GENERAL EDUCATION ASSESSMENT REPORT

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Purpose</th>
<th>To obtain student opinions about General Education</th>
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<td>Materials used, n:</td>
<td>Student focus group consisting of 12 undergraduate students</td>
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<td>Rubric/Scoring standard used:</td>
<td>Nine open-ended questions</td>
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<td>Date of assessment:</td>
<td>December 2016</td>
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<td>Report by:</td>
<td>Ana Vasovic, General Education</td>
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GOAL

The goal of this project was to obtain information about student experiences and opinions about General Education program.

OVERVIEW

Twelve students, all of whom are recipients of Harcourt Foundation scholarship, gathered for the end-of-semester luncheon/discussion with the Harcourt program Director Linda Carlson who agreed to dedicate part of the conversation to student experiences with the General Education program. All students started at City College as Freshmen and are now at different stages of their college careers: 5 are Freshmen, 2 Sophomores, 2 Juniors and 3 are Seniors; they are majoring in a variety of fields: Political Science, Biology, Psychology, International studies, undeclared... Director of General Education, Ana Vasovic, moderated the Gen Ed portion of the event asking questions which pertained to:
- Students’ familiarity with the requirements and goals of the program
- Students’ experiences with faculty and advisors
- Students’ learning experiences
- Students’ frustrations with the program

FINDINGS SUMMARY

The focus group findings can be summarized as:
- Students feel well informed about the General Education requirements; they all learned about Gen Ed requirement during the Freshman orientation.
- Students believe that the purpose of General Education is to introduce them to different areas of study. No one cited development of proficiencies, such as writing, critical thinking, information literacy and quantitative reasoning, as the program’s goal.
- While students describe experiences with faculty teaching Gen Ed as positive (students credit faculty for getting them interested in an unlikely field such as Anthropology), their experiences with advisors are described as rushed and consisting of no more than being provided a list of courses and told to select one from each category.
- Students find Speech a very valuable Gen Ed course with applications in other academic experiences and life in general. Some also cite knowledge obtained in Intro Psychology or Foreign Language classes as very useful.
- Students are open to learning experiences in fields other than their major and appreciate things they learned in General Education classes. They recognize the change in their thinking (e.g. questioning religion) and views (e.g. better cultural awareness) brought upon by these learning experiences.
- Students rely on advising offices to obtain listings of courses and checklists; none seem to use Gen Ed
They choose courses primarily based on schedule and recommendations of other students (from CCNY student Facebook page). Some look for course descriptions.

- **Large lectures seem to be distracting** for most of the students although some note that good coordination between the lead instructor and the TA (for recitation section) makes for a positive learning experience. Large lectures with no small breakout sessions such as ASTR 305 were cited as not good learning experiences.
- Students seem to **prefer upper level, specialized, seminar-style Gen Ed courses** to 100-level survey courses.

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Thoughtful responses by this group of students provided useful insight into their experiences with the program. While the availability of information, curricular offerings and learning experiences are well received by students, the advising experiences and course structure can be improved. The Office of General Education will:

- Develop **master list of courses with course descriptions** included so that students don’t have to search for these on their own.
- Work on **collecting and publishing information about writing experiences in General Education courses** in order to provide more guidance in course section and communicate to students the importance of developing this skill as one of the goals of Gen Ed. This will be included in a handbook/pamphlet for both faculty and students.
- **Share the findings of this discussion and start conversations with relevant offices:** advising (on how to make advisement more personal) and departments/dean’s offices (about the importance of good TA structure in large lectures).

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1. **How did you learn about the General Education requirements at City College and how familiar are you with what they are?**
   
   Students found out about the General Education requirement during the first registration/freshman orientation date at City College. They were explained that this is a part of their degree requirements and were given checklists for the requirements. Students feel that they understand the Gen Ed requirements well.

2. **What is your perception of what General Education is supposed to do for you?**
   
   Students believe the General Education allows them to “dip their feet” into different areas and to “expand their horizons” beyond the major. Students share that they were “amazed” by their Anthropology Gen Ed class, and how meaningful the World Music Gen Ed class was.

3. **What were your experiences like with your General Education professors?**
   
   Professors mostly sparked students’ interest in the academic field, such as Anthropology. A student even considered majoring in Anthropology following the experience. Students generally appreciated the opportunity to explore fields other than this major, although some, such as Math and Philosophy, were not tempting for further exploration.

4. **What were your experiences like with your advisors regarding guidance/recommendations for General Education classes?**
   
   Advising experiences were described as “very basic”. Advisors gave out lists of courses and said to choose from the list. No discussions or recommendations for particular courses that were best suited for students’ interests; this was interpreted by students as lack of time due to high volume of students in the advising offices.
5. How have you used any of the things learned in your General Education courses in other areas of your life or academic experience?

Speech seems to play an important role for students. They take what they learned in the class and apply to real life (e.g. speaking assertively in a crowd) or other academic experiences (giving a presentation in an Architecture class). Foreign language skills were very important for a student who participated in Study Abroad experience. Knowledge students acquired in Psychology was applicable to many life situations, such as having a conversation with someone or analyzing a situation. Although a large lecture class, it works well in the majority of situations, although the quality of the TA instruction can make it or break it. The lead professor is great and funny, but the large class does lead to distractions. Political Science was useful and well-functioning large lecture course with good coordination between the lead instructor and TAs. English composition courses were recognized as extremely useful for the grammar instruction they provided. Black Studies course material was presented in a relatable manner and made for a favorite course for one of the students.

6. What one thing have you learned from your General Education that you would have not learned without this experience?

Anthropology course provided fascinating information about language acquisition while World Music was great for exploring different cultures and stepping out of the US-centric experience.

7. Have any of the courses you took made a difference in the way you thought or challenged you to think in new ways?

Psychology of Religion had a big impact on one student claiming the course challenged all classmates in their attitudes toward religion while World Music contributed to expanding students’ global awareness and cultural sensitivity.

8. How do you obtain information about General Education offerings next semester and how do you go about course selection?

Students rely on listing of courses they receive from the advising offices and seem unaware of General Education website resources. Students chose courses primarily based on their schedule, but how challenging the instructor is also plays an important role (for this, students seek advice from their peers on ccny Facebook page or they review on “Rate my professors” website). Students also look at course descriptions to find courses that fit their interests the best.

9. What are some frustrations, if any, you are feeling about the General Education program at City College?

Large lectures provide an environment with many distractions and students find it difficult to pay attention and engage with the material in a meaningful way (e.g. Astronomy and introductory Biology classes). On the other hand, even small classes can be uncomfortable when packed in very small rooms. Students also noted that Intro survey-style courses (100 level) are less meaningful to them than the upper level more specialized courses; introducing students to a wide scope of material doesn’t mean they will remember any of it down the line while in-depth learning experiences are more meaningful. One student has been struggling with a course (German) being consistently canceled due to low enrollments.