Task Force on Communication Across the Curriculum

(Jointly appointed by the Office of the Provost, the Faculty Senate, and Undergraduate Studies)

Proposals to the General Education Council

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Introduction:

In January 2011, responding to external and internal reviews of the CAC Program, the Provost appointed the Communication Across the Disciplines Task Force and charged it to evaluate the University’s Writing and Speaking Intensive program and its relationship to the General Education program. The Task Force paid especial attention to the following statement in the Provost’s charge:

UNCG recognizes that there is a distinction between the goals and purposes of general education and the goals and purposes of disciplinary education. UNCG also recognizes, however, that it is important to the coherence of students’ educational experience that the general learning goals established for the general education program extend appropriately across each student’s entire curriculum and be engaged by campus-wide programs such as CAC.

Attending to this and the other statements in the Provost’s charge, the Task Force thoroughly reviewed the entire operation of the Communication Across the Curriculum Program and evaluated the effectiveness of the Writing Intensive and Speaking Intensive marker program. (The complete charge is included in the full CAC Task Force Phase I Report, posted on the CAC web site: http://www.uncg.edu/cac/). The Task force made numerous recommendations, including recommendations to the Provost, the Deans’ Council, GEC, the College, and the Writing and Speaking Centers.

The Task Force presented the recommendations to, and heard concerns and received suggestions about them from, the Provost, the Dean of Undergraduate Studies, the Dean of Arts and Sciences, the Deans’ Council, the Administrative Council of the College, faculty at several unit assemblies, and faculty at a Senate Forum. In response, the Task Force decided to divide its recommendations into three parts, eliminating or modifying many of the original recommendations, and to address the three parts to three different entities: the Faculty Senate, the Deans’ Council, and the General Education Committee.

The Proposal to the Faculty (also available on the CAC web site) recommends the following to the Senate:

The Task Force’s major recommendation is that each department should determine its discipline-specific communication competencies, supervise their instruction, and conduct their assessment. Moreover, the University should eliminate the current Writing and Speaking Intensive markers from the General Education requirements and institute a new program that requires every degree-granting program in the University to create and implement an appropriate “Communication in the Discipline” plan. A new Communication Enriched Curriculum Council, with the support of Communication Enriched Curriculum Program (the current CAC Program restructured), should administer this plan.

The Proposal to the Deans’ Council was to have recommended that each unit require all its students to take an appropriate sophomore-level, “transitional, multi-modal communication course” (for instance, a “Communication in the Social Sciences” course). Investigation determined that adding such a
requirement for all units would be far too expensive during the current budgetary crisis, and the Task Force has abandoned the recommendation.

The Proposals to the General Education Council are below. These proposals result from the Task Force’s recognition that while the CID plans will greatly strengthen the instruction and practice of communication in the upper-level, disciplinary courses required for the majors, the elimination of the Writing Intensive and Speaking Intensive general education requirements would be likely to reduce the amount of communication instruction currently being delivered at the sophomore level. The Task Force was also concerned about the kind and amount of foundational communication instruction some courses carrying the GRD marker currently deliver.

The Proposals:

I. Proposal to replace the current WI and SI markers with a “CE” marker

The CAC Task Force will recommend to the Faculty Senate that UNCG redesign the current Writing and Speaking intensive program, and it will recommend that it require departmental Communication in the Discipline (CID) plans that address the improvement of communication in the upper-level, disciplinary courses.

The CID plans will not address communication in the lower-level, general education courses. The CAC Task Force recognizes, however, that eliminating the University Writing Intensive and Speaking Intensive requirements may have detrimental effects upon communication instruction in the lower-level courses, especially in the general education program. The CAC Task Force, therefore, recommends to the General Education Council that it join with the CAC Task Force in presenting to the Faculty Senate a resolution that would create one new communication-based marker to replace the current WI and SI markers, in order to achieve the following goals:

- To ensure the continuation and improve the quality of much of the communication instruction currently being delivered through WI and SI marked general education courses.
- To reduce the possibility that section limits may increase in the General Education category courses.
- To create parameters that would make the altered marker program assessable in ways the old WI /SI marker program was not.

