

**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**

**REVIEW OF GENERAL EDUCATION**

**2003-2004 ACADEMIC YEAR**

## SCHOOL OF EDUCATION REVIEW OF GENERAL EDUCATION REPORT

The review of the General Education (GEDU) in the School of Education was carried out by the General Education Review Task Force. Patricia Busk was appointed as chair of the Task Force by Acting Dean Larry Brewster. The members of the Task Force were the members of the General Education Advisory Council (GEAC; see Appendix A for the Role and Responsibilities of the GEAC and the mission statement). Members of the GEAC for 2003-3004 academic year are as follows: Lana Andrews, Deborah Bloch, Robert Burns, Judy Goodell, Sr. Jeanne Hagelskamp, S.P., and Miguel Lopez, chair of GEAC.

The review began with an evaluation of the Mission statement, Role and Responsibilities of the GEAC, and 5-year Priorities (see Appendix A). No changes were deemed necessary for any of the documents. The history of the GEDU in the School of Education was compiled (see Appendix B). General Education courses are required for some MA students and all doctoral students. At the MA level, there are only two courses that students select to take one or the other in preparation for their thesis or field project: 0704603 Methods of Educational Research and 0704605 Practitioner Research. At the doctoral level, students are required to complete courses in two areas: foundation courses and methodology courses. One course is required from the foundation courses: Philosophical Foundations of Education, Anthropology of Education, Sociology of Education Psychological Foundations of Education, Law and Education, and Foundations of Linguistics in Education. Methodology courses consist of an introductory research methods course, an introductory statistics course, and an advanced research course (see Appendix A for Memo regarding types of courses that constitute GEDU curriculum). Students select one course from several courses that constitute the Advanced Research Courses: Advanced Statistics, Analysis of Variance Designs, Survey Research, Qualitative Research in Education, Educational and Psychological Measurement, Anthropological Research in Education, Program Evaluation, Ethnicity and Multicultural Issues in Research, Correlational Designs, Meta-analysis, and Participatory Critical Pedagogy Research. Some of the GEDU courses are used by departments for the portfolio review process (see Appendix A). Also Research Methods in Education and Applied Educational Statistics are prerequisites for Proposal Seminar.

When the doctoral program in the School of Education was begun, General Education was the responsibility of each department or program, that is, department faculty taught the General Education courses for their students. No one was responsible for scheduling the courses. Over the years, the departments were no longer able to offer the required courses for their own students. General Education was the topic of a retreat in 1990 and later of a task force that made recommendations, which eventually resulted in the formation of GEAC in 1995. There is no General Education department or faculty associated with General Education. Faculty who teach GEDU courses are members of the departments that comprise the School of Education. In addition to teaching courses within their departments, faculty members teach GEDU courses. There is no budget for General Education, but members of the GEAC are represented on the SOE Curriculum Committee and the Committee of Chairs.

The Task Force proposed the following activities for the review: focus group of current students in the doctoral program; survey of doctoral students enrolled in departmental dissertation courses (709, 729, 790, and 791); survey of alumni who had graduated in the past two years; survey of MA students who were enrolled in thesis or field-project course; survey of

the faculty in the School of Education; an evaluation of the sequence of GEDU course taking by doctoral students; an evaluation of syllabi for GEDU courses taught during the 2003-2004 academic year; an inspection of the cycle of GEDU courses offered; and an review of the course participation by major or department. For assistance with the focus group and surveys, the chair of the Task Force contacted Susan Prion, assistant to the Provost for Academic Affairs. She agreed to conduct the focus group and conduct the surveys using the World Wide Web, whereas the members of the Task Force developed the questions for the focus group and the surveys.

The remainder of the report focuses on the results of the review activities. Recommendations are provided in bold type for each of the review activities.

