Southern OREGON UNIVERSITY

The Transforming General Education Task Force

Recommendations to Faculty Senate

— Spring 2021 —

(Revised 05.14.2021)

***Strategic Direction I:* SOU will transform its pedagogy and curriculum (how and what it teaches) to enhance the success of its learners and graduates.**

- ***Goal One:*** *SOU will develop curriculum and provide learning experiences that prepare all learners for life and work in an evolving future; connect directly with the challenges of our community, region, and world; and build self-confidence and the capacity to think critically, innovate boldly, and create lives of purpose.*

— The SOU Strategic Plan

In Spring 2019, the SOU Faculty Senate authorized the Transforming General Education Task Force with a charge to review and act upon the prior recommendations of the General Education Professional Learning Community in accordance with SD1, Goal 1 of the SOU Strategic Plan.

The initial work of the Task Force commenced with a smaller planning unit in Summer 2019 and expanded into a much larger and inclusive body in Fall 2019, with participation and input from students, faculty from every division, staff, and administrators. This larger Task Force met weekly in Fall, Winter, and Spring terms of the 19-20 academic year.

The Task Force identified the following objectives to guide our work:

Objective 1. **To apply Strategic Directions 1 (Goal 1) & 4 (with special focus on meeting the HB 2864 Oregon Cultural Competency mandate) to SOU GenEd.**

Objective 2. **To reduce the GenEd credit burden for SOU students.**

Objective 3. **To make GenEd learning goals & requirements more transparent & purposeful for students.**

Objective 4. **To make SOU's GenEd model more attractive to prospective students.**

Objective 5. **To accomplish all of the above while ensuring maximum transferability of credits.**

In Fall 19, the Task Force made a progress report to Faculty Senate in which six draft "Core Capacities" were announced. Winter and Spring reports to the Faculty Senate were disrupted by COVID-19, but work continued into Summer 2020 with a smaller, concentrated Task Force subgroup. This smaller unit designed a model and made a series of presentations to the full Task Force, the Office of Admissions, the Registrar's Office, the Student Success Coordinators, the Division Directors, the Provost's Office, the Faculty Summer Symposium, and to faculty in their individual academic divisions.

In Fall 2020, the Task Force made a series of recommendations to Faculty Senate. The Senate provisionally approved the six new "Core Capacities" as recommended but made two requests: first, that the Task Force create six new interdisciplinary subcommittees, one per capacity, to review and further develop each capacity and make additional recommendations to the Task Force; second, for the Task Force to reconsider its model recommendation based on feedback from faculty and relevant recommendations from the capacity subcommittees.

The interdisciplinary capacity subcommittees met throughout the Winter 2021 term, and their recommendations were presented to Faculty Senate on March 8, 2021. While subcommittee recommendations included refinements and additions to the proposed capacities, they largely affirmed the direction taken by the Task Force and our original recommendations to Senate. Meanwhile, the Task Force continued to research General Education models and high-impact practices, including First-Year Experiences and GenEd ePortfolios.

Beginning in Spring 2021, the University Studies Committee took on the task of reconciling the various recommendations from the capacity subcommittees, and the Assessment Committee will soon begin creating developmental rubrics for each capacity based on the work of USC. The President's Committee on Equity and Diversity is also reviewing the EDI subcommittee's work and will make additional recommendations on May 12. Revised proficiency lists for each capacity will be submitted to Senate for review prior to the May 24 Senate Meeting.

On April 27, the Task Force presented two potential models **(Models A & B)** to the ASSOU Senate, and on April 30, 2021, all faculty, Student Success Coordinators, and division directors were invited to an open forum with the GenEd Task Force to review and comment on both potential GenEd models. Feedback collected at this session was shared with the campus, and those unable to attend were invited to contribute comments via email. Direct feedback was also provided by the Senate Advisory Council. After considering faculty feedback, the General Education Task Force is moving forward two models for Faculty Senate consideration: **Model A** and a revised version of Model B we have labeled **Model B2**. The Task Force believes either model would be an improvement over the current University Studies program.

After two years of work, we now present our recommendations to Faculty Senate for approval, as well as a series of additional questions we suggest for future campus discussion and debate.

Recommendations for Faculty Senate Approval

At the conclusion of our AY 20-21 work, the Transforming General Education Task Force recommends the following actions by Faculty Senate at the June 7 meeting of 2021:

Recommendation #1

A motion to formally accept the six recommended "Core Capacities" as the basis for SOU's future General Education curriculum, GenEd course development and approval, and assessment of GenEd, with recognition that work will continue on the specific proficiency language to be used in each capacity and the Task Force will update Faculty Senate in AY 21-22 with final revisions.

