A Faculty Guide to Submitting Courses for Certification for General Education (GE)

1. What courses are appropriate for GE?

The new General Education requirements focus on students' acquisition of knowledge and their attainment of abilities at a foundational level. By design, the NCAS/UCN GE learning goals correspond closely to the fundamental goals of a liberal arts curriculum and, thus, virtually all the courses we offer, not simply GE courses will, in some measure, advance student achievement of some of these goals. However, it is quite clear that the faculty intention is to get rid of long laundry lists of courses that fulfill various disciplinary requirements and instead focus on the attainment of particular abilities at the same time that students are acquiring knowledge in several disciplines. Generally speaking, the following working principles are consonant with the aims and assumptions of the Committee on the Future of Undergraduate Education (FUE) and its successor committees, whose work led to the proposed new curriculum that the FASN faculty has approved:

a. Courses certified as satisfying GE requirements should be accessible to a wide range of students and equip students to function as lifelong learners, global citizens, and productive members of society.
   i. Generally, certified courses will be at the 100- or 200-level. Courses will not be certified for GE when students will necessarily have already met the proposed GE learning goals by taking the prerequisite courses.
   ii. Typical introductory courses may not achieve these purposes in disciplines where the central purpose of the introductory course is to equip students to specialize in the discipline. Such courses may need to be supplemented by specially designed general education courses if the department wishes to teach in the general education curriculum at all.

b. Courses certified for GE requirements must have the relevant GE learning goals front and center in their design. The relevant GE learning goals should be highlighted on the first page of the syllabus, maximizing transparency for students and for the GEC.
   i. The assumption of FUE and its successors was that many of introductory courses that satisfied the old General Education requirements also will fulfill the new GE goals well, while many others either could be made to do so or could be made to do so better with just a little thought and effort. Apart from perhaps facilitating departmental reflection on and GEC review of courses, highlighting GE goals on a course syllabus also helps to communicate to students the centrality of the course to NCAS/UCN General Education as well as reinforcing for them the value and purpose of the GE requirements as a whole.
   ii. Courses will only be certified when they met the learning goal(s) every time they are offered irrespective of instructor, section, semester, or particular topic of focus.
      1. “Topics” courses usually are offered at the 300- or 400-level and thus may not be suitable as satisfying the GE requirements in general. In cases where departments have a compelling reason for advancing such a course for certification, the course in question will need to be designed to fulfill the GE goals every time it is offered, regardless of the specific “topic” covered.

b. Courses certified for GE must include an assessment plan. The issue is not whether the course does the activity listed in the learning goal, but rather whether the students in the course, on the whole and for the most part, know what the syllabus says they will know and can do what the syllabus says they will be able to do upon completion of the course.
   i. Quite simply, assessment of student learning outcomes, and, in particular, general educational learning outcomes, is a non-optional part of today's higher education environment. This is one of the very few areas, furthermore, where the Middle States evaluation team specifically suggested the need for improvement at Rutgers as a whole,1 and the University has committed

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1 “The University should continue working on the assessment program for general education – the University should complete its
ii. FASN is committed to the employment of authentic, minimally invasive, efficient, and valid assessment tools suited to our specific learning goals. While grading (evaluation and rank ordering of individual students) and assessment (documenting the extent to which the course achieves its learning goals) are analytically distinct, useful and valid assessment tools can often be developed out of and incorporated into standard methods of evaluating/grading students. It is completely appropriate, for example, for departments to conduct assessments by periodically evaluating a random sample of students’ work. The accompanying document, “A Very Brief Faculty Guide to Assessment,” is meant to provide a short, operational orientation to program-level assessment in higher education and may be helpful in constructing general education assessment plans. Numerous disciplinary (and interdisciplinary) professional organizations also have developed assessment tools that can be adopted or modified for use in NCAS/UCN.

iii. An assessment plan should identify what, when, and how goals will be assessed within the department(s) offering the course, and how the department will summarize and report the outcomes of the assessment to the NCAS/UCN GE Requirements Committee.

1. In cases where a department plans to offer multiple courses meeting similar GE goals, it may be perfectly reasonable for the department to assess the course outcomes together, so that only a single assessment plan would need to be submitted for all of the courses together.

2. How will the GEC decide whether to certify a course for GE?

At the time the course is first proposed to the GEC, the presentation of clear evidence that the course is designed to achieve in a substantive manner relevant GE goals and the inclusion of a plan for assessing student achievement of relevant GE goal(s) will be considered as demonstrating that the course meets the relevant goals and thus may be used to satisfy a GE requirement.

The GEC will then ask departments for periodic reports of the results of the departmental assessments, but no more frequently than according to the timeline specified in the assessment plan that the department originally submitted to the GEC for the course. Assessment reports will be reviewed and when the assessment results suggest that GE goals are not being met, the GEC will consult with the department. If, upon further consultation and review with the department, assessment results continue to suggest that the GE goals for the course are not being met, the GEC may recommend that the course no longer be able to satisfy the GE requirement.

3. What do I have to do to get a course certified for the new NCAS/UCN GE?

To submit a new or existing course for certification in GE, instructors should consult with their Chairs, Vice-Chairs, or Undergraduate Directors (as appropriate). Once the department endorses the instructor’s request (via departmental curriculum committee or other internal process), the Chair, Vice-Chair, or Undergraduate Director will file a syllabus and attached memo with the GEC for review. After that review, the GEC will report its recommendations to the FASN faculty, which will vote on them. This is the same process FASN uses for reviewing new courses, changes in courses, and changes in Majors and Minors, except that those requests go through the FASN Courses of Study committee.

The sample syllabus that is submitted should include, at the very least, the course number & title,
course description, the specific learning outcomes for the course (not just the GE outcomes), possible texts and other course materials, and a sample schedule of readings and assignments. (Because it is a sample syllabus, it need not include all the elements of a typical syllabus, such as grading policy, and so forth.) The memo should highlight the particular course learning outcomes that also are GE outcomes (or, at the very least, how some achievement of some of the former substantively contributes to the achievement of the latter), specify the assessment plan, and outline current scheduling plans (how often does the department expect to offer the course with how many sections with what enrollment caps).