**Focus Group:** Graduate Student Association (GSA) president was contacted during the Fall semester to schedule a date to hold the focus group. As the GSA is composed of members from all of the doctoral departments, members of the Task Force decided that we would have the best representation of the students in the doctoral program to ask questions about how the GEDU courses prepared them for the portfolio process, which is to be completed after the student is admitted conditionally into the doctoral program. Students complete the portfolio process after 12 to 15 units of coursework. The GSA meets during the lunch hour on Saturdays of the doctoral weekends. The second full doctoral weekend was selected for the focus group (Feb. 21). Handouts announcing the focus group and the questions were distributed during the meeting on the First Doctoral Saturday (Jan. 24; see Appendix C). Due to a change in policy of providing lunch for the GSA members, only 4 students were present for the focus-group interview on Feb. 21. Susan Prion decided not to conduct the interview, because the students were all from the same department. With the provision that lunch would be provided and a rescheduling of the speaker for the next meeting, the focus-group interview was scheduled for the next doctoral Saturday (March 6). Again there was a mix up with the food for the meeting, and students went in search of lunch so that the interview did not take place again. Given that the schedule was set for the rest of the semester for the GSA meetings, the focus-group interview was not feasible. The members of the GEAC had thought that the questions regarding the portfolio could be assessed by the alumni survey and of the students enrolled in the dissertation courses (709, 729, 790, and 791). **Recommendation:** If focus-group interviews are to be conducted during the lunch hour, lunch must be provided so that there will be an adequate number of students attending the session.

**Survey of Students Enrolled in Dissertation Courses:** At the end of March and using USF email accounts, Susan Prion emailed 128 doctoral students enrolled in 709 (Proposal Seminar), 729 (Proposal Seminar), 790 (Proposal Development), and 791 (Dissertation Writing) requesting their participation in an online survey (see Appendix D for email message and online survey). The students were provided with a link to the survey that was hosted by a third party. USF email addresses were the only addresses that were available for contacting students. Students enrolled in 709 and 729 have on-campus classes during the semester, but students enrolled in 790 and 791 work individually with their dissertation committees and do not have regular class meetings. Hence the reason for the online survey.

Students rated the four GEDU courses that they took, indicated the semester that they enrolled in the courses, commented on how the GEDU courses prepared them for their department's portfolio requirement, for their major courses, and for the dissertation process and

indicated strengths of the GEDU requirements and any changes that they would recommend. Additional questions were asked regarding class size and examples provided in the courses.

Frequencies of responses to the survey questions can be found in Appendix E. Twenty-seven responses were recorded for the survey, but only 25 were complete. The response rate is 20%, with the following responses by department: 2 of 15 from PSA and CSL, 6 out of 36 from IME, 12 out of 26 from L&I, 5 out of 45 from O&L, and 0 out of 6 from CPSY. Over 50% of the respondents were enrolled in 790, with an additional 11% enrolled in 791. There was one respondent enrolled in 729 and 6 enrolled in 709. Thus the majority of responses to the survey came from students who were not on campus.

Ratings for the four courses were mainly Excellent or Good with all but 15% providing these ratings for Applied Educational Statistics, 7% for Research Methods, 11% for the Foundation courses, and 7% for the Advanced Research courses. Eight-five percent of the respondents cited that the classes were the right size and that their learning was not negatively impacted by the size of the class. All but one student responded that faculty gave them the attention that they needed in the GEDU classes. Three quarters of the respondents indicated that the faculty teaching the GEDU courses provided examples in their program areas, and two-thirds indicated that the faculty answered questions about research in their program areas.

Almost 60% of those dissertation students responded that they took their Research Methods in the first year of their doctoral program, whereas more than 60% of the students took the first three semesters to complete the Applied Statistics class. Forty-five percent of the students responded that they took Applied Statistics before Research Methods as recommended by the GEAC (see Appendix F for suggested guidelines for Advisors). Only 18% of the respondents indicated that they took both courses at the same time, which leaves 30% of the students taking Research Methods before Applied Statistics. Almost 50% of the respondents had taken the Foundations course in their first semester, with 80% completing this requirement with the first three semesters. The taking of the Advanced Research course was spread out across semesters two to six.

The responses to the survey questions were crosstabulated by department (see Appendix E). The numbers in the departments are small, and no differences were found by department.

Responses to the open-ended statements (see Appendix G) were coded as positive, negative, statement of fact, and suggestion or recommendation. The chair and another member of the Task Force coded separately, which resulted in 84% agreement. Disagreements were resolved by discussion of the response until consensus was reached. Fifty-four percent of the comments were positive, 20% statements of facts, 17% recommendations, and 9% negative comments.

A summary of the responses to the each open-ended question follows. Twenty-one students made comments or statements of fact (57%) and positive (43%) and negative (10%) statements when asked about how the GEDU courses related to fulfilling their department's portfolio requirements. Twenty-two individuals provided comments to the question about how the GEDU courses helped prepare them for and complete the dissertation process, with 82% positive statements, 14% negative comments, and 32% statements of fact. Twenty-three responses were provided about the strengths of the GEDU requirements: 87% positive statements, 17% statements of fact, and 9% recommendations. With regard to changes that the students would make concerning GEDU courses, 22 students gave recommendations, positive (13%) and negative (18%) comments, and statements of fact (9%). There was no overlap in the recommendations that were made, that is, individual comments did not make suggestions that

were the same or about the same aspect of GEDU curriculum. Thirteen individuals gave additional comments about GEDU curriculum, as with the responses to the changes that the students would make there was no way to group the comments into categories for possible change.