  - Unlike WI and SI markers, CE markers should be closely associated with a particular program that has distinctive educational objectives. In this case, the CE markers will be associated with the General Education program.
  - Unlike WI and SI courses, which range in difficulty and specialization from the 100-level to the 500-level, CE markers should be associated with a specific level of instruction. In this case, the marker should be associated with sophomore-level instruction and therefore restricted to general education category courses either (1) at the 100- or 200-level and having no more than one course prerequisite or co-requisite, or (2) at the 300-level with no course prerequisites or co-requisites.
o Unlike WI and SI courses, CE courses should share some specific kinds of assignments in order for student performances across courses to be comparable.

With these goals in mind, the Task Force recommends to the General Education Council that it co-sponsor with the CAC Task Force a Faculty Senate resolution that would do the following:

1. Eliminate the current University requirement that each student take one course carrying a Writing Intensive marker and one carrying a Speaking Intensive marker, and additionally take a second course carrying a Writing Intensive and second course carrying a Speaking Intensive marker in within the major.

2. Create a Communication-Enriched (CE) course marker that would replace the current WI and SI markers, and instead require all students to take one CE course outside the major program of study, that is, a course that is not required by the major. [Note: The reduction in the number of marked courses that students must take will not reduce the amount of communication instruction students receive because the proposed Communication in the Discipline (CID) plans will require departments to deliver discipline-specific communication instruction in the courses required for the majors.]

3. For students who initially transfer to UNCG as juniors or seniors (with 60 semester hours or more), the CE requirement will be waived.

4. Require that all CE marked courses meet the following criteria:

   • Every CE marked course must also carry a general education category marker. [This restriction would help prevent students from enrolling in a CE marked course for no other reason than to get the marker, and it will help ensure that a large number of general education classes will be able to retain lower seat limits. More importantly, however, general education category courses are designed to follow SACS accreditation principles, including principle 2.7.3, which insists that general education courses “do not narrowly focus on those skills, techniques, and procedures specific to a particular occupation or profession.” The general education marker, therefore, justifies requiring CE marked courses to assign similar communication projects that use genres found universally across disciplines and that address a general audience.]
   • No CE marked course may also carry a GRD marker. [GRD communication instruction is at the foundational level, or “learning to write” (or speak), whereas CE criteria are designed to help students learn to adapt discourse to a particular subject and a general audience, or “writing (or speaking) to learn.” Moreover, this provision will prevent the possibility that students who take a 100-level GRD marked course could simultaneously fulfill their CE requirement.]
   • Every CE marked course must provide instruction for and practice in the skills needed for the required communication assignments.
   • Every CE marked course must include instructor feedback and guided revision, or opportunities for students to apply what they have learned from previous performances in a subsequent performance, as a requirement.
- CE courses should be limited to twenty-five students (or a 1:25 faculty/student ratio that can include teaching assistants).

5. All courses with Communication-Enriched markers must include the following Student Learning Outcomes, along with those appropriate to its general education category marker:

**Student Learning Outcomes for CE (Communication-Enriched) courses:**

At the conclusion of this course, students will be able to:

a. Construct in writing and present through speaking an argument about a key idea, text, or concept(s) in the course subject, that has the following essential elements:

   - A thesis statement, a claim, or a proposition that deals with a matter of probability, not certainty, and not mere opinion.
   - Grounds, reasons, or premises that support the thesis.
   - Adaptations of organization and style appropriate to the occasion and the targeted audience.

b. Construct in writing and present through speaking an exposition (a clarification, an explanation) of a key idea, text, or concept(s) in the course subject that has the following essential elements:

   - A controlling purpose, context, or rationale that recognizes the audience’s preconceptions and guides the audience’s perspective on the topic.
   - An analysis and organization of the topic appropriate to the exposition’s purpose and audience.
   - Definitions, examples, analogies, and other explanatory techniques appropriate to the exposition’s purpose and audience.

