

The New General Studies Program: Data-informed Decision Making

Introduction

The new General Studies program was formally implemented in Fall 2015 with a new curriculum and new program number. The new program refines the degree to a flexible, guided degree that allows students to meet personal, career, and academic goals while fulfilling transfer requirements. The new curriculum emphasizes intentional choices, reflection, and integration of learning to provide a cohesive learning experience. While the degree still incorporates a great degree of choice, it provides a more cohesive learning experience through the core structure and the explicit decisions that students need to make throughout the degree. Additionally, the creation of an academic leadership team to provide oversight and leadership for the program has created an organizational structure that facilitates outcomes focused and data-based decision making for the program.

Since the implementation of the new program and leadership team, several important initiatives have taken place based on data and observation of the program and program goals. Assessment of this program is of paramount importance, and so the College has taken a three-stage approach.

Short Term (Fall 2015- Summer 2017)

- Identify and access existing data sources (enrollment patterns, success, retention, and completion rates)
- Analyze and evaluate existing data
- Design benchmarks, interventions, and initiatives designed to enhance student success, retention, and completion.

Midterm (Beginning Fall 2017)

- Implement initial assessment plan focused on existing data sources: Gen Ed data comparisons (Fall 2017)
- Develop new data sources such as survey of faculty practices and SLO assessment of non-Gen Ed, 200 level courses (Fall 2017-Spring 2018))
- Establish Gen Studies assessment teams (2017-2018)
- Design General Studies specific rubrics (2017-2018)
- Establish regular General Studies Specific Data reports (Fall 2017)

Long Term (In Progress)

- Implement eportfolio for General Studies to enhance student achievement of the program goals and outcomes and create a more sustainable, meaningful assessment option.

This white paper will focus specifically on how data has been used between Fall 2015 and Spring 2017 to shape benchmarks, initiatives and recommendations for the General Studies programs. The mid-term assessment plan can be found in the General Studies program review, and the General Studies ePortfolio pilot can be found in the ePortfolio proposal and phase one update and overview.

Data-informed Decision Making

The implementation of the new curriculum for General Studies included a shift to new program numbers, so all students following the new program can be readily identified by their core. Each new core allows for an

interdisciplinary student of related disciplines where the old program had no way to distinguish what academic pathways a student might be interested in within the General Studies umbrella. Data has been an integral part of informing our work in General Studies in the following ways: setting completion benchmarks, program progresses benchmarks and intervention points, and recommendations for changes to the program structure.

Five Year Completion Targets

With the implementation to the new program, five-year completion targets were developed so that we could track and monitor student progress and program success. For General Studies, those five year targets are:

Program	Current Enrollment	5- year target	Current Graduation Totals	5- year Target	Current Transfer Rate	5- year target	Current time to completion	5 year target
General Studies	12,748	10,836 (<15%)	1,018	1,273 (^25%)	1,398	1748 (^25%)	4.1 years	3 years

Based on these targets, we can monitor the progress of smaller cohorts of students based on core as well as an overview of all General Studies students. We expect to be able to draw some better conclusions beginning with Spring 2018's completion and retention data as that will mark 3 years since the implementation of the new degree program and degree codes.

Progress to our 5 Year targets with the new program include:

Program	Current Enrollment	5- year target	Current Graduation Totals	5- year Target	Current Transfer Rate	5- year target	Current time to completion	5 year target
General Studies 15-16***	12032	10,836 (<15%)	1068	1,273 (^25%)	1788	1748 (^25%)	4.3 years	3 years
General Studies 16-17****	8522	10,836 (<15%)	1084	1,273 (^25%)	1705	1748 (^25%)	4.4 years	3 years

*** Year 1 data for the new program, ****Year 2 data for the new program

Enrollment Patterns

English, Math, and Science: An important early data informed project was a review of General Studies student enrollment patterns: what courses General Studies students take in the 15 credit hour, 15-30 credit hours, 31-45 credit hour, and 46-60 credit hours. This data allows us to see the path most General Studies students were taking, historically, in completing their courses. In that review, we found that General Studies students were waiting until their last 15 credits to complete their English foundation courses, math foundation courses, and required science distribution courses. The Math and English course concerns are not only a curriculum concern, since they are foundational courses, but also a concern related to the CCRCCA law which requires that students attempt their required math and English courses within the first 24 credits of course work. Additionally, delaying completion of math courses can delay the completion of science courses, since most of the science courses have

math assessment levels. Delaying the completion of these courses can add semesters to a student's degree completing because of the sequencing required based on assessment levels and pre-requisites. Selected data from the enrollment patterns is included below.

English Foundation

- ENGL 102 (N=2752) 38% of all GS students after 30 credits; 16% of all GS students take ENGL 102 after 45 credits

In contrast, 70% of GS students take ENGL 101 in the first 15 credits.