**Recommendation:** The responses to the open-ended items should be reviewed during the Fall 2004 semester by members of the GEAC. If items relate more to a department than to GEDU, then that information will be discussed with the department chairs. Class size was not indicated to be a problem. GEAC should review enrollment data to assess the class sizes of previous semesters and monitor class in the future. Advising guidelines may need to be revised in light of course-taking patterns and portfolio requirements.

**Survey of Thesis or Field Project MA Students:** Similar questions were given to students who were working on a thesis or field project for an MA degree. An online survey was constructed and used as these students were not meeting as a group on a regular basis for an in-person survey. One-hundred-eighteen USF email addresses were obtained for these students. On April 24, the students were sent an email message requesting their participation in an online survey (see Appendix H) and were provided the link to the survey that was hosted by a third party. Eighteen responses were received and analyzed. Respondents were from all but one of the nine programs listed. No one responded from Educational Technology (ETK). It may be that these students were surveyed by their department as it was being reviewed at the same time as GEDU. Of those responding, 14 indicated that they had taken ED 603 (Methods of Educational Research) and only 2 had taken ED 605 Practitioner Research. Fifteen students found the courses as Very Helpful or Somewhat Helpful, and only one student selected Neither Helpful nor Unhelpful. Of the 16 students responding to the question about class size, all but one student selected Just Right and that the size of the class did not negatively affect their learning. Seven students responded yes that faculty in the GEDU courses provided examples related to their program areas, whereas 6 responded no and 3 did not remember. The same numbers responded in the same manner to the question about GEDU faculty answering questions citing research in their program area. Eleven students provided suggestions about what they would change about course requirements and scheduling of the GEDU research course that they took. Only 3 individuals provided extra comments about the GEDU course (see Appendix H).

**Recommendation:** Sample size of respondents is small and most of the responses were positive. GEAC members should consider suggestions made about changes in course requirements and scheduling of GEDU research courses.

**Alumni Survey:** An online survey also was used for alumni. On April 23, 208 letters were mailed by SOE Dean's office personnel to individuals who graduated from the doctoral program in the last 2 years (see Appendix I for the letter). The letter contained the URL for the survey that was hosted by a third party. The addresses of the alumni were supplied by Alumni Relations. Questions for the survey were the same as those used for the students enrolled in the dissertation courses (see Appendix I). Twenty-four individuals responded to the electronic survey, with 4 alumni from Catholic Education Leadership, 6 from International and Multicultural Education, 6 from Learning and Instruction, and 8 from Organization and Leadership (Appendix J).

Ratings for the four courses were mainly Excellent or Good with all but 13% providing these ratings for Applied Educational Statistics and for Research Methods, 22% for the

Foundation courses, and 11% for the Advanced Research courses. Ninety percent of the respondents cited that the classes were the right size and that their learning was not negatively impacted by the size of the class. All but one student responded that faculty gave them the attention that they needed in the GEDU classes. Eighty-four percent of the respondents indicated that the faculty teaching the GEDU courses provided examples in their program areas, and 75% indicated that the faculty answered questions about research in their program areas. These responses are similar to those of the doctoral students enrolled in the dissertation courses.

**Recommendation:** The information regarding General Education from the surveys is useful for planning and curricular decisions, but it is limited by the small number of respondents. Responding to a survey about General Education would not have the same recognition and motivation as would a survey about a student’s or alumnus’ department. In the future, questions about General Education should be included in surveys conducted by departments for their program reviews.

