it should also be assessed in the major—not GER. They felt that the capstone class in the major could assess the intensives.

Another problem identified was that some faculty do not want to do the assessment so they pull the GER designation on the class so it counted as a GE for awhile then it didn't. How are the advisors and the students supposed to track that? The class in question was Telecommunications 1595. That hurt the students.

They also thought that there was a problem that not only science classes fit into the GER nor do all of the literature classes fit into GER. Shakespeare does not count for YSU students, but if a transfer student transfers a Shakespeare class in, then it does.

Another problem is the courses that have the writing intensive designation, and the students have a totally different experience in the same class because of different faculty (one making them do their own research papers while the other faculty member allowing them to do group work). The students don't get the same writing intensive experience.

They also felt that there were pieces missing out of GER such as computer proficiency. They can text and abbreviate but can they do spreadsheets, keyboarding, or Powerpoint? Another area missing is multiculturalism and diversity. It is very apparent at other universities. Another area of concern was civility and the students' respecting the rights of others.

They felt that the math requirement was bizarre. Somehow, algebra and geometry were lost. The GER math is a level 3, and a level 4 class can't be used for GER. Students can test into level 5+ but still have to take a level 3 class. Other universities allow their students to test out of a math class and even get class credit for it. The students are allowed to test out of reading classes. Someone then brought up Remedial U and then someone also mention the community college. They also said that there was a huge problem with Math 1501 since it is a five-hour class that can't count toward graduation but does count toward the students' GPA. A five-hour F has a major impact on the GPA.

Another person felt that the GERs were de-motivational. The students come to YSU all excited about their majors, but then they have to take all of the GERs before they can even get to their major classes. Some students also end up taking 13 hours of remedial classes on top of all of the GERs and get very discouraged. One person brought up ICP students who sometimes end up with 300 hours because of the areas as well as the GERs.

They then said that a lot of the classes that are on the AL list are not even offered. Athletes have a particularly hard time with the GERs because they have taken a certain percentage of classes toward their degree in order to keep their scholarships and compete in their sports. They have to be excellent students to keep eligible.

One person questioned why OBOR has not made goals standard across all universities in Ohio.

Students don't grasp the terminology of the domains, and how they fit with what they learned in high school (social studies, humanities).

Another person questioned why a lab was required for the science GER if not needed for the major.

Faculty advising was also an area of concern. The faculty think that if it's a literature class, then it's an A&L. The model has been in existence for 10 years, and still the faculty do not understand it. One of them got a call and as asked by a faculty member what department S&I was in.

3. From a professional advisor's perspective, what are the strengths of YSU's General Education model?

They felt that the goals were good, but it was too complicated. Another good thing is that majors can embed requirements of the major into GERs (e.g. micro and macro econ for business majors). However, by double dipping like that the students don't get the breadth that they are supposed to with GERs. However, they won't stop doing that because the students would be here forever.

They suggested that the students need basic-skills classes and one or two classes that they all have to take that cover the GERs. Then, the transfer students would be treated more fairly. They then talked about KSU and its branch campuses and whether or not they had the same courses at all of the branches. They did, but they were not the same at the main campus. There is a Northeast Consortium, and they wondered if that would result in all the same classes on the different campuses. That brought up whether or not all the GERs would also be the same. One person had experience with TAG and wondered if all of the courses could not be numbered the same as well.

GERs in summer were impossible to pick up so a lot of the students do online courses, and it is cheaper for them.

4. What are the weaknesses?

Students who have to attend at night or on the weekend are very limited in what GER courses they can take. The lab in science is particularly hard for them to get in.

The healthy lifestyles class was offered online, and it closed so fast, they wondered why the department did not offer more sections of it. They felt that the faculty do not like online classes. One said it was because if they gave their final two weeks early then everyone in the state would know it. One had a student taking four classes in fall, and the student was done with classes at Thanksgiving.

A&L were tough. The ones that were offered filled quickly. 1545 was also a problem with from 9:30 to 3:00 classes gone quickly. It is not a class that they should be taking at the junior level.

They also felt that some of the GERs were very difficult while some were easy—not a lot of consistency.

5. Comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the domains—including basic skills:

- Writing

They also didn't understand why there were prerequisites for freshmen level classes like 1545 and 1560 Psych. It was explained that 1551 was needed for 1545 so that they could do research for their speeches.

Another felt that the research should be left in the major, and she said that two classes should do it. She did notice an improvement in her students' abilities to write. The need for APA versus MLA was discussed as well.

- Speaking

Almost all of the majors required some type of speech class before it was made a GER. Persuasion is important for students in their fields.

- Math

Math is a four-letter word. They really feel that the students should be able to test out of it. They also questioned what goes on in the 2625 class since they're talking about voting and postman routes. They also do not understand why statistics doesn't count as a math class.

- Natural Science

They were talking about a 3-2-3 model for this one. They think that the faculty are more receptive to making their classes GERs. The classes in other domains should not be dependent on the faculty to make them GERs.

- Artistic and Literary

The list is too short. Anything with literature should be on the list. They advise the students at EARLY to jump on the A&L classes then, or they never will get into them. There is also an imbalance in the amount of work required in these classes. In one, they have to see six plays. In other, the word out is that it is an easy class.

- Societies and Institutions

The classes are large, and there is a longer list of classes that count. However, if the student wants to take classes at a higher level, then they won't count.

- Personal and Social Responsibility

These courses should be combined with S&I. They thought that one class should be offered in ethics and civic engagement that tells them how to take care of themselves and others.

Then, they wondered who tells the students about GERs. They talked about an orientation class that would incorporate GERs into it. One of them taught the Reading and Studies skills class, and she explained them in there.

Another problem that they identified was undetermined students. The students were under the impression that they could stick with the GERs for the first year and then decide on a major. That didn't work because of the embedding.

#### Selected Topics

This should be deleted or the courses expanded. They felt it was pointless and was a major reason why the students did not complete all of the GERs.

#### 6. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the YSU's General Education model in the advising of transfer students?

GERs are ignored when it comes to transfer students. The advisors have to make a judgment in the equates, and because of it, the transfer students are treated better than the regular students. They do try to satisfy the spirit/intention/goals of GER with the equates.

The designers of the current GER did not take into account a lot of the pragmatics of administering the domains and intensives.

#### 7. How helpful is DARS when advising students (both native and transfer)?

I did not get to this question.

#### 8. The General Education model may be revised soon. How would you improve the model?

They suggested going back to the old system. They want broader inclusion of courses in GERs, and they want less categories (two science; two humanities; two social studies, and one or two global classes that talk about citizenship, ethics, and engagement). Another thought that one class would be too hard and maybe the students should have five options.

The intensives have to be removed from GER and put in the majors. Curriculum and program committees could evaluate the coverage in the majors.

The paperwork to become a GER class should be eliminated, and the committee should just identify the GER classes.

They again mentioned that the students should be able to test out of math, and statistics should count as a math course.

The technology component was brought up again. Some thought that they were tech-savvy. Then, one person brought up how lost nontraditional students are.

## FOCUS GROUPS: ARTISTIC AND LITERARY PERSPECTIVES

There was no one from art present during the focus group.

### General Impressions of GER

1. What are the benefits of the general education requirements in preparing YSU students to be productive and responsible citizens?

One person mentioned that prior to taking her class, the students had never had never gone to a classical concert before. GER's allow students to think about things beyond their earlier experiences in life. Another said that it was nice to hear that the students were going to continue the experiences that they had with their families after the class. A lot of the times the instructor gets thanked for providing them with the experiences.

Another said that the GER's expose the students to tolerance issues. She focus on being anti-racist in her pedagogy, and the students had not thought about how language is related to their attitudes. They had not read books by authors of women of color, and they feel cheated by not being exposed to those authors in high school.

The GER's are enriching for the students; however, some students don't think that anything is enriching. The GER's get students to think about issues. They also attract a mixed group of students from various programs across the campus. It's nice when there are some English majors in the literature classes because they are more critical thinkers and can serve as models for the other students.

Color and class issues are covered in the literature classes, and the students don't get to discuss those issues in their other classes, and the issues are not going away in society. One picks novels about young people in different cultures across the world so that they can see that the issues that they are facing (e.g., mother/daughter relationships) are being faced by young people in other cultures. The students find through reading that they have something in common with people in Africa and New Zealand. Later, they said that the students get to talk about differences and a level of tolerance is developed. They felt that their minds were opened. The students have to learn to see another person point of view and have a civil discussion.

One participant expressed a concern about the students' curiosity and wondered how to make them curious. When discussing different cultures, she has to light a fire under them. The participants then talked about how the students isolate themselves and don't bother to interact with the person next to them in class but immediately turn to their cell phones. They bring their private world with them and walk around stuck in it.

One person asked their class why they enrolled in a literature class, and one student replied that he wanted to meet women at parties. In the classes, they learn more about what to look for in films to be able to discuss them beyond like and dislike. One commented that it was good to be erudite about *Citizen Kane*. It gives them the ability to conduct themselves as cultured people in a civilized society. The literature also shows them how to live and be a citizen of the world. One participants shared with her the criticism that she often gets that the students say that they will not need this "stuff" in his field. They offer the argument that regardless of the field that they enter, they are going to be expected to be able to converse in an intelligent manner about a variety of topics.

One person offered that he will share information about the lives of the composers to make what they are learning about more personal. They then turned to critical thinking and how the students don't do it. The students start out their classes with not needing the material, then they have to listen to other points of view which can be disruptive. The instructor has to keep pointing out that saying the material is boring is not the right thing to do.

In the literature classes, the students have to learn how to read differently. They can't skim but they need to read slowly and let it sink in.

