Syllabus Review Project
Submitted December 2007

Prepared for: **General Studies Coordinating Committee, Dr. Ken Sanders, Chair**
Submitted by: **Dr. Fran Moran (Political Science)**
Date: **11 December 2007**

Purpose

Courses in the General Studies Curriculum (GSC) are required to meet specific criteria: namely, reading and writing, and two of the four remaining core competencies of critical thinking/creativity, quantitative and computer literacy, oral presentation, and information gathering and literacy (see below). While the current GSC included a number of major revisions over the previous GSC, for present purposes the most significant is the reclassification of the Area courses, including the subdivision within the social science area (Area B), and the repositioning of some departments from one area to another. That is, the current project did not review syllabi for First Year Experience courses or for All University Requirement courses.

Implementation of the GSC included a provision for the establishment of area curriculum committees to review current and proposed GSC courses to ensure that they met the criteria for GSC designation. Courses that were part of the previous GSC were grandfathered into the new GSC providing the course syllabus was "adjusted to demonstrate how it [met] the criteria for General Studies courses" (*GSP Guidelines*, p. 10). New courses being proposed for inclusion in the GSC were required to move through the regular course approval process, with the addition of an area curriculum committee review following departmental approval and preceding submission to the Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences.

The purpose of the current project was to collect the syllabi from the courses currently approved and offered in the GSC and determine the extent to which the criteria were being met in the classroom, at least as manifested in the course syllabus distributed to students at the start of the semester.

Method

In the fall 2004 semester, chairpersons of each of the departments offering courses in the GSC were contacted and asked to gather a syllabus for each of the courses, *not each of the sections of those courses*, that their department offered in the GSC (see appendix A for sample cover memo). We had a 95% response rate, with 20 of the 21 departments contacted submitting syllabi for their courses (despite repeated requests, Computer Science did not submit any syllabi). Of the 20 departments who responded, only one – Economics – did not supply syllabi for a majority of their courses offered. No syllabi were gathered for the Interdisciplinary Studies courses since those courses are not housed

within a specific department and it was difficult to determine a contact person for collecting the syllabi.

Once the syllabi were gathered, I read each one to determine if the GSC criteria were being fulfilled (see attached spreadsheets in Appendix B for the results of the survey). Those criteria include each of the following:

Reading: "All courses must assign reading in appropriate texts such as textbooks and journal articles."

Writing: "Assignments requiring writing must go beyond in-class examinations."

In addition, courses must include two (2) of the following:

Critical Thinking/Creativity (CTC): "Assignments and/or in-class exercises that require students to solve problems or produce creative work using techniques appropriate to the discipline."

Quantitative and Computer Literacy (QCL): "Assignments and/or in-class exercises that require students to use data presented in tabular, graphical or other quantitative forms in order to evaluate information critically."

Oral Presentation (OP): "Assignments and/or in-class activities that require students to articulate ideas/theories/concepts appropriate to the discipline."

Information Gathering and Literacy (IGL): "Assignments and/or in-class exercises that require students to demonstrate information literacy skills such as using print, traditional, or on-line resources to gather and analyze information."

Observations

1. Of the two main competencies – reading and writing – writing was by far the most difficult to determine whether or not it was being met in a given course. As indicated above, the definition clearly and explicitly indicates that for this competency to be met, students must produce written work outside of the classroom. Yet most syllabi submitted for this review did not indicate if such writing was required. Moreover, little description was provided for the type of exam being given, a problem since the exam appeared to be the only writing required.

2. Of the four other competencies, QCL and OP appear to be underserved in the GSC. Beyond the mathematics and some natural science courses, quantitative and computer literacy are rarely mentioned; and only a handful of departments (modern languages, political science, and African-American studies) require oral presentation skills in a majority of their GSC courses. As for the other two, CTC and IGL, the criteria were more than likely being addressed in a course, but often the syllabus failed to

specifically mention how and where that would occur. So in the current review, syllabus directives for a "research project," "oral presentation," or take home exam were taken as evidence of information gathering and literacy. Likewise, stipulations for an exam, presentation, or discussion, etc., were taken as indications of critical thinking and/or creativity.

