

GEOC Annual Report for 2023-24 Academic Year

Overview of Process

Thanks to the engagement of faculty across all Units on campus, the hard work of the review committees, and the support of the deans and the Office of the Provost, the University is in good shape to meet our Fall 2024 launch date for the new General Education (GenEd) curriculum. There are sufficient course offerings available across all the GenEd categories to meet the needs of the current SU students and incoming students. Signature Outcome courses (Civic & Community Engagement, Environmental Sustainability, and Diversity & Inclusion) and Experiential Learning courses remain low, but incoming students will not need these courses immediately.

This year's work by GEOC and the GEOC Advisory Subcommittees has focused on identifying best practices for course proposal review and communicating the recommendations in clear and transparent ways. Specifically, GEOC has advocated for inclusion of notes, comments, completed rubrics, etc directly into Curriculog such that decisions and justifications for decisions are communicated openly. This has required learning more about the nuances of Curriculog. While each subcommittee has developed their own mechanisms for communicating requests for revision and providing feedback, all subcommittees now include information in Curriculog at the time that they make their recommendations to GEOC.

Successes

We have seen exceptional engagement from the faculty as evidenced by the number of attendees at the GenEd continuing education events and the number of course proposals submitted. All Units (except the Libraries, although Library faculty serve on GEOC and Advisory Subcommittees) have submitted course proposals and, as evidence that the 2024 GenEd curriculum is removing silos, there is increased diversity of departments submitting in various GenEd categories. The overwhelming response from faculty to this process is excitement for what the new GenEd curriculum brings to our students and gratitude for the help the review process has provided in creating stronger courses.

The most striking example of faculty engagement and the positive impact our students will experience can be found in the First Year Seminar (FYS) courses. Through the unbelievable lift of the FYS Advisory Subcommittee, 43 new FYS course proposals were approved this year. As a result, SU has 38 FYS sections being offered in fall for incoming first year students. These FYS sections will be taught by 28 faculty from sixteen departments, representing Fulton, Henson, Seidel, Perdue, and CHHS. More than any other, the FYS Advisory Subcommittee should be recognized and commended for their exceptional work, attention to detail, consistency of review, and clear communication of recommendations.

Challenges

This increased engagement has not been without cost. Some faculty have not been happy that their courses were not immediately approved. They have expressed disappointment in the process and anger at being asked to explain how their course aligns with the GenEd category

criteria. Some have even implied that the review process has infringed on their academic freedom. GEOC would like to respond to those allegations by pointing to the evidence of the review process in Curriculog. Of the close to 300 courses reviewed, GEOC has only rejected two. All decisions are accompanied by justification for the decision and actionable requests in the revision process. At no time has GEOC or any subcommittee indicated that a faculty member could not teach the course they proposed in the way that they wanted. Rather, we have said that the faculty must demonstrate how their course will teach to and assess the GenEd SLOs if they want it to be included in the GenEd course offerings. That is, as the SU faculty agreed by voting to support this GenEd curriculum and the GEOC Standing Rules, each course must align with the GenEd criteria. For some proposals the GEOC or subcommittees have had to ask for clarification if we cannot understand how the course proposed aligns with the approved rubrics and criteria. This is not in any way an infringement on academic freedom and to characterize it as such is unacceptable and dishonest. Repeated mischaracterizations of committee review have slowed the process and discouraged future faculty from serving in these crucial review roles. (Note: when deliberate and forming a pattern across multiple interactions, mischaracterizations of faculty or committee work is a form of bullying, according to the USM Policy on Professional Conduct and Workplace Bullying.)