2. What are the challenges of the general education requirements in preparing YSU students to be productive and responsible citizens?

The students' mixed levels of ability, background, and preparation are huge challenges. They need to keep the students who are deficient on board while not boring the ones who are doing fine. They felt that that issue occurred because of open admission and because of the students being from different disciplines. It was a delicate balance to serve all of the students in their classes. They also felt that they had to perform in class to keep the students' attention.

Attendance was another issue. They will get e-mails from students asking them if they missed anything in the four weeks that they were absent from class. One said that she will find herself refreshing them on what was covered in the previous class, but they all felt that that was difficult to do in a 50-minute class. One faculty member refuses to respond to the "what did they miss?" e-mails. She makes them find buddies in the class and tells them to ask their buddies what went on in class. They really felt that attendance was a major issue and were unsure as to what to attribute it to—was it the weather, the economy? Later, they mentioned the student who comes to them and basically indicates that they have screwed up for five weeks and puts that responsibility on the instructor to fix the problem. It puts the instructor in an impossible situation.

They then talked about traditional versus nontraditional students and how nontraditional students had family and work responsibilities that sometimes got in the way of their classes. One felt that she didn't have any problems with nontraditional students but had more problems with the younger students. They mentioned smelling alcohol on their breaths (day after St. Patrick's). Later, one mentioned that nontraditional students tended to raise the level of discussion in class.

They then turned to the students' perceptions of general education courses. They feel that they don't need them, and their major courses are what matters. If they have to make a choice, they will study for the major course and let the GE course slide. One said that she has seen students take out textbooks from other classes during her class.

Cell phones were brought up. They use them to check the time. One of them teaches film, and she said that the film was ruined when the cell phones are opened up. Another said that she tells the students if a cell phone goes off during class, she will dance to the music, and they did not want to see her dance. They also brought up the prevalence of texting during class.

Student athletes were then discussed. They have a problem with them not coming to class. Others felt that the coaches really back up the instructors and get the students to perform, and others felt that they are some of the best students because they were so disciplined.

3. How well do you think that the GER system is working to help YSU students become productive and responsible citizens?
4. Do you have any general comments that you'd like to share with the GER committee about the requirements?

#### Specific Questions about Artistic and Literary Perspectives Courses

1. YSU students should demonstrate an understanding of artistic expression in multiple forms and contexts. How well do you think the courses that you teach help students to do so?

They felt that they did a good job if the students leave their classes wanting to read more and finding voice in literature that they liked. They liked it when the students wanted to continue beyond what they learned in the class. They felt that the students had the curiosity beaten out of them by previous education. They expect the instructor to do the interpretation for them rather than them being responsible for it.

The students also progress beyond just saying "I like it," or "I don't like it." They have to get them beyond that. One gave an example of how she makes them read a poem and analyze it. They have to read the poem that they choose to another student in class (very uncomfortable doing that). After the poem analysis, she found that they do a better job of interpreting literature. The music professor makes them write papers on the concerts that they attend. They can't just sit there, but they have to express an opinion and explain why they didn't like the concert. She has found that while they were negative initially, 80 percent they enjoy the concert, and they didn't expect to do so. She also has them compare concerts. She said that writing three pages is a difficult assignment for them. They're not used to writing about music. She also has live performances in class for them.

They felt that a lot of the subject matter was cross disciplinary (Sonny's Blues). That allows other majors to offer their expertise in the class (music major in the literature class).

They felt that they had different types of students—the deadpans may not move; the lukewarm become warmer during the class, and the A students get a lot out of the classes. They questioned how a student could graduate from college and not be able to express himself/herself.



2. What is working right in the courses that you teach to meet the learning outcome of demonstrating an understanding of artistic expression in multiple forms and contexts?
3. What challenges are you facing in the courses that you teach to meet the learning outcome of demonstrating an understanding of artistic expression in multiple forms and contexts?

These subgoals were discussed after all of the other questions were asked

4. A sub-goal for the artistic and literary perspectives domain is for students to understand the importance of ethical reflection and moral reasoning. How well do you think that courses that you teach help the students to do so?

It's in literature with an openness to other cultures. One tries to get them out of their tidy moralities and show how it is relative with the example of Anne Frank and let them know that sometimes it's okay to lie. They also play the devil's advocate in class. One gave the example that if you have nothing you rob, and if you have everything, you are robbed.

5. Another sub-goal for the artistic and literary perspectives domain is for students to understand the interrelationship among science, technology, and society. How well do you think that courses that you teach help the students to do so?

Film classes talk about science and technology. Stories about composers are shared and how they were innovators (e.g., Gershwin and a radio show). Music in video games is mentioned in classes, and synthesizers are also mentioned.

6. Another sub-goal for the artistic and literary perspectives domain is for students to understand the relationship among physical, mental, and emotional well-being and the quality of life of the individual, family, and the community. How well do you think that courses that you teach help the students to do so?

Literature and music feed the soul. They are asked to analyze plots, but they try not to over-analyze to kill the enjoyment of the story. The students have to personalize the literature in order to understand it. Fiction models life. They focus on how literature and poetry gives meaning and significance to their own lives. One mentioned the students' music choices and how Gilbert and Sullivan was rap.

7. Another sub-goal for the artistic and literary perspectives domain is for students to understand the development of cultures and organizations of human societies throughout the world and their changing interrelationships with Western Society. How well do you think that courses that you teach help the students to do so?

One mentioned literature about Native Americans. Another mentioned international fiction. The literature shows cultures within cultures. They insert different cultures in their reading beyond British and American literature. One mentioned the connection between anti-slavery and the women's movement and how both oppressed groups had connections. In order to understand the art, one had to understand the context of the art.

8. Another sub-goal for the artistic and literary perspectives domain is for students to understand the importance of diversity in America in all of its forms. How well do you think that courses that you teach help the students to do so?

They felt that they had already discussed this sub-goal.

9. Another sub-goal for the artistic and literary perspectives domain is for students to understand the natural environment and the processes that shape it. How well do you think that courses that you teach help the students to do so?

It comes out in Native American literature since much of it has an ecological focus. Thoreau and the environment. One talked about homosexuals and women working out of the home as being perceived as unnatural during our history, and how literature was used as instruments of rhetoric to express certain ideologies.

10. The GER committee realizes that a course-by-course assessment of learning for courses identified as artistic and literary perspectives is not providing them with the kind of information that they need to assess learning.

They talked about the challenges of getting a course approved for GE.

They then asked what evidence would the students' writing need to show to assess the learning outcome. The e-portfolio was mentioned and how it could be used to capture all kinds of writing files across the students' college careers. As they progress through college, the students should demonstrate evidence of better writing and critical thinking. With the e-portfolio, the students' reflection could be examined. The students would also have control of what posted, and it could also be shared with



other students and potential employers. Multimedia projects could also be uploaded. Then, they questioned who would read it all. Would they only look at a sample of students? One person suggested that the student be made aware of the goals and then make then pick their own work that shows how they have achieved the goals. It would make the students proactive in sorting through all of their “stuff.” The assessment team would then hear from the students as to how they are achieving the goals. They could select and reflect on their own writings. Students are often startled when they are asked about their learning. The information could be captured at three points during their college careers. The students need to be told that they are signing on to these goals when they start at YSU. It could help with retention, and they also may not be so quick to sell their textbooks. Extracurricular experiences could also be included in meeting the learning outcomes as well as enriching the goals.

One of the challenges that they face in the classroom is the students being used to reacting to the television screen and having them react to them in the same way. The students don’t grant the instructor with humanity.

They then talked about forcing the students to use the library and not just rely on the Internet. They also felt that the students have to go beyond just one interest area and just one field. One said that even the honors students do not want to take risks and look for easier classes. It’s good for the students to hear the same thing in different classes and then make the interdisciplinary connections; however, it should not happen by accident. There should be interdisciplinary connections built into the GER’s. They suggested tracks in the GER’s.

- a. What challenges are there to assessing being able to understand artistic expression in multiple forms and contexts as a learning outcome for YSU students?
- b. What are your recommendations do you have for the committee in assessing being able to understand artistic expression in multiple forms and contexts as a learning outcome for YSU students?

11. Are there any general comments that you would like to share with the GER committee about artistic and literary perspectives courses?

They want more interdisciplinary classes, and they realize that it wouldn’t be easy because of workload issues and responsibilities. Faculty need to get out of their own little cubicles. There were also a lot more choices for students in societies and institutions than in their domain.

One questioned 50 YSU students graduating with a 4.0. Only God is perfect. The students are so narrow in what they do to protect their GPA’s. We don’t encourage them to explore outside of their major area. Why are they in college? They could get just their majors from a trade school. The students take a beeline for the course in their specialized areas. The students might feel that it is a luxury to learn about other things. They then questioned why the students go to college and felt that it was to get a piece of paper and get a job. The STEM focus by the state is promoting that kind of thinking. The students don’t need an education for their careers. However, they feel that the students need to be well educated, expressive learners.

## FOCUS GROUPS: MATHEMATICS

I think that most of the faculty in the room were full-time faculty with responsibility for coordinating the GER courses 2623 and 2625. Later on in the focus group, it was revealed that while all YSU students have to take a math course, they all do not take 2623 or 2625.

### General Impressions of GER

1. What are the benefits of the general education requirements in preparing YSU students to be productive and responsible citizens?

They thought that the GER requirements make students responsible citizens. They also thought that the GER requirements provided a coordinated collection of courses from different departments. The requirements also ensure that the students have a well-rounded background of course work that they would not get from the courses in their majors. They thought that the GER's give the students basic material that they all should have.