3. One of the surprising results of the survey is the sheer diversity of syllabus design being used in the GSC. Diversity in design is not necessarily a liability as long as the syllabi all provide the same essential information. That, unfortunately, is not the case. The range went from single page affairs that did little more than list the title of the course and the reading schedule (and in one notable case, did not even include that last piece of information), to more elaborate descriptions of specific work required to qualify for specific grades (those were common in psychology). Considering that all of the courses went through the same review process in order to be included in the GSC, one would expect to see fairly similar design and information underlying the diversity of disciplines and subjects covered.

4. Essential information – section numbers, exam types, faculty expectations for students – was frequently missing from the syllabus. For example, in trying to determine whether or not the writing requirement was being met, I noted in the accompanying tables (see Appendix B) whether or not the syllabus under review clearly indicated the type of writing being asked of students. Too often the syllabus would refer to "midterm" or "exam" but provide no information as to the type of exam – in-class or take-home; or essay, multiple choice, or some other objective format – or would note that weekly homework was expected with no information as to the nature of the homework. Because the criteria for the writing component specifically mentions writing beyond the classroom and given the ambiguous descriptions of the exams on a syllabus, I generally opted for an expansive read and counted a mention of an exam as evidence of writing (unless the syllabus specifically indicated an objective examination was being used) in order to determine whether or not the writing component was being addressed.

5. The kind of information missing (as noted in the previous point) would seem to make it difficult for students to make an informed decision as to whether or not to stay with a course, which is a significant liability since students have a rather limited window for deciding whether or not continue with a course. Given that reality, syllabi should present as clearly as possible the expectations for the course (Grunert, 1997). The limited information and vague descriptions of work expectations included in the syllabi reviewed here may contribute both to higher than necessary withdrawal rates and lower GPAs for our students, which in turn negatively impacts our graduation rates. Moreover, the problem with vague syllabi may be much more widespread and much more troublesome than the current review presents, since the memo sent to chairs requesting assistance in gathering syllabi specifically indicated that this was for a project emanating from the Dean's office reviewing the GSC. One would expect that chairs would tailor their selections accordingly and provide the best examples available.

Citation

Grunert, Judith. 1997. *The Course Syllabus*. Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing.

Appendix A: Sample collecting memo.

To: [Department Chair]
From: Dr. Fran Moran, Political Science Department
Cc: Dr. Ken Sanders, Dean's Office, College of Arts & Sciences
Date: 2 November 2004
Subject: General Studies Syllabi Collection

Hi [Chairperson's name]

In the fall 2003 semester, the dean's office of the College of Arts and Science convened a committee to begin the process of assessing the status and evolution of the General Studies Curriculum. As one part of that process, I've been asked to collect representative syllabi from all the courses currently included in the GSC.

I would greatly appreciate if you could collect from your faculty a syllabus for each of the courses in the core currently offered in your department and then forward the pile to me at Grossnickle 246 or email them to me at the address below. We don't need to have samples for every section of a course, but we would like to have samples for each course in the core.

According to the MCL, we would need syllabi for the following courses:

[Course numbers and names inserted here]

Thanks for your time and help. If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact me via email at fmoran@njcu.edu, by phone at x3259, or to contact Ken Sanders in the Dean's office (he's chairing the committee).

Appendix B
Individual Courses and Competencies, by Department

General Studies Curriculum Committee
Syllabus Review Project
Key to symbols:

E=exam, **R**=Report, **N**=nebulous, **C**=clearly stated
Bold Italic font indicates courses whose syllabus does not provide sufficient information to determine if the GSC criteria were being fulfilled.

Headers for the tables:

Course = Course Name in the MCL
Reading = One of the two required competencies for GSC courses
Writing = One of the two required competencies for GSC courses
CTC = Critical Thinking/Creativity
QCL = Quantitative and Computer Literacy
OP = Oral Presentation
IGL = Information Gathering and Literacy

African American Studies

Course	Reading	Writing	CTC	QCL	OP	IGL
AFRO101	C	NE, CR	N		C	
AFRO106	C	NE, CR	N		C	
AFRO108	***C***	***NE, CR***	***C***		***C***	
AFRO118	C	NE, CR	C		C	
AFRO164	***C***	***NE***				

Art

Course	Reading	Writing	CTC	QCL	OP	IGL
ART102*	C	CR	C		N*	C
**Syllabus indicates 10-minute presentations for the last day of class; but no description of the content for those presentations.*						
ART104**	C	CR	C			C
***Syllabus includes a final page on guidelines that has letterhead indicating it predates the conversion to NJCU.*						
ART105	***C***	***CR***	***C***			
ART130	C	CE, CR	C		C	C
ART131	C	CE	C			C

