

As past Chair of EPCC and a long-time member of that committee, I would like to respond to the document drafted by the Arts and Letters Division concerning the 'problems' with GEC limitations.

I agree that prerequisites are needed in many courses. EPCC is not suggesting otherwise, nor are we saying that necessary pre-requisites be eliminated for the sake of general education. We are saying that if a course has 'same-discipline' prerequisites that it should not be considered a GEC course. We have also specifically made exceptions for sequences and for the first two years of a language.

I also agree that upper division courses are important and that we wouldn't want to restrict GEC to only lower-division courses. EPCC is not suggesting otherwise. We are saying that if an upper-division course is to be GEC, it should not have same-discipline prerequisites.

It is abundantly clear in the memo from A&L that enrollment management is at the heart of this issue. If upper-division courses are not allowed GEC status due to prerequisites, "fewer faculty members will be able to offer upper-division courses in their specialties." Enrollment management has been a primary criterion for general education requests for over twenty years and I would argue that that has led to the unwarranted size of our curriculum and general education compared to the size of our faculty and student body. But, it's not just upper-division courses that are the enrollment management concern, lower division courses are affected too. If an upper division Economics course requires a lower division Economics course, then the GEC status may attract students to my upper-division course, but first they have to take my lower-division course. Now, that surely benefits me, and it makes my upper-division easier to teach since I can assume a certain level of knowledge, but I'm not sure it benefits students who are not Econ majors.

There seems to be some concern that upper-division students will be disadvantaged by this policy, but it's not clear to me why. There are plenty of upper-division courses that currently are general education and have no prerequisites and yet are challenging and allow students to work at their level. I have no doubt that there are existing general education courses that have prerequisites that could be successfully be taught without them. Would the faculty have to change the course somewhat? Undoubtedly yes. You would not be able to assume a background level of knowledge. But that doesn't mean that the course would be less challenging, it would just be different. And by not restricting access to the course because of prerequisites, it's possible that the course would be enriched by a broader spectrum of students.

I would also argue with the point that "upper-division General Education encourages students to enroll in courses outside their majors." If there are prerequisites for an upper-division GEC course, then a student without those prerequisites, even if they would like to take the course, are discouraged from doing so. Plus I would say that enriching the pool of students is just as likely by not having prerequisites as by having them.

This is the fourth or fifth time I've watched general education change at Eastern. There has never been unanimity for any program. Faculty members quickly develop vested interests in the current program and are loathe to see any changes, lest their courses/disciplines be affected, and so the status quo is preferable.

I agree that EPCC has defined a GEC course as "open and accessible to all students." I also understand that not everyone agrees with this. But to claim that this is an "arbitrary" change is a mischaracterization. We have been discussing this current version of GEC for over four years, and over the last two years EPCC has been attempting to engage in 'rulemaking' to allow the implementation of GEC. We have debated and discussed this issue and both EPCC and the Faculty Senate have approved it.

As to the claim that such a change will "result in accreditation problems," that is simply unfounded. In fact, during the last accreditation visit our general education course list was characterized by at least one visitor as lacking coherence. She suggested that EPCC consider what sorts of parameters we might establish that would limit the list of courses and bring some consistency to the program.

The culture at Eastern has developed in such a way that faculty see enrollment management as a strategic component of general education. If you want to add a course to your curriculum and you want to ensure enrollment, the course has to be general education. That strategy has further been exacerbated by distance education and the claim that online student needs are significantly different that we need to bend our curriculum to suit their needs. This goes back as far as I can remember when weekend college courses could only be approved if they were both upper division and general education. I personally think that is an unstable foundation on which to build a general education program and, I would argue, potentially self-defeating.

General Education status does not imply that a particular course is better than another course, and yet that seems to be part of the subtext of this issue. Denying GEC status to a course seems to imply, to some faculty, something negative about a course. I consider these 'limitations' rather straightforward and minor. I also understand that not everyone agrees. But, if these limitations are not acceptable, are there any constraints on general education that will be universally agreeable. I think not.

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