6. A Communication-Enriched (CE) Course Committee will replace the current Writing Intensive and Speaking Intensive Committees. The Chair of the CEC Council will appoint the CE Course Committee from among the members of the Council and its Faculty Development Coordinators. Members and Coordinators will not be eligible to serve during the year their units are preparing CID plans for certification.

The CE Course Committee, as did the current WI and SI committees, will design and publish appropriate course guidelines and proposal forms, and will approve all proposals. During the transition period, the CE Course Committee will grandfather current SI and WI courses already carrying general education category markers as CE courses, but departments will need to re-design them and the Committee will have to re-approve them at the time the courses’ general education markers are re-certified.

7. The CE Course Committee will not grant CE marker approvals to instructors, as is the case for WI and SI markers, but to departments for specific courses. The CE Course Committee will approve
markers for courses only when the department affirms that its instructors will teach the course CE every time the department offers the course.

8. A department offering CE marked courses will submit a copy of each CE course section’s syllabus to the CE Course Committee at least one month prior to the first day of the semester in which the course will be taught. Although it is expected that sections of the same course will vary, sometimes considerably, in their content and structure, the department head or his or her appointed representative is responsible for ensuring that all sections

   a. have the same CE student learning objectives
   b. meet the minimum criteria for assignments, and
   c. link these assignments to the appropriate student learning objectives.

9. The Communication-Enriched Curriculum Committee will be responsible for determining the schedule and method of assessing the Communication-Enriched Course program, and the office of the Communication-Enriched Curriculum program will be responsible for performing assessments and reporting the results.

II. Proposal to strengthen the General Reasoning and Discourse category courses

Learning Goal #1 (LG1) in the UNCG General Education Program is the ability to “think critically, communicate effectively, and develop appropriate fundamental skills in quantitative and information literacies” (http://web.unCG.edu/reg/Bulletin/Current/UnivReq/GECProgram.aspx). In order to ensure that its students have the opportunity to improve their competency in these fundamental skills, the University requires every student to earn six semester hours of work in two courses carrying the General Education Reasoning and Discourse (GRD) marker. The UNCG Undergraduate Bulletin asserts that in courses carrying the GRD marker “Students gain skills in intellectual discourse, including constructing cogent arguments, locating, synthesizing and analyzing documents, and writing and speaking clearly, coherently, and effectively” (http://web.unCG.edu/reg/Bulletin/Current/UnivReq/GECDescription.aspx).

The Communication Across the Curriculum Task Force believes that all of these goals are not being achieved, or sometimes even entirely addressed, by all courses that currently carry the GRD marker. The Task Force further believes that in order for GRD marked courses to achieve these goals—goals the University faculty have already determined—the General Education Council should set much more stringent criteria for GRD courses than it has in the past. These criteria should include minimum quantitative and qualitative requirements for writing or speaking, as well as research, and they should include specific Student Learning Objectives—objectives that can be appropriately assessed—associated with those assignments. The Task Force recommends the following:

Assignment criteria:

- Students must write a minimum of 15 pages (typed, double-spaced) of polished prose (i.e. not including drafts), or speak a minimum of ten minutes before an audience (not including practice), or produce some equivalent combination of writing and oral presentation.
- Prior to submitting the polished prose or performing the formal presentation, students must receive instructor and peer feedback and guided revision from drafts or practice sessions.
• For at least one writing or formal speaking assignment, students must construct an argument, and they must summarize, quote, paraphrase, and synthesize source material in support of that argument.

**Student Learning Objectives:**

Students should demonstrate their ability to

• analyze the content and structure of complex texts (written, oral, and/or visual in nature);
• compose cogent, evidence-based arguments;
• summarize, quote, paraphrase, and synthesize source material in support of an argument;
• employ drafting, peer review, and revision techniques in order to improve content, style, and structure of their own writing or speaking; and
• appraise their own communication abilities and processes through critical reflection.