



The Transforming General Education Task Force

Frequently Asked Questions

— Spring 2021 —

(Revised 05.19.2021)

What is the Transforming General Education Task Force?

The Transforming General Education Task Force is an interdisciplinary body formed by Faculty Senate in Spring 2019 to review SOU's current model of general education and make recommendations for change as needed. This work sought to build upon [previous research](#) collected by a Professional Learning Community (PLC) that had explored approaches to General Education in AY 18-19 as a component of the university's strategic planning process.

The Task Force includes faculty representatives from each division (some of whom also served on the original PLC), a student representative from ASSOU, a designee of the Faculty Senate Chair, a representative for the Student Success Coordinators, a representative from CATL, a representative for Division Directors, and a representative from Student Life. The Provost is the administrative contact for the Task Force. The Task Force is co-chaired by two faculty members.

Who leads the Transforming General Education Task Force?

The current faculty co-chairs are Andrew Gay and Brie Paddock.

The Provost is the administrative contact and is ex officio on the Task Force, as is the Director of Undergraduate Studies. Both have offered their support and perspectives, but neither has directed our work.

Only faculty and student representatives may vote on Task Force recommendations.

Who is my representative on the Task Force?

Faculty Representatives

BCE – Alena Ruggerio

EHL – Erin Gravelle (Michael Paddock is her sabbatical replacement)

H&C – Bonnie Holmes

Library – Dale Vidmar*

OCA – Sean O’Skea

Social Sciences – Kylan de Vries

STEM – Brie Paddock

Undergraduate Studies – Elizabeth Whitman

Senate Chair Designee — Andrew Gay

** Dale Vidmar was Library faculty when this work began, but has since become the Interim University Librarian, an administrative position. He has been permitted to continue as the Library’s “faculty representative” at the request of the Library faculty, who are short-staffed.*

ASSOU Representative

Violet Crain, ASSOU President

Staff & Administrative Representatives

Adult Learning – Moneeka Settles

Students Success Coordinators – Edward Derr

Student Life – Max Brooks

Registrar – Kitty Cable

CATL – Clay Austin

Division Directors – Lee Ayers

Provost’s Office — Sue Walsh

Why does General Education at SOU need to be “transformed?”

Opinions on the purpose of GenEd vary widely across campus and even within the Task Force itself. As a body, the Task Force believes that General Education should support [SOU’s vision](#) of helping students “develop the knowledge, capacities, and audacity to innovate boldly and create lives of purpose” by exposing them to diverse ways of knowing and doing that they are unlikely to

encounter in their major discipline alone. We believe General Education should be student-centered and clearly communicate to students the skills and dispositions they need to attain, develop, and exhibit in order to achieve their own goals for life and career success. General Education should enhance students' metacognitive skills and help them make meaningful learning connections between their goals, their values, their academic coursework, their co-curricular activities, their career development, and their personal lives, and it should provide them with tools to help them communicate those learning connections to others.

SOU's GenEd program should embody the university's commitment to students' intellectual growth by encouraging them to develop breadth and depth in knowledge and abilities that are relevant to the world in which they live, but we do not believe breadth and depth can be achieved in General Education alone. The program should play a foundational role in students' academic experience by fostering students' cultivation of essential abilities and habits of mind that will enable them to sustain a life of intellectual curiosity and learning while students at the university and beyond.

The Task Force does not believe SOU's current University Studies curriculum successfully achieves these aims.

SD1 of the SOU Strategic Plan states that "SOU will transform its pedagogy and curriculum (how and what it teaches) to enhance the success of its learners and graduates." The Task Force has made recommendations for transformation that we believe will enhance the success of our learners and graduates.

What work has been completed by the Transforming General Education Task Force to date?

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 two hours per week in Fall, Winter, and Spring terms of the 19-20 academic year.