They then started focusing on their classes and felt that the students could better understand the dynamics of elections, the concepts of probability and statistics, and how important mathematics was to every aspect of their lives. They felt that the mathematics courses helped them with critical thinking. They then shared stories about what the students did not understand about financial math and how much they didn't understand about their own finances. They tried to give them real-life mathematics that they could apply to their lives such as loans and voting (They also mentioned the students' abilities to calculate a tip—percentage later on in the discussion). There was also a component of writing in the mathematics courses, and they struggled with what to do about the mistakes that they saw there. They also felt that oral communication was important and included it in their classes as well. The students need to be able to express themselves clearly and efficiently (effectively). They also had to understand the meaning behind the mathematical equations that they were learning.

2. What are the challenges of the general education requirements in preparing YSU students to be productive and responsible citizens?

The students come into their classes and question why it is important for them to take mathematics courses. They also struggled with the students' inability to communicate effectively. They are not English faculty and find it hard to grade content versus grammar vs. expression.

They also felt that there was a need for a class that focused on study skills before they take the mathematics requirements. They felt that the students thought that because it was a GE class that it was a blow-off class. They meant that the students think that because it is a GE class that it will be simple, and therefore, they don't do the work required in the class. They just want their A's and to be able to move on. The math faculty have to motivate them and tell them that what they will learn in the class is for their own benefit. They felt that the students were in the classes (2623 especially) because they chose a major that did not require mathematics. Some of the students are taking the class their last semester. They have tried to take it two or three times before and failed. The class is perceived as a barrier between them and graduation. The students also do not do the work that is required of them to succeed in the class. The faculty cannot teach them without the students having to think.

They try to make the material more real for the students by how math may be used outside of the classroom. One gave the example of gambling and the difference between odds and probability. They also talk about mortgages (principal and interest payments).

3. How well do you think that the GER system is working to help YSU students become productive and responsible citizens?
4. Do you have any general comments that you'd like to share with the GER committee about the requirements?

### Specific Questions about Mathematic Courses

1. YSU students should demonstrate the ability to use mathematics for problem solving and decision making. How well do you think the courses that you teach help students to do so?

For the students who do well in the classes, they are very successful, but those students are in the minority. The students' backgrounds as well as their attitudes become issues since they not only dislike math but might also fear it.

Mathematics is different from other subjects in that the students have to practice it in order to learn it, and they are not in the habit of learning by practicing which is why they fail. The math lectures are a delusion. The students see the instructor work the problem out on the blackboard, and it makes perfect sense to them. They go home, and that's the end to their learning. When they take the test, they realize that they should have practiced the problems.

The students also have a lack of confidence in their abilities to do math. They felt that possibly computer labs could help them visualize the problems. They could learn tools such as graphing on the computers, and SPSS could help them with the calculations; however, there was concern that they could plug the numbers into the program and not really understand what the numbers mean. They also felt that the computers could be used to give them practice problems.

Focusing on the decision making part of the GER, they felt that the students are helped with financial math, probability, and scheduling. They then talked about the book that is currently being used in 2623 where the students are being asked to do math problems that do not have a good (elegant) solution. They did not think that the book being used for 2623 was the best book. The distance-learning classes of 2623 are using a different book that the other classes will begin using. One person also expressed that it was not possible to cover all of the concepts in one class, and there was a need for two math classes since mathematical modeling and logic are contained under one big math umbrella.

Their major success was showing the students how math applies outside of the class such as with voting (already mentioned above). They also thought that the group projects in their classes were beneficial to the students. They were asked to choose something to study and apply what they learned. The students would do the survey research, compile the data for statistical analysis, and make decisions based on the data. They felt that the students liked the projects because it was not what the book or what the instructor chose for them, but they got to choose their projects. Later they went back to the project and its effectiveness. They felt that it allowed the students to collaborate with each other which is an important skill. In the evaluations of the course, while there is some resistance to group work, it is indicated as the best part of the class by the students. While it puts pressure on them to be responsible for their area of the project, it also lessens the load since they work together. The instructors also evaluate what each student contributed to the project. They realize that the sliders might get a passing grade because of the group project, but the question remains if they can do the work.

Another technique that seemed to work was the use of Powerpoint since the students hate to read the book. They can at least read the slides. Another instructor types up his own notes and shares lists of steps with them.

They feel that there should be a course that focuses on math study skills. They felt that it was necessary because with math it requires practice, and the skills are developmental. Math cannot be learned by reading a book. The students have to do the problems. Rote memorization that might work in other subjects won't work in math. The students have to read and then practice the problems.

Discussion then turned to students who have been out of school for five to ten years struggling in 2623. They need to take something else before they take 2623. They then talked about the different levels of students in the class and how difficult it was to teach the class because of that. They would like some kind of assessment test before the students are allowed to take 2623. They then talked about the math placement test.

They need to change the students' attitudes toward math. They're scared; they hate it, and they don't want to concentrate. Mathematics requires hard mental work. The solution is not on the next page or at the end of the chapter. They felt that the poor attitude toward math was created in high school or from parents. They then talked about the high school teachers themselves and their feelings about mathematics may be transferred to their students. The students in education don't want to learn the higher-level math if they are only going to be teaching grade-school math.

They felt that the students that they have picked a major that doesn't stress math, and the students view that class as a hurdle that they have to get over in order to get on with their lives.

They then started talking about attendance. The one faculty member said that the student felt that if they had the Powerpoint slides, then they didn't need to come to class. Another said that the students felt that the class was too easy so their attendance was not necessary. They also thought that some students get so frustrated that they just give up. Then, there were the students who chose only to show up on test days. There were some students who just never engage. They're on their rosters but not doing any of the assignments in the class. They have to find a way to motivate the students to want to learn mathematics.

2. What is working right in the courses that you teach to meet the learning outcome of using mathematics for problem solving and decision making?

3. What challenges are you facing in the courses that you teach to meet the learning outcome of using mathematics for problem solving and decision making?
4. The GER committee realizes that a course-by-course assessment of learning for courses identified as mathematics is not providing them with the kind of information that they need to assess learning.
  - a. What challenges are there to assessing being able to use mathematics for problem solving and decision making as a learning outcome for YSU students?

They felt that it would be very difficult. They said that they have been praised by GE for their previous assessment of GE. The group projects and discussion of portfolios are ways that the students could be assessed.

They felt that the instructors should be trusted that they are covering the GE topics on the syllabus. 2623 and 2625 have a standardized syllabus with core topics to be covered. However, there are too many sections in each chapter so the instructors pick and choose the sections that they want to cover. However, the distance learning course is completely standardized (content and tests).

They have specific learning outcomes associated with each class, and they are struggling with how to use them as part of assessment. They have been doing group meetings with the instructors to share what they have achieved in their classes. They provide good insights as to what is working, and the coordinator of the class prepares a summary report from the discussions. The instructors then read the summary report and are asked to add to it. They would like more guidance from the assessment team on how to go about assessing the students' learning.

They then went back to the level of math skills the students have. Some have been so reliant on calculators that they can't do simple math in their heads. They do not allow the use of calculators in 1500 and 1501. Students can't learn math if they use calculators.

- b. What are your recommendations do you have for the committee in assessing being able to use mathematics for problem solving and decision making as a learning outcome for YSU students?

5. Are there any general comments that you would like to share with the GER committee about mathematics courses?

Again, they mentioned that they want more guidance on how to do assessment. They also wanted to affirm the notion of academic freedom. They think that the students need more math courses. They also wanted the committee to know that the math faculty are doing a good job. They beat English in credit-hour production. What they are doing is worthwhile for the students.

There is a huge challenge in assessing "skills" for each YSU student since the math requirements for each student is different.

They also require a great deal of testing in their classes. They have tests, quizzes, and homework assignments. I brought up the concept of the e-portfolio and whether or not those assignments could be included in the portfolio. They were concerned about the legalities of doing that.

Should the system just trust that each YSU student who graduates is able to do math? Should there be some kind of tracking after they graduate? Their math skills should be enriched by other courses that they take and not be the sole responsibility of the math class that they took.

They did mention that not all of the full-time faculty are on board with what happens on 2623. They are happy that they don't have to teach the classes because of the level of the students in the class as well as what's covered in the class (not their future "customers"). Some of the full-time faculty are champions of the course and will teach it. They also mentioned that they have dedicated limited-service faculty who are doing a good job in the class.

Since the previous two focus groups mentioned an orientation class, I asked them what they thought about it. They liked it if it focused on study skills. They then indicated that a majority of YSU students place into 1500 or 1501. They thought that the standards to get into 2623 should be raised.

## FOCUS GROUPS: NATURAL SCIENCE

### General Impressions of GER

1. What are the benefits of the general education requirements in preparing YSU students to be productive and responsible citizens?

One felt that prior to the new GER standards at YSU, there was not as much structure, and students were taking a lot of classes haphazardly. They all had more classes that could count for GE than they do now. Another felt that the GER's make for a more well-rounded student. They also thought that the GER's provide a common body of knowledge and experiences for the students. They also provide the students with different ways of knowing things. They thought that the students needed to understand science in order to know what is credible and what is not that is presented in popular media.

2. What are the challenges of the general education requirements in preparing YSU students to be productive and responsible citizens?

They felt that a lot of the students were not prepared to take science classes. The students have a difficult time with critical thinking and abstract thinking needed to understand science. When they ask the students to apply the information that they are presented, they are disappointed in the results. They questioned the kind of exposure the students have to science in high school because their general knowledge of science is weak. One gave the example of students thinking that the earth goes around the sun one time a year. They felt that a lot of their class time is spent filling in deficiencies from other classes.