Recommendation #2

A motion to adopt either **Model A** or **Model B2**,* as described in the accompanying documentation (or as amended during Faculty Senate debate), for implementation in the 22-23 academic catalog and launch in Fall 2022. **With passage of this motion, the Transforming GenEd Task Force will be charged with implementation oversight for AY 22-23 and will report progress on implementation benchmarks at each Faculty Senate meeting.**

> ***Note:** because the Task Force is moving forward two options for the Senate to consider, we recommend a non-binding survey of all faculty (identified only by division) to see which of the two models is preferred by each division.*

Recommendation #3

A motion to reduce the existing University Studies credit requirement to approximately 48 credits beginning in Fall 2022*, including a backdated reduction for all pre-existing catalog years (to be achieved as follows: reducing E, F, and G strand course requirements to two courses each (eliminating the *non-lab* course requirement from G); giving students the option between H and I strand courses; A, B, C, D, and J strand requirements remain unchanged). This change should be announced to students before registration opens for Fall 2022.

> ***Note:** the Task Force has revised this recommendation. After conferring with the university registrar, we believe this timing is the best for both students and the university.*

Recommendation #4

A motion to approve the **GenEd Transfer Articulation & Teachout Plan**, effective upon implementation of the new model.

Recommendation #5

A motion to approve and authorize the **Accelerated GenEd Course Approval Process & Procedure**, as described in the accompanying documentation (or as amended during Senate debate), effective upon implementation of the new model.

Issues for Campus-wide Discussion

During our work, the Transforming General Education Task Force encountered substantive issues we determined fell beyond the scope of our immediate charge but demanded campus-wide attention from faculty and the administration. They are noted below:

Issue #1: Academic & Career Advising

SOU should reconsider its existing structures, loading, training, tools, and evaluation of academic and career advising.

Background: In recent years, SOU has made positive gains in academic advising, most notably in the hiring of Student Success Coordinators and the adoption of Navigate. However, much work remains to be done. Freshmen students, in particular, are subjected to confusion as they often encounter mixed messages from three advisors (USEM, SSC, and major advisor). Programs across campus utilize SCCs in very different ways that result in workload inequities for these advising heroes. Adoption of Navigate by faculty advisors has also been uneven, partly due to frustration with the number of different tools advisors must use to complete their advising tasks (Banner, DegreeWorks, Navigate, and the Student Curriculum Update Request form). Many faculty have never received training or professional development in effective academic or career advising practices (training in advising tools is not the same thing), their advising practices are not *directly* evaluated as part of tenure and promotion, and students have no opportunity to offer feedback on their advising experiences. The new ePortfolio creates an exciting opportunity for deeply reflective academic and career advising between faculty and students, but using it for this purpose will require professional development, may add yet another tool advisors must utilize, and could increase advisor workload.

Career advising at SOU also needs increased investment. SOU has only one Career Preparation Coordinator who cannot possibly meet the needs of our entire student body. This under-investment in career services sends the wrong message to current and prospective students who want assurances that their SOU degree will lead to positive employment outcomes. Elevating the title of the Career Preparation Coordinator and expanding this department with additional career counselors could improve employment outcomes for SOU graduates.

Issue #2: Capstone Requirements

Should the capstone experience be defined in the SOU catalog, and should all major capstone experiences share some common elements, including some connection to the Core Capacities and Purpose ePortfolio?

Background: The SOU catalog states that students must complete "capstone experience requirements in each major" to earn their degree, but no capstone definition or standards are provided. While the Task Force is wary of overly prescriptive language here, we believe both students and programs could benefit from some universal capstone expectations. Likewise, one of our two prospective models includes a culminating ePortfolio course as a requirement, while the other does not. This culminating course could prove unnecessary if all programs had a similar Capstone experience.

Issue #3: BA/BS Requirements and Matching Majors to the Right Degree

The Task Force believes that SOU should engage in a campus-wide discussion about our BA and BS degree requirements. These requirements may need to evolve in response to changes in General Education. Our BS degree requirements, in particular, are among the least meaningful among Oregon publics. Likewise, most SOU programs offer both BA and BS degrees by default. Should they?

Background: When the Task Force reviewed peer institutions, SOU stood out as relatively unusual in lack of meaningful requirements for the BS degree in particular and in the fact that most of our programs offer matching BA and BS degrees. We believe the campus is ripe for a wide-ranging discussion about our degrees. Likewise, we would encourage all SOU programs to consider whether both degrees serve their majors equally well and suggest the Senate might explore principles by which a program would determine the right degree(s) to offer.

Issue #4: Two-year Degrees

Should SOU consider offering AA and AS degrees?

Background: The Task Force felt that the offering of AA and AS degrees could be a meaningful way to increase enrollment, recognize student progress, and support second-year retention. Some students also expressed an interest in this move. However, we acknowledge more research should be done on this question. We also recognize that offering AA and AS degrees would put us in direct competition with our partners in the SOHEC group (RCC and KCC).