Biology

Course	Reading	Writing	CTC	QCL	OP	IGL
BIOL100	***C***	***NE, CR***				
BIOL103	C	NE, CR	C			C
**Syllabus specifically indicates multiple choice quiz and exams, hence the "NE" for writing; no other writing assignments are mentioned.*						
BIOL104**	*C*	*NE*				
***Syllabus refers to quizzes/exam without specifying type; an essay with "details to follow." No details were available elsewhere on the syllabus.*						
BIOL106	C	NE, CR	C			C
BIOL130***	*C*	*NE, NR*	*N*			
****Syllabus refers to a "two page reaction statement," with no further description other than a "handout to follow."*						

Chemistry

Course	Reading	Writing	CTC	QCL	OP	IGL
CHEM105*	***C***	***NE***				
CHEM111*	***C***	***NE, CR***				
CHEM113*	***C***	***NE, CR***				
**Syllabus refers to "exams, final, and quizzes" of various weights, but no description of their type*						
CHEM117	***C***	***CR***				

NOTE: *None of the syllabi submitted for this department provided sufficient information to determine which of the other four competencies were being addressed.*

Computer Science

NO SYLLABI SUBMITTED by this department

Economics

Course	Reading	Writing	CTC	QCL	OP	IGL
ECON208*	***C***	***NE***				
**Syllabus refers to midterm exams and a final exam, with no description of type of exam offered. Syllabus did not provide sufficient information to determine which of the competencies were being addressed.*						
ECON220**	C	NE		N		N
***Syllabus refers to "tests," with no description of type of test. Syllabus mentions "goal" of preparing students to use technology and math, but insufficient data on how that goal was to be met.*						

These were the only two course syllabi submitted by this department.

English

Course	Reading	Writing	CTC	QCL	OP	IGL
ENGL187*	***C***	***NE, NR***				

**Syllabus refers to midterms, finals, and 2 papers, with no description as to type of exam or papers. Syllabus mentions "wants" and "wishes" but no clear description for how any competencies will be met.*

ENGL188**	***C***	***NE, NR***	***N***			

***Syllabus refers to midterms, final exam, and paper with no description as to type of exam or paper. Under "goals and objectives" syllabus refers to critical thinking skills, but no account as to how the skills will be developed.*

ENGL190***	***C***	***NE, NR***	***N***			

**** The syllabus refers to quizzes, but no description as to type of quiz, and "essays" but no account of the type of essay (take home or in class; critical or creative) save that 2 of the 5 will comprise the midterm and final exam. The "Goals" section of the syllabus refers to critical thinking, but no other competencies.*

ENGL192	C	CE, CR	C			C
ENGL199^	***C***	***NR***	***C***			

^Under "Course Requirements" the syllabus reads: "you are required to a short stories [sic] poetry, and a one act play." It further notes that all assignments must be typed, but there is no subsequent description of the assignments, save a statement that students will "write a short story, poetry [sic], one act play, and a special project."

Geoscience

Course	Reading	Writing	CTC	QCL	OP	IGL
GEOS111*	***C***	***NE, NR***	***C***	***C***		***C***
**The syllabus indicates that 50% of the exams are short answer essay, the remaining half being "objective" questions. The syllabus also has "Papers" in a header and mentions them in grading, but no discussion of papers follows anywhere on the syllabus.*						
GEOS112**	C	NE, CR	C			C
***The syllabus refers to "Test I, II, and III" but no description of the type of test is offered. The quiz/test samples included were short answer or multiple-choice questions.*						
GEOS115***	C	NE, CR	C	C		C
****The syllabus indicates that 50% of the exams are short answer essay, the remaining half being "objective" questions.*						
GEOG111^	C	NE, CR		C		C
^The syllabus refers to "3 one hour exams @ 100 points each" but no description for the type of exam offered						
GEOG112^^	**C**	**NR**				**N**
^^The syllabus refers to "oral or written tests," but provides no description of the type of test used in either format. The syllabus does not provide enough information to determine which of the competencies are being addressed.						
GEOG113^^^	***C***	***NR***				
^^^The syllabus lists "vocabulary mastery" and "note taking" as the evaluation criteria. The syllabus does not provide enough information to determine which of the competencies are being addressed						