They quickly focus on science classes and the challenges there. The students are more apt to take astronomy, meteorology and geology because they think that those science classes will be easier than biology or chemistry. They equate astronomy to constellations, meteorology to weather, and geology to rocks and are surprised when they get in the classes and find out they are much more. They've found that the only way to get the material across to them is to use demonstrations. They have to start where the students are and move them forward, and it's not where the faculty would want them to be coming out of high school. They have to familiarize them with a lot of nomenclature to which they should have been exposed. They felt that the YSU students were not well prepared by the classes that they took in high school. Later, they mentioned that the students were taught to memorize and then regurgitate it back, and that is not how to learn science. They felt that memorizing was comfortable for them, but active learning was better, and it took awhile for them to be comfortable with that method of learning. Later, they mentioned that the students are not used to active learning, and usually they like it once they get used to it.

Another issue that they brought up was the type of equipment that a lot of the science departments had. Astronomy has a spiffy auditorium that a nice, rich lady gave to them, but physics is using equipment from the 50's. The sciences require a greater financial infrastructure than courses in literature. They need more proper teaching lab space. If students learn by doing, then they are limited as to what they can do in their labs. One mentioned using a weather lab online.

3. How well do you think that the GER system is working to help YSU students become productive and responsible citizens?
4. Do you have any general comments that you'd like to share with the GER committee about the requirements?

### Specific Questions about Natural Science Courses

1. YSU students should demonstrate an understanding of the natural environment and the processes that shape it. How well do you think the courses that you teach help students to do so?

They do it well; however, one half of the students do well while the other half do not, and they attributed that to a reflection on their training. The students come in with misconceptions, think it will be an easy class because they see it on television (Weather equated with meteorology.). They don't understand the sciences behind what they see on TV.

They then turned to what they do to try to help the students out. They provide the students with lists of things that they should know (e.g. phases of the moon). They need to educate the students on what is important to know for their classes. One said that he would not like himself as an instructor because he has become very explicit about what they need to do to be a successful college student (have to do the work, have to attend class, can't be disruptive and mess around with other students' learning). He has to be very detailed and list it out for them because students can take his class if they are on academic probation. He would prefer to have 10 things stick with them than cover 40 things that don't stick. Another felt



that they have students who don't belong in college in their classes and brought up the notion of open enrollment. Another said that he gives unannounced bonus quizzes throughout the semester. He will work with the students who were there to take the bonus quizzes but will write off the ones who were never there. They then started talking about the number of students who are on their rosters that they never see and that it was not a negligible number. One attributed it to health insurance. They felt that that was self-destructive behavior and brought up the new policy of F grades.

They did bring up education majors. Some were sharp and some they wished were not in their classes because they did not think that they were capable of being good teachers because they were inarticulate and not ready to learn. They felt that they went into that major because they thought that it would be easy.

2. What is working right in the courses that you teach to meet the learning outcome of demonstrating an understanding of the natural environment and the processes that shape it?
3. What challenges are you facing in the courses that you teach to meet the learning outcome of demonstrate an understanding of the natural environment and the processes that shape it?

There is so much of environmental science presented in the media that it is a challenge to correct the misconceptions presented on the news and in the media since they do not provide the whole story.

Another challenge is to get the students to read the book. They also think that one hour of study time is sufficient for a test. One felt that it was not unreasonable to expect the students to take as much time to study for the test as the instructor did in preparing, administering, and grading the test. One shared that he prepares outlines for the tests, and they don't even bother to read them. Another questioned whether or not they even knew how to study. They don't have the test-taking skills that they need. One requires them to read outlines that are only one to two pages long, tell them that the material will be on the test, and they won't read them. One gave them all of the questions that would be on the test, and they still didn't prepare for the test. They wondered how to get the students to be responsible for their own learning.

They brought up the idea that the students consider general education classes are easier than their other classes. There is a perception of how hard classes should be at the university, and general education classes should not be hard. The students think that they have to work really hard in their major classes but not in the required classes.

The students that they have in the GE classes are not science majors, and they come with the mind set that it will be painful and difficult. One mentioned that astronomy is the gateway drug for the other sciences. They either like it or don't like it. Some felt that they were putting on a science show to sustain their interest. They don't want to make it silly, but the students expect entertainment. One mentioned that the students have a 7.5 minute attention span which requires them to change things up in class frequently to keep them from wandering. One mentioned that you can't throw up one Powerpoint slide after another because they stop listening and just start copying down what's on the slides. The faculty have to teach in a variety of ways to maintain the students' interest.

4. A sub-goal for the natural science domain is for students to understand the scientific method. How well do you think that courses that you teach help the students to do so?

They initially said that they don't teach the scientific method, but they revealed that they do teach it but don't label it as such for the students. They pose problems, make them observe, but they can't label it the scientific method because the students find it so dry. They commented that the nice people who put the GE together had OD'd on the scientific method. They would lose the students in a heartbeat if they tried to teach it. They questioned if it was really critical to understanding science. One person said that he covers it, but it is his driest lecture, and he uses reality TV shows as an example of the scientific method. They do teach observational science and the rigor of knowing every part of the scientific method, but the students don't realize that they are learning the scientific method. The students are more appreciative of it at the junior and senior level. It is dry stuff. More important, is the critical thinking component of the scientific method. One makes the students make three observations and then come to a conclusion.

5. Another sub-goal for the natural science domain is for students to understand the interrelationship among science, technology, and society. How well do you think that courses that you teach help the students to do so?

There is a lot of impact on humankind from geology—volcanoes, earthquakes—and the students can identify with them. With meteorology, they can understand the impact of potential climate changes. They are aware of it from the media, and they can weave the topic in to the class material or else the students consider the class boring. Astronomy can talk about why we have seven days as a result of the moon, sun, and the five visible planets. Weather and why it happens is important for the students to know. One faculty member brings in articles that are timely on the subject matter to get the students' attention.



Another mentioned the proliferation of science channels on cable and how the students will ask him about programs that they have seen proving that they do switch off the comedy channels.

6. The GER committee realizes that a course-by-course assessment of learning for courses identified as natural science is not providing them with the kind of information that they need to assess learning.
  - a. What challenges are there to assessing being able to use natural science for problem solving and decision making as a learning outcome for YSU students?

They want the committee to define the outcomes more clearly. They found that filling out the paperwork to get a course to be GE was full of bull and arduous. They really didn't know what the committee wanted.

As for assessment, they did not know how it could be measured. Science is filled with facts and content-oriented things that could be measured. There are also standardized tests out there that could measure understanding of each subject that have been tested at several universities, but they are specific to one science.

They wanted the committee to define what they wanted the students to know. They felt that the student being able to critically think was the most useful. They could propose a problem and then tell whether or not the student's argument and conclusion was valid. They didn't think that a bubble-sheet test was appropriate. They also thought that they could construct a science problem, present it to the students, and ask them how would they know if it held water or not (e.g., a sample of one would make the experiment bogus). They agreed that there was no silver bullet to measure the outcome.

I mentioned the e-portfolio idea. They did not know how it would work for science. Who would be responsible for evaluating it? What would the students upload from their science classes? They thought that possibly the lab reports could work, but some of them are fill in the blank. One of them had huge classes (600) and questioned what would be included from students in those classes.

They wondered what other universities are doing that have adequate assessment according to HLC. They as faculty do not know enough about assessing broader learning outcomes and goals.

- b. What are your recommendations do you have for the committee in assessing being able to demonstrate an understanding of the natural environment and the processes that shape it as a learning outcome for YSU students?

7. Are there any general comments that you would like to share with the GER committee about natural-science courses?

They want more workshops on assessment. They also want to know the tools for assessment—both direct and indirect. They also questioned YSU making such an investment. They felt that 13 goals was crazy and wondered if the faculty knew what they were. They thought that there had to be a simpler process, and YSU needs to be more realistic given its modest resources and limited time.

They then went back to what other universities are doing and what accreditation bodies look at. If they knew what they looked at, then it would give them a better idea of how to get there. They thought that the complete HLC report should be made available to faculty. They felt that they did an adequate job in assessing individual courses but don't know how to assess it more programmatically.

The reports that they have to do are long and painful, and they don't affect teaching but are difficult and time consuming.

They also felt that YSU faced big issues in the near future with state funding formula changing and with the community college on the horizon. They will have a huge impact on assessment. One mentioned Arizona State laying off 500 people and how it might hit YSU. If the minimum enrollment requirement to YSU is changed, it will change how classes are taught—doing things differently and expecting a little more.

They wanted to know what universities have passed the HLC for assessment. They also wanted to know what HLC did not like about YSU's assessment. They wondered if there should be bodies of accreditation in the natural sciences.

## FOCUS GROUPS: PERSONAL AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Because of two separate (and not really similar) learning outcomes, the focus group may have worked better with two separate groups.

### General Impressions of GER

1. What are the benefits of the general education requirements in preparing YSU students to be productive and responsible citizens?

Students bring basic assumptions to the classroom about how they act on their values. The GER's give them new, alternative forms of thinking and listening. The students learn to be attentive to different viewpoints and aware of others' actions and how they might clash. GER's help prepare responsible citizens of society. They need to know that one religion or one culture does not sum up who people are. The GER's help them to be critical and raise questions. The faculty want them to ask the right questions and not hurry to answer those questions. They did mention that they have huge sections and questioned how to teach critical thinking in those classes. One person mentioned that she uses the Horvath method of teaching at a high level but testing at a low level, and it seems to be working. She said that they appreciate being shown empirical evidence of what is being presented in the classroom so she goes beyond the textbook. Another said that he focuses on content in the classroom since the students are deficient in understanding what psychology is. Some question their own psychological behavior. He also addresses experimental designs in the classroom.