MATF (Total # of students in sample MATH 110 (1135 students) and 117 (2064 students))

- MATH 110 (N=1135) 68% of all GS students take after 30 credits; 41% of all GS students take after 45 credits
- MATH 117 (N=2064) 71% 30 credits, 47% after 45 credits

NSLD/NSND

- BIOL 101 (N= 1236)- 70% GS students take after 30 credits, 40% of GS students take after 45 credits
- NUTR 101 (N=1065)- 82% GS students take after 30 credits; 58% of GS students take after 45 credits
- BIOL 150-(N=1668) 52% GS students take after 30 credits; 23% of GS students take after 45 credits
- CHEM 131 (N=944)- 82% GS students take after 30 credits, 60% of GS students after 45 credits

Additionally, we intended to use the enrollment patterns to identify key 200 level courses to focus on for assessment, but in that process, we noted that it was difficult to determine a student's intentions in taking many of their courses-- whether the courses were being used to fulfill general education requirements or to reflect the student's academic core selections. Since one goal of the degree was a more cohesive program, we determined that creating a more intentional sequence for students was warranted. However, we did not want to create a rigid academic sequence.

Three key program progress benchmarks were developed based on this review of course enrollment patterns:

1. A program progress benchmark of **completion of math and English Foundation courses in the first 24 credits** has been instituted. This benchmark is communicated to students, faculty, and advisors for General Studies students. Additionally, a recommendation for creating a block or some other intrusive measure has been made as part of our program review process.
2. A program progress benchmark of **completion of at least one course meeting each of the general education program distributions (HUMD, ARTD, BSSD, and NSLD/NSND) by the completion of 30 credits** was instituted. This benchmark is communicated to students, faculty and advisors for General Studies students. Additionally, the General Studies Leadership Team has requested help tracking student achievement of this benchmark and is continuing to explore effective strategies for enforcing this benchmark.
3. A program progress benchmark for completion and updating of a specific General Studies Academic Plan. Specifically, this benchmark calls for students to create a General Studies Academic Plan in their

first 15 credits and for them to update it in 15 credit (or each semester) increments afterwards. A pilot implementation of General Studies Academic Plans will begin in Fall 2017.

Additionally, this review of enrollment patterns, coupled with student feedback, highlighted the need for more concrete guidance for students in completing their degree. As a result, we are developing academic maps, which provide recommendations for specific courses and a sequence of courses focused on specific transfer or program goals for General Studies students. These maps will provide a guiding framework for students to move through the degree and will allow the College to more effectively intervene to support students when necessary.

General Studies Undecided

A second data-informed review includes the General Studies undecided students. As part of the curriculum revision, an undecided option was created. This option allows students to start as undecided in their first 30 credits, but requires them to move to a specific core or other major before completion of 30 credits.

In Fall 2016, there were 1904 students registered as General Studied Undecided (GENU-611Z).

- 7% (135) had completed 30 credits
- 4% (83) had completed over 45 credits

We implemented a process to intervene with these students and found concerns with how students were coded in the system. A number of students past 60 credits had returned to complete a second degree or to complete requirements for a different major for transfer. We also sent letters and asked counselors to work with students to change their majors. Since this was only the second year of implementation of the degree, we decided to explore further.

In Spring 2017, there were 1848 students registered as General Studies Undecided (GENU- 611Z)

- 9% (170) had compiled at least 30 credits
- 4% (81) had compiled over 45 credits

In the spring 2017, we sent letters, developed a GENU advising worksheet, and worked with the counseling department to implement a Starfish flag to notify students of the need to change their major. We have had difficulty tracking the effectiveness of these interventions. Additionally, we note that the impact of financial aid changes and requirements are also impacting our work on GENU. We have made two recommendations as part of our CAR report:

1. Reduce the number of credits or eliminate the undecided option, a curriculum change
2. Create a block for students who exceed the credit limits for the undecided option

Additionally, we will be developing a short guide for GENU students with guidance for course selection and clearly identified benchmarks and decision points. We will make the guide available through the General Studies website, send directly to students on enrollment in GENU, and give to counselors and advisors for working with GENU students.

General Studies Instructional Faculty Advising

In the second year of the implementation of the General Studies program, we instituted General Studies Instructional Faculty advising to complement and expand existing advising services provided by counselors to General Studies students. Based on data collected from the instructional faculty advisors, we found few students were taking advantage of instructional faculty advising; this is counter to the stated requirements of the CCRCCA law that expects every student to have an academic advisor. As a retention and success tool, it is important for students to have ongoing interactions with faculty and staff at the institution; for General Studies' students, this type of connection is even more important since there is so much flexibility and so many ways students can complete the program. As a result, we are creating a more proactive instructional faculty advising initiative where students can request and be matched with an instructional faculty advisor. This initiative does not replace the opportunity for students to seek advising from counseling faculty; instead it provides students an active opportunity to request an advisor and creates a framework for those advisors to reach out to specific students on academic choices, goals, and progress discussions.

Specific elements of this revision include:

- Instructional faculty advisor request form for students to request an instructional faculty advisor
- General Studies specific academic plan
- General Studies Student Planner, a downloadable resource
- General Studies Instructional Faculty Student Advising Kit, a resource for instructional faculty advisors
- “Why Advise”, a standard presentation department chairs and deans can use to solicit instructional faculty for advising

Conclusion

Throughout the implementation of the new General Studies program, data has been used to make decisions and identify areas of improvement or tweaking of the implementation of the new degree program. Unavailability of data has also been used to make recommendations and program changes so that data can be effectively collected. Key institutional benchmarks, program progress benchmarks, programmatic changes, and initiatives have been instituted based on a review of various types of data.