History

Course	Reading	Writing	CTC	QCL	OP	IGL
HIST114*	***C***	***NE***				
*****Under the title "Evolution" [sic], the syllabus mentions "Test 1," "Test 2," and a "Final" but provides no description of the type of exam. The syllabus does not provide enough information to determine which of the competencies are being addressed.*						
HIST115	C	NE, CR	C			C
HIST158^	***C***	***NE, CR***	***C***			
^The syllabus refers to two exams and a final, but no description of the type of exam is offered. The syllabus also specifically excludes conducting any outside research to supplement the required paper.						
HIST150	***C***	***CE***	***C***			
^^The syllabus included sample study questions to determine the critical thinking competency being addressed, but had insufficient evidence to determine which other competency or competencies were being addressed.						
HIST152^^	***C***	***CE***	***C***			
^^The syllabus included sample study questions to determine the critical thinking competency being addressed, but had insufficient evidence to determine which other competency(ies) were being addressed.						
HIST154*	***C***	***NE, CR***	***C***			
**The syllabus refers to two exams, but no description of the type of exam is provided.*						

Latin American, Caribbean and Latino Studies

Course	Reading	Writing	CTC	QCL	OP	IGL
LATI105*	***C***	***CE, CR***	***C***			

**The syllabus included a guide for the research paper which made it possible to determine that the critical thinking competency was being addressed, but had insufficient evidence to determine which other competency or competencies were being addressed.*

LATI120**	***C***	***CE, CR***	***C***			

**The syllabus included a guide for the research paper which made it possible to determine that the critical thinking competency was being addressed, but had insufficient evidence to determine which other competency or competencies were being addressed.*

Mathematics

Course	Reading	Writing	CTC	QCL	OP	IGL
MATH140	C	NE, CR		C		
MATH165	C	CR	C	C		
MATH1165**	C	NE, NR		C		

***Syllabus refers to quizzes, in class exams, and a comprehensive exam, but no discussion of how much if any writing is required.*

MATH190*	C	NE	C	C		

**Syllabus refers to quizzes, in class exams, and a comprehensive exam, but no discussion of how much if any writing is required.*

MATH205***	C	NR, NR	C	C	N	

****Syllabus refers to quizzes, in-class exams, and a comprehensive final, but no discussion of how much if any writing is required. Syllabus refers to "short reaction paper" with no subsequent description of scope and content of the paper required.*

Media Arts

Course	Reading	Writing	CTC	QCL	OP	IGL
MEDI100*	C	NE, CR	C			C

**Syllabus mentions quizzes and a final exam, but no discussion of the type of quiz or exam offered.*

MEDI102	C	CE, CR	C			C
MEDI103	C	CE, CR	C			C
MEDI119**	C	NE, CR	C		C	

***Syllabus mentions a midterm exam, but provides no description of the type of exam offered.*

Modern Language

Course	Reading	Writing	CTC	QCL	OP	IGL
LANG103*	***C***	***NE, NR***			**C**	

**Syllabus refers to "three written tests" and "written homework" but offers no description as to the type of exam or homework. Syllabus did not provide sufficient information to determine which competency or competencies beyond oral communication were addressed.*

LANG104*	***C***				***C***	

***Under "objectives," the syllabus lists writing, but the skill is not mentioned elsewhere in the document and no writing assignments are listed anywhere.*

LANG105**	***C***	***NE***			***C***	
LANG106**	***C***	***NE***			**C**	

****The syllabus does not mention any exams. Under "Evaluation" it lists homework, quizzes, and chapter tests, but has no description as to the type or content of the quizzes, chapter tests, or homework.*

LANG107^	***C***	***NE***				
LANG108^	***C***	***NE***				

^Under the heading "Grading System," the syllabus lists 2 tests and quizzes, but provides no description as to the type of test or quiz. Syllabus does not have sufficient data to determine which competencies are being addressed.

LANG123^^	***C***	***NE, NR***	***C***			
LANG124^^	***C***	***NE, NR***	***C***			

^^Syllabus refers to "written quiz" and "homework," but provides no description as to the type of quiz or homework.