They realized that their disciplines were very different with goals four versus nine. One said that she focused on the content but then gets them to use it and tries to spark the students. They talked about trying to find the students' "on" switch. The information provided in her class might improve the quality of their lives. One said that she focuses on inequality based on gender and age, and there is a ton of information that she has to get through. The person who taught professional ethics said that he tries to challenge them on everything that they've taken for granted. He usually has business and medical students in his classes. They don't think that his course is relevant to their careers. He said that he's never sure what kind of students will be in his classes. Another said that he wants the students to think outside of the box and uses the Socratic method. The ethics professor said that students will begin to analyze behavior of their work colleagues and figure out how they are being screwed over. He also gets feedback from students about how relevant his class was.

2. What are the challenges of the general education requirements in preparing YSU students to be productive and responsible citizens?

One mentioned the students' sense of entitlement. They are seeing a different type of student now. They feel that they are entitled to an A just by showing up for class. It is the instructor's job to make them care. They also thought that the students thought that the faculty were there to provide a service. While they will have statements on their syllabi about not allowing work to be made up, the students will come to them and ask how they can make up a missed assignment—the rule on the syllabus was for everyone else in the class and not them. They also just assume that absenteeism is okay. One puts them into groups, and if one person doesn't perform in that group, then the whole group is punished grade-wise. He then talks about being blamed for things for which they were not responsible and how often that happens in life.

Another said that he lets the students know that he knows that they don't want to be there. Another shared that teaching was 80 percent performance and 20 percent content. One said that she likes to shock them to wake them up. The students are in the GER classes because it's a requirement. They then talked about mandatory attendance, and most said that they do not want them there if they don't want to be there. They don't want them in their classes if the student is going to be reading another text in their classes. One gives them pop quizzes so that those who do attend will benefit. Another gives random in-class discussion assignments. Another won't put powerpoint slides up on WebCT because it gives them an excuse to not come to class. Another twitters updates on what was covered in class so that they know the reading assignments for the next class.

The whole curriculum needs more student buy in. One brought up the foreign language requirement and how that worries so many students. The students do not understand why they have to take the courses in GE. They need a student orientation to going to a university. They need to know that they are here to be an educated person and to know more than just one specific area. They've agreed to that premise by enrolling at a university rather than a trade school. Later, they mentioned training a seal versus education a student. They have to learn more than just getting what they need for a job. One mentioned that Canadian system of higher education and how they don't take any classes in GE. One said that the students have to quit their whining and just take the GER's because they're good for them. One uses the examples of GER's as a paternalistic system. They felt that the students don't read the information in the bulletin about GER's. One said that they

need a convocation a sense of what they are in for—what will happen to them in college.

They talked about an orientation class (Liberal Studies 100). The class would explain why general education is here. It was brought up that it was discussed when the GER's were revised, and it was felt that it would cost too much and would add one or two hours to programs that are already requiring too many hours. One person said that they got support for a one semester hour orientation class from student affairs but not academic affairs. One suggested that the students be made to go through a series of online modules before they could do something (like register). The problem there is that they could just flip through the screens and not read them. They talked about SOAR and said that they don't even see the motivation of the students during that program. They questioned if YSU explains the purpose of GE and why the classes are important for the students to be successful in their careers. Another said that not only do the students need to be oriented the GER's but so do the new faculty. She had no idea that she needed the main goal and then a subgoal for this domain. One person said that when he was in school, there were engineers working in the field who came in once a week and told them why what they were learning was important to their careers. It was a way of changing their frame of minds as they transitioned from high school to college.

The GER's do provide failure experiences to change the way that the students function. The students do not know how to study nor how to read for content, but they can write. GER's are a burden placed on the students.

3. How well do you think that the GER system is working to help YSU students become productive and responsible citizens?
4. Do you have any general comments that you'd like to share with the GER committee about the requirements?

#### Specific Questions about Personal and Social Responsibility Courses

1. YSU students should demonstrate an understanding of the importance of ethical reflection and moral reasoning. How well do you think the courses that you teach help students to do so?

It works. They found that the most effective approach is a practical one. They try to get the students to think outside of the box. They need to know how to pose an argument and have it supported by evidence. They also try to get them away from regurgitating something of a doctrinal nature. One says that he tries for shock and awe the first day of class with an outrageous example and said that it was false advertising because subsequent classes will not be as exciting. He proposes that he be allowed to kill one of them at random, and they all get A's. Then he proposes that he be allowed to kick the crap out of one of them at random, and they all get A's but the one who was beaten up gets a F. They then learn the skills of how to justify that what he proposed is wrong. He also gives them the statement that, "Eating babies for breakfast is a good thing." They have to give him the reason why it is wrong. They find out that there's not quick answer, and it's done. They start using the language of ethics, and he ends the semester with a good chunk of the students understanding the concepts of ethics. Students will approach him after the class and tell him about how meaningful the assignment was for them.

2. What is working right in the courses that you teach to meet the learning outcome of demonstrating an understanding of the importance of ethical reflection and moral reasoning?
3. What challenges are you facing in the courses that you teach to meet the learning outcome of demonstrating an understanding of the importance of ethical reflection and moral reasoning?
4. YSU students should demonstrate an understanding of the relationships among physical, mental, and emotional well-being and the quality of life of the individual, the family, and the community. How well do you think the courses that you teach help students to do so?

In developmental psychology, the outcome is covered because she takes them from womb to tomb. In food and nutrition, obesity is a major topic so she brings in articles that cover the topic and does not just rely on the textbook. Another talked about health problems and not only how it affects people physically but also emotionally. It also has an impact on families and relationships within families. She gives personal examples of her own parents and their health issues. She also talks about using community resources for exercising (e.g., bike paths). In healthy lifestyles, students come in assuming that they know everything about the course. She makes them do family trees which gets them to identify health risks of their own. She also gives them a "Who Am I?" assignment, and they have to go beyond just the labels that are put on them (sister, mother, etc.). While some really take the assignment seriously, others are just there because it is a requirement. Another gets them to analyze their diets and relationships with food.

5. What is working right in the courses that you teach to meet the learning outcome of demonstrating an understanding of

the relationships among physical, mental, and emotional well-being and the quality of life of the individual, the family, and the community?

6. What challenges are you facing in the courses that you teach to meet the learning outcome of demonstrating an understanding of the relationships among physical, mental, and emotional well-being and the quality of life of the individual, the family, and the community?
7. What challenges are you facing in the courses that you teach to meet the learning outcomes of the two main learning outcomes just discussed and combining them with another goal from three to 12?

Most of them seemed to pick up on diversity and all of its forms as their subgoal. Others also used goal 11 as their subgoal. Others used #6 and #3. One mentioned that it seemed like cookie cutters, and he was happy if he hit a number of the subgoals. Most said that the goals and subgoals were on their syllabi.

8. The GER committee realizes that a course-by-course assessment of learning for courses identified as personal and social responsibilities is not providing them with the kind of information that they need to assess learning.

They did not think that there was an effective way to measure it. One asked why they could not assume that the goal was met if the student passed the class. One suggested that the students write essay questions and reflect on their answers.

Another felt that this GER system was much better over the cafeteria system that preceded it. They felt that there were too many goals to assess in the current system. They also felt that they needed guidance on how to do assessment and not make it so hard. They all do assessment within their departments. One suggested doing a pretest in their freshman year and then doing a post test in the senior capstone course to assess their learning.

- a. What challenges are there to assessing being able to understand the learning outcomes associated with the personal and social responsibility domain for YSU students?
- b. What are your recommendations do you have for the committee in assessing learning outcomes associated with the personal and social responsibility domain for YSU students?
9. Are there any general comments that you would like to share with the GER committee about personal and social responsibility courses?

They felt that whole concepts disappeared with the new GER's—where was humanities? They also thought that the domains had funky names. Philosophy doesn't fit with the others. The history of the battles over the GER's was also brought up. They questioned if the HLC even knew what it wanted. Is the focus to give the students marketable skills? Is higher education becoming more business oriented with the assessment focus? The students should be able to think, write solid essays, debate, and talk. The GER's should make them well-rounded individuals, and how can that be quantified? Are we going to boil it down to a list of skills to check off?

One said that Cleveland State had four columns, and students were expected to take classes from the four columns.

Another mentioned that when employers are surveyed, they are interested in written and oral communication, critical thinking, technology skills, and internship. They then talked about critical thinking and if there was a standard way of teaching it and measuring it. One said that 97 percent of YSU faculty said that they teach classes with a critical thinking component. One mentioned that World War III would break out if the GER's are changed.

They then seemed to think that the GER's need to be changed. While it made sense when they were developed, are they still relevant and do they have coherence? They also felt that the GER's never got buy in from the faculty, chairs, and dean (waiving requirements for graduation). Everyone hates assessment. The GER's are never explained to the students. A lot of the GER's are required for specific majors, or they just take the course because it fits into their schedules. One person who taught psychology used to explain the GER's in his class, but he doesn't do that anymore because of time. They then went back to the need for a one-hour freshman orientation class. Every other university has one. It could give the students a rationale behind the GER's. It could also help with retention. One felt that the Center for Student Progress might not want the class. The class would give the students a taste of the possibilities of college life. They don't know the disciplines in the GER's. The GER's are needed to make them well-rounded, to get them to think differently, to get them to appreciate other things in life, and to get them to be a better professional. It will also get them to be able to hold a conversation, and college is not just about getting a job.

## FOCUS GROUPS: SOCIETIES AND INSTITUTIONS FOCUS

As I mentioned in my e-mail, there were way too many people in this focus group. From the nonverbals that I picked up on, I think that a lot of them felt that it was a waste of their time since they did not get the opportunity to share.