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

1. To apply Strategic Directions 1 (Goal 1) & 4 (with special focus on meeting the HB 2864 Oregon Cultural Competency mandate) to SOU GenEd.
2. To reduce the GenEd credit requirements for SOU students.
3. To make GenEd learning goals & requirements more transparent & purposeful for students.
4. To make SOU's GenEd model more attractive to prospective students.
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 soon. 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 has moved 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.

How did the Task Force choose the six Core Capacities?

The Task Force began its work by surveying both faculty and students on the learning outcomes they thought were important to a General Education curriculum. SOU's current University Studies program has 10 learning goals. Drawing from our faculty and student surveys, we had identified as many as 14 learning goals that faculty and students valued, but our hope was to simplify rather than complicate General Education.

Working from our longer list of learning goals, we collaborated with a small focus group of students to identify a shorter list of interdisciplinary capacities that cut across all of our goals. Our student collaborators championed these core capacities as more comprehensible and tangible than our current learning goals.

In Fall 2019, these capacities were presented to Faculty Senate. In response to faculty feedback, the capacities were revised to include Numerical Literacy.

The six core capacities of Communication & Expression, Numerical Literacy, Inquiry & Analysis, Creativity & Innovation, Purposeful Living, and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion were again presented to Faculty Senate in Fall 2020 and provisionally approved by the vote of an overwhelming majority of Faculty Senators. In Winter 2021, six interdisciplinary faculty subcommittees from across our campus affirmed their support of these capacities.

What opportunities have students, faculty, and staff had to offer feedback on the Task Force's work?

The Task Force includes faculty representatives from each division, a student representative from ASSOU, a designee of the Faculty Senate Chair, a representative for the Student Success Coordinators, a representative from CATL, a representative for Division Directors, and a representative from Student Life, and constituents of each group have always been welcome to share their thoughts with their representative, as many have.

The Task Force began its work by surveying both students and faculty in Fall 2019 on their thoughts about our current University Studies models and wishes for General Education. At the end of Fall 2019, we presented a draft of our core capacities to Faculty Senate, and in response to faculty feedback, the capacities were revised to include Numerical Literacy.

At the end of Summer 2020 and beginning of Fall 2020, the Task Force made numerous presentations to administrators, staff, and faculty, collecting feedback and answering questions. Each academic division had its own meeting with the Task Force. Individual programs that requested a direct audience with the Task Force were granted time to share their thoughts. In Fall 2020, all academic programs were surveyed on their thoughts and concerns about the six core capacities, and faculty were invited to participate in interdisciplinary subcommittees to help develop those capacities. The subcommittee work was shared with all faculty on March 8 with an open invitation for feedback.

On April 27, the Task Force presented two potential models (Models A & B) to the ASSOU Senate. The Task Force opted not to seek wider feedback from students since the new models will not be available to those students, and we did not want to create confusion for students over their own GenEd requirements. 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 requested from and provided by the Senate Advisory Council. On May 12, Faculty Senate Chair Kemble Yates invited all faculty to answer a survey on the new models. Those results will be shared with the campus very soon.

The Task Force believes we have offered ample opportunities for all key stakeholders to provide input on our work.

Why has the Transforming General Education Task Force recommended reducing general education credit requirements?

The 2016 University Accreditation report found little fault in SOU but did specifically state the opinion that our GenEd requirements are too complicated and require too many credits. Many SOU programs have a demanding number of required courses that must be balanced against an unusually high number of GenEd requirements that add up to about 1/3 of the student's total class time.

SOU's 64-credit General Education program is the largest of all Oregon public universities, with an in-state tuition price tag of \$12,544 in AY 19-20. The median GenEd credit requirement among Oregon public universities is 55.

By lowering the credit number and at the same time realigning the requirements to better match the institution's mission and core values, students will have more flexibility in their schedules allowing for a smoother path to graduation. As the total credits required for graduation are not changing, students will have more freedom in electives to pursue courses in their areas of interest or that will complement their major, allowing students to feel more invested in their own academic choices.

If credits need to be reduced, why not simply reduce the current University Studies requirements, by either reducing the number of Explorations credits required or by removing the upper-division Integrations credit requirements?