To address some of the concerns that have been raised anonymously, GEOC will add to the Frequently Asked Questions section of our webpage (<https://www.salisbury.edu/administration/academic-affairs/general-edu-oversight-committee/>). One specific example is the question of whether FYS courses can be submitted as Shell Courses where multiple faculty members would teach the same topic with alternate syllabi. Shell Courses have proved a viable mechanism for COMAR requirements. While it is the case that a FYS topic could be supported by multiple faculty, there was no clear plan for what the standards of topics would be until proposals were received, and very quickly in the review process we realized that FYS proposals need to be identified by their topic and that aligned materials need to indicate each proposing faculty's design (even if multiple courses have a theme in common). Even if it were the case that some sort of common theme or approach could be identified by a group of faculty, each faculty member would, at a minimum, need to submit their own proposal so that alignment with program goals and SLOs could be evaluated. In effect, the value of a Shell would be minimal if not nonexistent. A diversity of distinctive FYS topics is desirable and necessary to meet GenEd programmatic goals. Therefore, GEOC has required that each faculty member submit their own proposal for inclusion in the GenEd curriculum, even though it is completely permissible for faculty to share resources (e.g. assignments, syllabi, rubrics, etc).

Committee Workload

GEOC held regular meetings with almost perfect attendance of members at those meetings every Friday, with only a few exceptions. We routinely met for 1.5 hours per meeting with time for discussion, planning, hearing faculty concerns, and consideration/deliberation on course proposals. Meeting agendas for these meetings can be found in Curriculog. More detailed notes are available in the GEOC Teams OneDrive archive. Going forward, it seems reasonable that GEOC will routinely meet every other week.

Plans for the Next Year

During this past year GEOC requested help from UARA and the Faculty Senate’s University Academic Assessment Committee (UAAC) to draft the final section of the GEOC Standing Rules on assessment of the GenEd curriculum. We have the beginnings of a plan to assess at the University level (pre/post assessment through targeted GullWeek assessments required of students in FYS and Experiential Learning courses). We also have requested that ID&D continue to explore the potential to generate course-level outcomes in Canvas (MyClasses) to give faculty the opportunity to align assignments and assessments with GenEd SLOs in their courses. These are the building blocks for the GenEd assessment plan and formalizing the assessment process will be the focus of GEOC work early in the Fall 2024 semester.

GEOC needs to consider formally adding review of course transfer requests for Signature Outcomes (Civic and Community Engagement, Diversity & Inclusion, and Environmental Sustainability) to the GEOC duties. Currently course transfer requests that require evaluation are sent to the appropriate department for faculty review. Since the Signature Outcomes do not have a departmental “home” it seems likely that GEOC should assume this role, but this will require a modification of the GEOC duties from the Faculty Senate.

With the recurring issues of difficulty filling GEOC Advisory Subcommittee vacancies, GEOC will also begin discussions with faculty/departments to determine if the "editorial model" failed the all-faculty vote on its merits, or if better communication/clarification of the model might make a return to the Faculty Senate a reasonable path forward.

GEOC By-the-Numbers:

of meetings: 21 meetings

CATEGORY	# proposals reviewed (23-24)	# approved (total to date)
SIGNATURE COURSES AND SEPTEMBER 2023 DEADLINE		
Civic and Community Engagement	2	5
Diversity and Inclusion	19	28
Environmental Sustainability	13	13
First Year Seminar	45 (1 reject)	46
Experiential Learning	19 (1 reject)	24
Personal Wellness	3	3
COMAR COURSES (MARCH 2023 DEADLINE)		
Communicating through Writing	0	2
Human Expression	33	49
Humanity in Context	18	26
Social Configurations	20	34
Social Issues	17	29
Hands-on Science	1	14
Solutions through Science	5	20
Quantitative Analysis	5	7
Total	200	300

Note: # of proposals does not count expedited reviews for additional topics of shell courses and is only current as of 05242024.

Respectfully submitted: Jennifer F. Nyland, BIOL, 21-24, Henson, chair GEOC

GEOC Committee Members:

Thomas Lamey, RESP, 23-26, CHHS

Mike Lewis, ENVR, 23-26, Fulton

Stephen Ford, LIBR, 22-25, Library

Khashayar Khazeh, ECON/FINA, 22-25, Perdue

Konstantine Kyriacopoulos, ECED/ELED, 21-24, Seidel

Ex officio Members:

Melissa Boog

Martin Hunter

Kara Raab

Joerg Tuske (designated senator)