### General Impressions of GER

1. What are the benefits of the general education requirements in preparing YSU students to be productive and responsible citizens?

Without the GERs, the students would not take anything but their major classes. It provides them with a more broad perspective. They broaden their knowledge bases. The GERs also get them out of their comfort zones. They need the GERs otherwise the students will play it safe and never move out of their niche.

The GERs allow the students to become more well-rounded citizens. The person who shared this felt that our society and educational focus is moving away from this focus with the need to educate the students for careers rather than for life.

Students perceive history as boring because in high school they had to memorize a bunch of names and dates. In high school, the teachers may not specialize in the subject matter, or the students may not be mature enough to appreciate the subject. With the GERs, the students find a different understanding of the subject. The GERs also give the departments the opportunities to recruit majors. The students take courses that they think they know about and are surprised at how much different the subject is in college than in high school.

GERs introduce the students to a world that they never knew, and that was the original purpose of high education. The GERs teach them how to learn. They can be any major and get jobs in companies with majors in subjects covered in GERs because they can think creatively and learn how to do the job on the job.

2. What are the challenges of the general education requirements in preparing YSU students to be productive and responsible citizens?

The big challenge is student buy in. They have no interest in the subject matter and don't give a "crap." They just want to get the requirement out of the way. Later on, they said that the students wouldn't touch the subject matter if they were not forced. Some may have a real interest in the field but don't know a lot about it except what they pick up from politicians and the news media.

Another challenge is a compliance issue. If the student is a senior, the chair or dean may waive a GER to let the student graduate.

Another challenge is that students are all over the place in terms of abilities, backgrounds, and interest levels.

One person questioned if a handful of courses from different areas (breadth) really give the general education that they need. They end up with a whole lot of classes across the board where it might be better for them to go in-depth in an area outside of their majors. Someone indicated that the semester system allows them to get more depth in one area. One recounted his own education where he did not get a lot of depth but was exposed to a lot of breadth with the smattering of courses that he had to take. He felt that he retained a lot of different information. Another commented that the students get depth in their majors, and YSU can't emphasize depth in every field. The students should get a glimpse and a taste of every field. It helps the students put their own majors into context. The person who wanted more depth asked them to think about ways to move from what we have now and making more connections among the classes in societies and institutions. Do the requirements that we have impact their life outcomes and force them to improve. One person remarked that that was an empirical question that should be tested.

Concern was raised about the quality of delivery since so many limited-service faculty deliver the courses. One questioned why the least capable faculty are given the classes to teach. Another commented that the part-time faculty are the best instructors since they have a passion for the field. The other argued back that they do not have a lot of time to give to the class, and they often find out that they are teaching the class one week before it begins. The part-time faculty should be treated better.

More pressure is also being put on teaching GER classes to huge (200) classes. If GER is so important, why is it being delivered in large classes? Huge classes become unreasonable for the students. One mentioned that she had labs of 35 students without GA's. One said that when he started out, he required three written assignments; it went down to two, and now is at one because of the sizes of his classes. One mentioned that the essays are mandated in her department.



Another challenge is that there are too many juniors and seniors in the GER classes. It hurts the other students in the class.

Some departments have specific requirements for the GERs, and some took issue with that.

3. How well do you think that the GER system is working to help YSU students become productive and responsible citizens?
4. Do you have any general comments that you'd like to share with the GER committee about the requirements?

#### Specific Questions about Societies and Institutions Courses

1. YSU students should demonstrate an understanding of the organization of and theories behind legal, governmental, and social systems as well as economic markets. How well do you think the courses that you teach help students to do so?

Criminal justice is an interdisciplinary field so the course fits well with this goal. Others felt that the courses do not fulfill this goal. The students would need to take complimentary classes in order to fulfill the goal. Another questioned should the question be whether or not we can achieve the goal or if the goal is worth achieving. Others felt that the goal was written because of turf wars which made it have so many aspects. Another felt that there were other ways of thinking about the goal and suggested a possible integration with other disciplines—connect a course with another course and have them fit together to fulfill the goal. They would also like the students to be able to count other courses as GE. For instance, if they take world religion and enjoy the topic, could they not pair it with a course on Buddhism?

This goal then received a lot of discussion. It has nothing to do with any of their areas, and it is too narrow. It does not address what their college does. The departments just scrambled to make their intro courses fit into societies and institutions. They felt that goal 10 and 11 should be combined. One person felt that diversity needs to be its own thing, and students should have to take courses in diversity. The courses on diversity could not be fit in anywhere. One of the guiding principles of the University is diversity so it can't be put in the back seat. It was brought up that diversity went the way of critical thinking in that the thinking was the "We all do that."

2. What is working right in the courses that you teach to meet the learning outcome of demonstrating an understanding of the organization of and theories behind legal, governmental, and social systems as well as economic markets?
3. What challenges are you facing in the courses that you teach to meet the learning outcome of demonstrating an understanding of the organization of and theories behind legal, governmental, and social systems as well as economic markets?
4. Another goal for the societies and institutions domain is for students to understand the development of cultures and organizations of human societies throughout the world and their changing interrelationships with Western Society. How well do you think that courses that you teach help the students to do so?

They do fulfill this goal in the classes that they teach—comparing and contrasting cultures. They then talked about how students choose the societies and institutions classes that they teach. A lot of them advised students, and they don't have any idea what is taught in the classes. They try to advise students by specific goals or interests of the students. One person said that regardless of what is put into Banner, the student can ignore it and go pick up the courses that s/he wants. They then said that a lot of the students pick what classes to take based on holes that they have in their schedules.

5. Another goal for the societies and institutions domain is for students to understand the diversity in America in all of its forms. How well do you think that courses that you teach help the students to do so?

They mentioned diversity within the U.S and then diversity in the world, and instructors would cover the topics based on their levels of expertise.

6. The GER committee realizes that a course-by-course assessment of learning for courses identified as societies and institutions is not providing them with the kind of information that they need to assess learning.

Challenges of assessment measures are faced by the different departments. They can have six to eight people teaching the same class, and they will all teach it differently. There have been attempts of imbedding specific questions that everyone would include in their classes, but it hasn't worked. In criminal justice, all of the introductory courses are taught by full-time faculty.

Another mentioned that none of the textbooks are written to meet the goals. One suggested that possibly there should be three



classes—Institutions and Societies I, II, and III—that would be the only way to meet the goal and assess it.

The departments do the assessments differently, and they questioned whether or not it could be done globally across the courses in societies and institutions.

They want more general and universal language in the goal with 10 and 11 put together. Another person said that what we had for general education was every bit as good as the current system. Another commented that we would never go back to the old system. One suggested that seven key courses be developed that would cover different parts of the goal. Another said that we don't have the resources to staff the courses. One person said that the GE courses caps keep going higher and higher. He cited the example of the psychology course. Another person suggested team teaching courses in societies and institutions that contain a kaleidoscope (multiple classes within the course with multiple perspectives) of different topics and would show them how they all interrelate. Later, one person said that the topics would have to be integrated. They would not want a 15-course meal. If they had a course in Civilization, then it would be a lot easier to do assessment. One person shared that he had taken a course called "Great Ideas." Another person said that Michigan State had a University College where GER's were taught in all of the fields.

Another person suggested that the committee should look at how it is being done at other institutions that are like YSU. They questioned the wisdom of 13 goals and that maybe all we need is four or five.

YSU needs to find out about useful assessment tools since what is done now seems like busy work. One person said that the College of Education has done a great job with assessment because of accreditation (NCATE). Later, they said that the guidelines from professional accrediting bodies should be used.

They also suggested having a standardized test for assessment that the students would come in and do in one day. It would have to be coordinated across the departments.

I mentioned the e-portfolios. One immediately jumped to students posting photos on it and how potential employers could look at the photos and get a lot of illegal information. Another person said it was not illegal if the student cared to share it. Another mentioned that NCATE requires portfolios. The capstone criminal justice course requires a portfolio. Evaluation of the portfolios would be very costly (faculty time). Another was concerned that the students would sell their papers from their e-portfolios. Another felt that the students would post photos of children on their e-portfolios (legal concern). They questioned who would be responsible for administering the information in the portfolios.

I then asked about an orientation class. They had no interest in it.

- a. What challenges are there to assessing being able to understand the learning outcomes associated with the societies and institutions domain for YSU students?
  - b. What are your recommendations do you have for the committee in assessing learning outcomes associated with the societies and institutions domain for YSU students?
7. Are there any general comments that you would like to share with the GER committee about societies and institutions courses?

After three years, they are getting reports that imply that things are getting worse. The person felt limited in what they can learn from the assessment reports. Another said that the value of the feedback is suspect. They felt that the faculty evaluation was worthless.

Another felt that to do assessment correctly, it would be extremely costly and is conditional on the quality of the students who need to be able to write, do math and think. One felt that a proper statistical study was beyond the scope of the people on campus except for maybe a few in mathematics. One questioned if YSU was willing to do a proper empirical study.

So much assessment depend on what we want to know. Do we want to know if the course included this information, or do we want to know if the student learned this information? Are the students' skills getting better? Did the course cover stuff?

They questioned if it was possible to assess a world view? If it can't be measured, then maybe it shouldn't be a goal.

While they wanted to be nice about it, so much of the assessment is no fun and not useful. Therefore, they gripe about doing it.

Right now, it's important for YSU to focus on its priorities, and assessment is not important. What is important is what the students are getting out of the courses that they take. Another person said that quality programs can go down because of the focus

on assessment. They briefly mentioned the standards in high school and teaching to the test. One said that if the fuel for the engine is bad then the engine won't run—what fuel do we have in the classroom?