**Survey of Sequence of GEDU Courses:** Transcripts were obtained for students who began their doctoral programs in Fall of 2000 and Fall of 2001. These students should have completed their GEDU coursework and came under the portfolio review requirement. Only students who were enrolled in Spring 2004 semester were included in the analyses. This review was undertaken to assess the actual course taking patterns for students given portfolio requirements of departments (see Appendix A) and the recommendations to advisors regarding sequencing of Applied Educational Statistics (704706) and Research Methods in Education (704708) and the Foundation course (see Appendix F). The results were tabulated by department. Only Applied Educational Statistics and Research Methods in Education are offered in the Summer Term. None of the students in Catholic School Leadership (CSL) department took their GEDU courses in the Summer session. For students in the International and Multicultural (IME) department, 68% (n = 24) took Applied Educational Statistics and 41% (n = 15) took Research Methods in Education during the Summer session. Only 5 Learning and Instruction (L&I) students or 31% took Applied Educational Statistics in the Summer. The percentages for Organization and Leadership (O&L) students are 28% (n=13) for Applied Educational Statistics and 35% (n= 16) for Research Methods in Education. The breakdown by department of sequence of taking 706 and 708 is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Breakdown by Department of Sequence of Taking 706 and 708			
Department	706 before 708	708 before 706	Both Same Time
CSL	1	5	2
IME	7	22	7
L&I	19	3	0
O&L	27	11	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>16</b>

The majority of students (49%) followed the recommended sequence of taking 706 before 708. This sequence was followed by the majority of L&I (86%) and O&L (60%) doctoral students, whereas the majority of CSL (63%) and IME (61%) students took 708 before 706.

**Recommendation:** Given the portfolio requirements are varied by department, course sequencing recommendations should take these requirements into consideration and may be modified. The rationale for the recommendation behind the ordering of the two GEDU courses is that the students would have a better chance of reading and understanding the results section of research articles if they took Applied Statistics first.

The breakdown by department of which semester students took their GEDU courses is provided in Table 2. The pattern of course taking is varied by department.

Table 2

Course	Semester							Summer
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 or more	
<b>CSL</b>								
Foundation	0	2	2	6	0	0	0	0
706	2	4	1	2	0	0	0	0
708	5	2	1	1	0	0	0	0
Ad. Res.	0	1	4	3	2	0	0	0
<b>IME</b>								
Foundation	18	4	1	10	2	0	2	0
706	2	3	20	5	5	3	0	24
708	15	5	13	2	2	0	0	15
Ad. Res.	0	3	2	7	14	4	8	0
<b>L&amp;I</b>								
Foundation	18	4	1	0	0	0	0	0
706	16	2	3	1	0	0	0	5
708	2	15	2	4	0	0	0	0
Ad. Res.	0	2	13	4	4	0	0	0
<b>O&amp;L</b>								
Foundation	21	8	4	3	3	3	2	0
706	11	12	10	7	3	1	3	13
708	8	8	13	9	4	4	0	16
Ad. Res.	0	1	2	8	12	8	4	0

**Evaluation of GEDU Course Syllabi:** Course syllabi were requested from faculty who taught GEDU courses during the 2003-2004 academic year. Information was compiled for the following: texts used, calendar of readings and assignments, goals and objectives provided, method of evaluation indicated, contact information, and headings (General Education, Course name, course number, and term). All syllabi contained information on texts used, calendar of readings and assignments, goals and objectives, and contact information. Only one syllabus did not have information about how the students would be evaluated. Regarding headings, two of the syllabi were not identified as General Education courses, one syllabus did not have the course

number as part of the heading, and all syllabi had the course name and term as a heading. Additional comments are provided about the syllabi (see Appendix K).

**Recommendation:** Course syllabi should be provided to the Dean's office for possible review by students and future reviews and that the appropriate individual within the Dean's office request and monitor the submission of the course syllabi from faculty. Periodically the faculty should be reminded by the GEAC chair to include the heading of General Education on their course syllabi, and the syllabi should be review to assess the compliance with this request.

**Cycle of GEDU Courses Offered:** Appendix L contains a copy of the GEDU courses when offered. Only three courses are offered every semester and during summer session. Two other courses are offered every semester with all but three of the remaining courses offered every Fall, Spring, or other year.

**Recommendation:** GEAC should continue to monitor the cycle of courses to asses whether departmental and student needs are being met. GEAC should investigate the three courses that have not been offered within the last 3 years.

**Course Participation by Major or Department:** A breakdown of course participation by major or department was compiled for GEDU courses beginning in Spring 2000 and ending with Spring 2004 (Appendix M). The pattern of participation varies from one semester to the next and from one year to the next. Students tend to cluster in the Foundation and Advanced Research course that reflect the objectives of their department or program.

**Recommendation:** As long as the content of the courses do not focus on department material but educational content that is relevant to those in education, then those courses should be retained as GEDU courses. If an instructor requests a departmental prerequisites, then the GEAC members should review to decide whether such a prerequisite is necessary and whether the course is consistent with General Education goals.