As higher education continues to bear the disinvestment of public funding and costs shift to students and their families, students are demanding an explanation of the worth of every course. Thus, one of the primary goals of the Task Force is to design a new General Education system that helps students create *meaning* for themselves out of their requirements. Whereas the existing University Studies model is organized by foundational skills (written and oral communication), disciplinary areas (arts and humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences), and topics (science and technology, citizenship and social responsibility, and diversity and global awareness), those typologies are not universally legible to students. The disciplinary areas, in particular, center the institution and its programs over the student and their learning goals.

The Task Force determined that one of the ways to encourage students to make more meaning out of their requirements would be to organize their learning by capacities, as articulations of things they should graduate being able to *do* and continue growing in for the rest of their lives. Thus, merely reducing the number of credits in the existing model does not meet all the goals, such as cultivating opportunities for students to make meaning out of their education, set before the Task Force.

If General Education credit requirements are reduced, how should students reach 180 credits to graduate?

If general education requirements are reduced then students could explore minors, concentrations, double majors, certificates, badges, or other personally chosen paths to expand their learning with the remaining credits. The task force is not assuming that Majors should increase their requirements. This will also allow more students transferring in with a high number of credits to be able to complete their major without exceeding the 180 number.

Why has the Transforming General Education Task Force recommended a GenEd ePortfolio, and what will that look like?

One of the most transformative goals of the new General Education model is to link coursework in GenEd classes to the overall educational goals of the student and the University. Many students view GenEd requirements as a chore to be completed, even an obstacle, on their way to their graduation goals, rather than seeing GenEd as an essential part of their higher education. A GenEd ePortfolio could focus the student on capacity development rather than focusing entirely on completion of requirements. Students will be asked to define and offer evidence and artifacts of their progress in the capacities and how they have applied those skills to their goals, their values, their academic coursework, their co-curricular activities, their career development, and even their personal lives.

Design of the ePortfolio will be the focus of a Summer 2021 Task Force subcommittee.

Why didn't the Task Force propose my preferred GenEd model approach instead?

We frequently receive some version of this question, but the hypothetical models at the heart of the question vary greatly depending on the faculty member asking it.

Some faculty ask why we haven't reduced the credit requirements of General Education even more than we have in the proposed models, while other faculty oppose reducing General Education credits at all or even recommend increasing the required credits instead of reducing them.

Some faculty feel the proposed models are overly prescriptive, while other faculty believe the proposed models are not prescriptive enough.

Some faculty feel that our proposed models are too similar to University Studies, while other faculty believe the new models are too different from what we're used to.

Faculty at SOU have very diverse views on what General Education should look like, and these views are well-represented in the Task Force, where we have

engaged in prolonged, vigorous debate on these very same issues. Many of us had favorite models that our colleagues opposed, but each member of the Task Force has set aside our own preferences and collaborated in earnest to find common ground among our various viewpoints. We do not believe a total consensus on General Education is possible, but we unanimously support bringing the proposed models to a vote in Faculty Senate.

Do we need to approve this work in Spring 2021, or can we have more time to consider these proposals?

While the Task Force is sensitive to the concerns of those who believe this work needs more time, especially to those who are concerned that the pandemic has not allowed faculty sufficient time to consider the proposals, it is unclear how additional time would be used productively.

This stage of the Task Force's work is complete. The next stage of work cannot begin until a model is approved by Faculty Senate.

Faculty Senate and six interdisciplinary subcommittees have already endorsed the six core capacities and affirmed that they should serve as the basis for SOU's General Education program.

The Task Force has considered dozens of model proposals and has revised its work multiple times in response to faculty feedback.

At this time, we respectfully ask Faculty Senate to either support the recommendations of the Task Force, allowing us to proceed with the next stages of development, or affirm their preference for SOU's current University Studies program and dissolve the Task Force. The members of the Task Force do not wish to continue an open-ended commitment to a transformation process without direction, faculty support, or reasonable expectation that our recommendations will be implemented.

— END FAQ —