The concept of general education is useful and a great benefit to the students but how to assess it is an issue. It needs to be grounded into a metric of what the students are getting out of the classes that they take.

One said that the students should be measured when they come to us and what they have when they go out. Did we make a difference with the time that we had them? That can't be measured with a standardized test.

## FOCUS GROUPS: SPEECH COMMUNICATIONS

### General Impressions of GER

1. What are the benefits of the general education requirements in preparing YSU students to be productive and responsible citizens?

One person remarked that the student would be well-rounded after taking a smattering of classes from different disciplines. Another felt that there wasn't a clear rationale provided to the students as to why they had to take the courses. Therefore, they did not appreciate the courses. Another felt that it exposed the students to diversity in ideas and people with different educational backgrounds. Another person remarked that there is a need for an orientation that ties everything together for the student that explains the need for the GER's. They talked a little about SOAR and how it would be impossible to do it then when everything else is being thrown at them. Another felt that it exposed them to different subjects and ideas, and another felt that the GER's provided the students with a framework for understanding the world and doing critical thinking. They felt that communication was a diverse field and needed by all disciplines. They also said that the world is constantly changing, and students have to keep abreast of those changes. Later on, one person commented that GER's are the microcosm of the world. They also felt that GER's gave students different exposure opportunities. Another felt that students might change their majors based on taking a GER. Another suggested that the GER's are the University unifier that gel the student body then added that misery loves company. Another said that the GER's had a focus and could be used for skills assessment.

2. What are the challenges of the general education requirements in preparing YSU students to be productive and responsible citizens?

Some students have the idea that they know what they want to do, and the GER's are in their way, and the classes are the last thing that they want to do. One gave an example of a student that she had last summer. He was on his way to be a concert pianist and the 1545 class was the last thing in his way. Another felt that there was no coherence in the GER's so the students don't see the value in it. Universities are turning to the perspective as the student as customer, and the customer is always right. Therefore, the students think that they should be able to take what they want. They question the value of having to take GER's. Another commented that it is expensive (There's a course fee for the technology associated with 1545.), and it is hard to sell it to the students. A lot of the students say that they had speech in high school and don't need to take it again.

In 1545, there's three topics that they cover—interpersonal, small group, and speech. The students come in with different levels of skills. In order to make a speech, the students need to be able to develop an outline so there is a lot of written work required in 1545 that they may not be prepared to do.

They did mention that even though there are multiple sections of 1545, they are all on the same page. They felt that there is a nurturing atmosphere in their area (unlike business—mentioned nonverbally when my back was to them).

One person felt that with all of the GER's that they are taking their first semester, it can be overwhelming for the students to be exposed to so many different concepts in so many classes. The GER's are large classes with overwhelmed students. They felt that the 1545 class helps with the challenge of giving them a safe place to express themselves. One person felt that the GER's present a challenge for the students that some of them cannot get past. It could be because they do not have an interest in the class, but they also thought of the way that the courses are set up and used business as an example where the students have to do all of the GER's before they can take business classes.

3. How well do you think that the GER system is working to help YSU students become productive and responsible citizens?
4. Do you have any general comments that you'd like to share with the GER committee about the requirements?

### Specific Questions about Speech Courses

1. YSU students should demonstrate the ability to speak effectively. How well do you think the courses that you teach help students to do so?

They think that they are doing a good job. They are using a standardized point system with instructor options. More than half of their course is for the students giving speeches. They do see the students make improvement during their courses. They felt that 1545 met almost all of the learning goals listed in the GER brochure.

1545 exposes the students to opportunities to speak by creating a supportive climate for them. The enrollment is limited to 20 students, and the students, when they give their speeches, are talking to friends. They also get feedback from their classmates on their speeches. The atmosphere created takes the pressure off the number one fear of Americans—giving a speech.

The faculty who teach 1545 are both full time and part time. They are friendly, easy to talk to, and approachable. They are highly qualified, collegial, collaborative. The framework of the class is put into the hands of the instructors to tweak. The class is structured and organized, and the instructors feel that they are prepared to teach the class.

Extemporaneous speaking is a good tool that will serve the students well in their disciplines. The students are allowed to pick what they want to speak about. One person says she asks them to speak about what they are passionate about. It is probably one of the only classes where the material is about them. Therefore, the informative speech is meaningful to the students. They used to do journaling for the interpersonal communication part of the class but found that the students tended to over share. Because the students are preparing speeches about what they care about, they take on a sense of ownership and investment in the topic. They also are free to express themselves in that class where they might not feel the freedom in others. One faculty member said that one of her students dressed up as Anne Frank and gave her speech in the first person. She even responded to Q&A as Frank. Sometimes, the costumes make the students feel less self conscious when giving a speech. They (the students) also get a lot of exposure to other students in the class and learn from each other. Friendships are made in 1545, and there is a sense of community in the class. There is also an intercultural experience when international students are in the class. One person commented on what they choose to wear to give a speech, and the students' definitions of "professional dress."

They then talked about volunteer opportunities that are part of 1545, and there were mixed reactions to it. Some felt that it helped the students with their needs to give back to the community and allowed for personal growth. The person who did not like it felt that it did not work as it should with group decision making and with the reflective thinking model. The students would identify the volunteer activity before identifying the problem and figuring out how to solve it.

2. What is working right in the courses that you teach to meet the learning outcome of speaking effectively?
3. What challenges are you facing in the courses that you teach to meet the learning outcome of speaking effectively?

1545 is required, and some students are really afraid to speak. The inclusion of the reflective thinking model in the class is also a challenge. They have to give a condensed version of what the critical thinking process is before they can go through the model.

Another challenge is the skill sets of the students who come into the class. Are they capable of making an outline for their speeches? Do they have the same skills in creating a powerpoint presentation? Can they write a reference page? 1545 has requirements of the students in the class that are not taught in the class. Also, some students are natural-born speakers with charisma while others are not.

Technology also changes, and it brings new things for them to learn. The instructors do not have the time teach what they are supposed to cover effectively (three different areas). They then mentioned the critique sheets with eight competencies on them. Some felt that the sheets intimidated the students while others felt that the sheets let the students know how they will be graded and serve as a reinforcement.

They mentioned the entitlement attitude of Gen Xer's. They gave examples of students who question what they tell them (Who says? Aristotle.). The students also question why they have to do it the instructor's way and accuse the instructor of dictating their own personal bias on the students. They don't have time to teach the history of rhetoric to show the students the roots of what they are learning. Another issue is subjective grading.

The charge of the course is also a challenge. They have a lot to cover and much of it has to be overlapped so that they get it all in. Then, there are the technology challenges. They were talking about equipment breaking down and problems of getting the students their DVD's. There is a powerpoint that they are supposed to use in class, but it is for lecturing and not for giving speeches so it confuses the students (Do as I say not as I do.). One person said that it also has typos in it and duplicate bullets.

4. The GER committee realizes that the current general-education assessment of speech courses is not providing them with the kind of information that they need to assess learning.

They mentioned e-portfolio and how great it would be to upload all of the speeches onto the system. It could also mark how

the students are progressing as they continue in their coursework. The system could be used to measure quality as well as improvement and formative versus summative measures.

While there was some pressure to define what was meant by effective, they did feel that the students should have to make a speech in the capstone course of their majors, and that they should be assessed with the same eight competencies that they use in 1545. There should be consistency across the board. They would be willing to share their critique sheets with all departments. One person was asked to evaluate classes in business and felt that the rubric used to measure their speeches did not make any sense. They want to see campus-wide consistency of measuring speaking.

- a. What challenges are there to assessing being able to speak effectively as a learning outcome for YSU students?
- b. What are your recommendations do you have for the committee in assessing being able to speak effectively as a learning outcome for YSU students?

5. Are there any general comments that you would like to share with the GER committee about the speech courses?

They were asked to put in more emphasis on interpersonal communication in their classes. How important is it to the GER that it is covered in 1545? One of them teaches at another university, and that university has a communication theory class AND a speech class. They also want to know how important small group communication is to GER. Again, they want direction from GER about speaking effectively TO WHOM? While the three parts that are currently in the class have common threads, they wonder if all three parts are important to GER. There was also a concern with technology and the need to include mediated communication in the future.

They like the structure of 1545. They have achieved standardization across multiple sections. They were changing texts too frequently but like the text that they have now and want to keep it. They do have standardized tests and like that they don't have to make up their own exams.

## FOCUS GROUPS: WRITING

### General Impressions of GER

1. What are the benefits of the general education requirements in preparing YSU students to be productive and responsible citizens?

They immediately focused on the classes that they taught and indicated that 1550/1551/ prepare students to be able to write papers, use the library effectively, and develop good study skills. They felt that writing was important to any career that a student pursues. They then focused on more general benefits of GER's and one said that a general understanding of math and science was important for the students but made the comment that maybe gym was not. One commented that the GER's bring the students up to a certain level of education. To be cultured, one needs to be able to write. One thought that it would be nice if our students could at least know the three branches of government and be more publicly engaged. Further on in the focus group another also commented that students should also be voters, and they need to be informed voters, and it requires critical thinking. Another felt that the technological advances in society make the GER's more important, and s/he tied that to critical thinking and inquiry. Another commented that there's been a shift from higher education to hire education and that the students are more interested in training than in education. They also questioned the students' view of what education was. Another felt that the readings in the GER's deal with contemporary issues. Another commented that the GER's provide the students with a degree of professionalism and felt that every discipline needs problem solvers. They felt that the students focused on training in narrow areas and don't appreciate the GER's. One felt that at 18 a student does not know what is relevant to their education and may not appreciate what they learned in the GER's until much later. One offered that the GER's provide the students with a smogasboard of ideas. Another said that the GER's force the students to take courses outside of their comfort zones. They joked that at least they would be able to carry on intelligent conversations at cocktail parties and know the answers on Jeopardy.