Music, Dance & Theatre

Course	Reading	Writing	CTC	QCL	OP	IGL
MDT101*	C	NE, CR	C		N	C

**The syllabus provides different grading options for students, all of which include exams, papers, quizzes, but no description of the type of quiz is offered. One option also includes the possibility of oral presentations.*

MDT102**	C	NE, CR	C			C
MDT103**	C	NE, CR	C			C

***Syllabus refers to two exams and a final, but provides no description of the type of exam offered.*

MDT104***	C	NE, CR	C		C	

****The syllabus refers to "tests" but provides no description as to the type of test offered.*

MDT106^ C NE, NR

^The syllabus refers to "Exams, Quizzes, Concert Reports, Transcriptions, and additional homework assignments" but provides no description as to the type of exams or reports (save that the reports must be typed and that no make-up exams are permitted; transcriptions are not defined). The syllabus has insufficient data to determine which of the competencies were being addressed.

Philosophy & Religion

Course	Reading	Writing	CTC	QCL	OP	IGL

PHIL101* N NE

**This syllabus is very confusing. Below a handwritten title and the professor's name, the syllabus starts with a heading labelled "test:" [sic] and then lists two books. Neither of these is mentioned in the list of readings. The entire syllabus is 13 lines long and has no sentences.*

Syllabus lists a midterm and final exam, but provides no description as to the type of exam offered.

PHIL102	C	CE, CR	C			C
PHIL103	C	CE, CR	C			C

PHIL106** C CE, CR

***Syllabus provides insufficient data to determine which competencies were being addressed*

PHIL110	C	NE, CR	C			C

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Physics

Course	Reading	Writing	CTC	QCL	OP	IGL
PHYS101*C	***NE, NR***	***C***	***C***			
PHYS130l*	***C***	***NE, NR***				***C***
PHYS1130	***C***	***NE, NR***				C
PHYS131*	***C***	***NE, NR***				
PHYS1131*	***C***	***NE, NR***				***C***

**Syllabus refers to exams, quizzes, and homework, but no description of the kind of writing required in any of these.*

Political Science

Course	Reading	Writing	CTC	QCL	OP	IGL
POLI102	C	CE, CR	C		C	C
POLI109	C	CE	C		C	C
POLI110	C	CE, CR	C		C	C
POLI116	C	CE	C		C	C
POLI205	C	CE, CR	C		C	

Psychology

Course	Reading	Writing	CTC	QCL	OP	IGL

PSYC100* ***C*** ***NE, NR***

**Syllabus refers to a "Test #1," "Test #2," and a final, but provides no description as to the type of exam. Syllabus has insufficient data to determine which of the competencies are being addressed.*

PSYC110* ***C*** ***CE, CR***
PSYC150* ***C*** ***CE, CR***

***Syllabus is pretty confusing. It lists various grades available for students doing different types of assignments. As such, it is difficult to determine which competencies are being addressed.*

PSYC160** ***C*** ***NE, NR***

****Syllabus refers to quizzes, but provides no description as to type of quiz. Syllabus also refers to "1 article critique" and "comprehensive typed notes" but no description as to how much writing this requires. Syllabus does not have sufficient data to determine which competencies are being addressed.*

Sociology/Anthropology

Course	Reading	Writing	CTC	QCL	OP	IGL
SOCI141*	***C***	***NE***				

**Syllabus refers to exams and quizzes, but provides no description of the type of exam. There is insufficient data to determine which of the competencies are being addressed.*

SOCI225* ***C*** ***CE***

***Syllabus does not provide sufficient data to determine which of the competencies are being addressed.*

SOCI111** ***C*** ***NE*** **C**

****Syllabus refers to "two major exams" but provides no detail as to the type of exam. There is insufficient data to determine which competencies are being addressed.*

SOCI113^ ***C*** ***NE***

^Syllabus refers to midterm and final examination, but provides no detail as to the types of exams. There is insufficient data to determine which competencies are being addressed.

SOCI114^^ ***C*** ***NE*** **C**

^^Syllabus refers to "two major exams" but provides no detail as to the type of exam. There is insufficient data to determine which competencies are being addressed.

Women's Studies

Course	Reading	Writing	CTC	QCL	OP	IGL
WGST100	C	C	C			C
WGST108	C	CR			C	C
WGST202	C	CR	C			C

Note: These were the only courses submitted by this department. One course previously in the core (Women and Men) that was submitted has apparently been substituted with Gay and Lesbian Studies (WGST190) sometime after the syllabi collection began.