2. What are the challenges of the general education requirements in preparing YSU students to be productive and responsible citizens?

They felt that the students were very resistant to the GER's and questioned their relevance to them (the students). One felt that absenteeism was a big issue in the GER classes. If they're not there, they can't benefit from the class. The fact that YSU is a commuter campus was an issue. One said that the students feel that the GER's are an obstacle to the classes that they want to take. Another felt that the GER's were not valued by the students. They also felt that the GER's were a challenge for the instructors because the students come in with different abilities and skill levels. One commented that in high school the students are presented with a bunch of facts and are told by their teachers how to interpret what they read. In college, they need to be able to form informed opinions on their own. They felt that 1550/1551 were the leveling fields where they are introduced to these critical thinking concepts. Nontraditional students were also discussed and their levels of experience but also the length of time that it had been since they were in the classroom setting plus their lack of appreciation in having to take classes that don't relate to their discipline. They then focused on the traditional students and their lack of maturity and also their sense of entitlement—they paid for the class so they deserved the grade. One instructor said that a student told her that student paid her salary. Once salaries were brought up, they then focused on the pay for adjunct faculty at YSU. Several of them not only teach at YSU but other universities. They felt that the low pay resulted in high turnover, no shared values, and no continuity across the multiple sections of classes. They also felt that the low pay requires them to teach too many classes. One said that s/he taught seven classes one semester. Then, they mentioned that GA's were teaching two courses now. They also felt that the GA's have a hard time with nontraditional students in their classes. Not only do the GA's get their degrees questioned by the students, but they do as well. Then they switched their discussion to when the students take 1550/1551 and how they should be taken in sequence. They cited examples of students not taking 1551 until very later in their college careers. They felt that the reason for that was transfer students, international students, advising problems, scheduling, and the number of times the students have to repeat 1551.

3. How well do you think that the GER system is working to help YSU students become productive and responsible citizens?
4. Do you have any general comments that you'd like to share with the GER committee about the requirements?

### Specific Questions about Writing Courses

1. YSU students should demonstrate the ability to write effectively. How well do you think the courses that you teach help students to do so?



They felt that the professors do a great job. They said that it was a two-way street and that the students have to work as hard as the faculty in understanding. They also felt that some of the students do not hear the same information the same way and felt that that could be attributed to different levels of maturity. They said that writing needs to be practiced throughout the curriculum, and the students need to hear the importance of writing more than once. Later on, one shared that writing does not just belong in 1550/1551. She equated it with a car wash. They don't go into the classes as non-writers and come out the other end writers. One shared her experiences of reading a dissertation, and it had in it the mistakes that she saw in 1540. They felt that more time should be spent on reading in 1550 because it serves as examples of good writing, and it shows writing in action. One person shared that people who read for pleasure are better writers. They then lamented that they can't make them readers by the time they reach college.

They then moved onto the topic of consistency in 1550. Should they focus on reading and shorter essays? Is that the best way to teach? They felt that they needed to prepare the students to be lifelong writers. They then said that they hear complaints from all over campus. One faculty member from education asked them in what classes was grammar taught, and they couldn't answer her. They also said that the departments want the writing taught in 1550 to be discipline specific. Attempts were made to do this with Criminal Justice as well as English. Even the choice of the Style Manuals was questioned across campus, and each discipline wanted a specific style taught. Later on, they shared that one department has a writing course in its curriculum, and the students are told that they will teach them how they want them to write and will undo the damage that was done to them in 1550/1551. Should the students who take 1550 be able to write an effective thesis essay as well as be able to compare and contrast? They then talked about whether or not the students can see the connection among classes. One commented that students have been very appreciative of what they've learned in 1549.

One said that students cannot write without critical thinking, but how are they supposed to cover that as well as writing in 1550? One felt that 1550 should focus on critical thinking and that it could get messy since the thinking happens in the writing which makes it messy. How could a student defend a position in writing without good reasoning skills? They also said that they would steer students away from specific topics for their papers since they did not feel that they were ready to handle the topic. When the student insisted on going forward with the topic, it usually was a disaster. They felt that critical thinking and writing should go hand in hand. One pointed out that critical thinking leads to structured arguments where biases could be revealed. They also talked about objectivity and whether or not one could be truly objective. They also thought that it was unrealistic to start at one point in writing skills and show significant improvement to be ready for 1551 after only 15 weeks. One asked how they were supposed to teach the students in 15 weeks what they didn't get in the last 12 years of their education. They then started talking about grading and how they make give a student A for effort because s/he did make significant progress, but the quality of his/her work was not A. They don't want to penalize a student who tried very hard and showed improvement, but they know that the student is not ready for 1551. One shared that at another campus she had a student who was taking a grammar course, a writing course (basic composition from paragraphs to short essays), and a critical thinking course at the same time. The student could not write well at the beginning of the semester but is showing a lot of improvement because of the three classes. They felt that maybe too much was expected of the courses since students need to be able to read, write, and think through their arguments as well as learn how to academic research.

They then talked about whether or not some of the students that they see in 1550 really belong in the class. The placement test was discussed. They also said that a lot of the students in 1551 are not ready for it after 1550. Students need to be prepared for college-level reading and writing. They need to be responsible for their own learning as well as how to be a student. They questioned where would they get that.

They then started talking about other universities who have a semester-long orientation class.

They then moved on to student evaluations. It seemed to be the consensus that they as instructors were not evaluated on a regular basis. One had taught in the program for two years and had never been evaluated. They also said that there was no real orientation for the faculty who teach 1550/1551. They are handed a syllabus and plopped in the classroom without any standards. There is no consistency among the multiple sections. One shared that in one class the student might write three essays while in another, the student might write eight. There are also 1550 instructors who come from other departments. One cited Derrick Bach (sp?) who said that composition courses should have five parts: (1) goals with outcomes; (2) competent staff; (3) reasonable teaching loads; (4) training in objectives and pedagogy, and (5) evaluations of every section. One said that they tried to create a repository for 1550 instructors that would include a manual, but it did not come to fruition. They thought that a mentoring program would be good for 1550 instructors. One said that one faculty member missed two weeks of classes and asked her if it would be okay to miss more classes. The instructor had no clue that she should not have missed classes. One then made the comment that students adapt to make each instructor happy.

They went back to talk of consistency in 1550. There needs to be agreement on the number of essays to be written and the types of writing that is to be assigned. They talked about three types—argumentation, prose models, and process. Common goals are needed for the class. It should be shared what the student at the end of 1550 should know. They then questioned

doing exit exams or possibly doing a CPRT at the end of the class. They felt that there was a lot of resistance to this with the full-time faculty since the concern was teaching to the test and lack of academic freedom. They questioned why there weren't more concrete goals for 1550. The goals could also be helpful for assessment. One shared how a doctoral student used found objects as a representation of self as a final project for her students in 1550. The room was full of painted rocks.

2. What is working right in the courses that you teach to meet the learning outcome of writing effectively?
3. What challenges are you facing in the courses that you teach to meet the learning outcome of writing effectively?
4. The GER committee realizes that a course-by-course assessment of learning for writing courses is not providing them with the kind of information that they need to assess learning.

They thought that exit exams were a good idea, and then they talked about how outcomes will come to higher education as it has to K-12. They then talked about the student developing a portfolio. One shared that at one university, the students prepare a portfolio for evaluation at the end of their junior year to see if they know anything and if they can write. They write an essay, and then they identify two sentences that could use revision, and they re-write them. Some in the focus group asked why they waited until the junior year. They then thought that the portfolio idea could be extended across all GE classes. They didn't think that there would be enough manpower to read them all. If it were paid positions, then YSU would get a lot of volunteers. They then talked about the E-Portfolio and the system used in the College of Education.

They brought up the idea of trying to link the courses and have theme-based 1550 courses by the various disciplines that focused on specific topics and specific styles of writing. They mentioned how it was done with criminal justice, and it worked there until the chair changed. It was tried in English, but there was a problem when the 1550 instructor tried to require three novels ("Stop they might learn something.")

- a. What challenges are there to assessing being able to write effectively as a learning outcome for YSU students?
  - b. What are your recommendations do you have for the committee in assessing being able to write effectively as a learning outcome for YSU students?
5. Are there any general comments that you would like to share with the GER committee about the writing courses?

They want paid more. They thought that writing was immensely important to the type of student that they are seeing now—non-readers on the other side of the digital divide. The preparation that the students get in 1550 is critical to them. Even the students who leave after their first classes still benefit from what they learned. The 1550/1551 classes need to do a better job. It should prepare the students for the other three years of college. They said that they don't do what they're supposed to do for GE because of a lack of consistency. They face students who are trying to learn with different levels of skills. They think that 1550 should be a one-year class with the same instructor or with consistency across instructors.

They also recommend a comprehensive orientation class with an introduction to how to do academic research and find a book in the library. Other universities have a first-year experience class. They talked about nontraditional students and the need to teach basic computing skills. They also felt that there is a need to teach classroom etiquette. They mentioned the need to teach them how to print powerpoint slides. The focus has to be on student learning. They need to know the rules before they can break them. They questioned the percentage of 1550/1551 faculty who came through as GA's.

They questioned whether or not the GER committee knows what happens in 1550/1551. There has not been consistency with the directors of the program, and they have no voice when the English faculty who don't teach the courses talk about the courses and make decisions. Again they mentioned the need for goals for 1550. They recommended that the GE committee work with the composition director to set goals for the classes.



