An Interim General Education Program

IT IS HEREBY PROPOSED THAT THE FOLLOWING BE ADOPTED:

1. That the University immediately adopt the General Education program approved by the SUNY Board of Trustees in the Memorandum to Presidents dated May, 2010.
   a. That current and future undergraduate students General Education requirements be those outlined under the “seven of ten rule” and that no other General Education requirements except upper level writing be required.

2. That the bill take effect for all currently enrolled undergraduate students at the University immediately.

3. That this proposal be forwarded to the President for approval.
Rationale: The University at Albany and SUNY are confronting a fiscal crisis. Last January, 2010 the SUNY Board of Trustees afforded campuses and students some relief by significantly streamlining the requirements of the SUNY-Wide General Education Program that the Trustees imposed on all campuses a decade earlier. The intent was to allow institutions more flexibility in constructing a General Education Program that provides a unique experience for students at each institution, while maintaining quality through program assessment at the institutional level.

The opportunity to save valuable instructional resources by retiring a General Education Program that was imposed from above is now available at a time when the University has few palatable options open to it for curricular flexibility. The University is at a unique place in time and history during which it can streamline General Education requirements of the old program. The change to the Trustees’ minima, while retaining upper level writing as the sole “local” requirement, allows the academic units and faculty to concentrate resources on students who need—and want—major and minor courses to graduate. While popular electives can be retained, or even in some cases revived, the streamlining provides students’ additional opportunities to complete second majors, an additional minor, enhance their foreign language training, study abroad, and pursue internships and support coursework that can enhance their prospects for employment or graduate study.

UAlbany owes it to the student body, who we hope will become successful and perhaps generous alumni, and to their families and the taxpayers of New York State to lessen the burden by retiring an unwieldy General Education that in the past decade has forced far too many students to complete extra course-work, take courses over the summer elsewhere, and/or graduate late. Reducing the debt burden for our students and their families is especially appropriate in a time of extreme fiscal stress.

The Task Force on General Education has proposed an alternative model in its December, 2010 report to the University Senate. Several undergraduate major and minor programs have already been mentioned as targets for possible elimination to address current deficits with others possibly to follow. While the efficacy of the alternative model will be discussed formally by the University Senate and its councils for consideration when the University’s financial circumstances allow, students enroll at Albany to find and pursue majors, not General Education. The streamlining of General Education provides the opportunity to ascertain what course space is needed to meet the new SUNY-wide requirements. Once that baseline is known and the finances of the state and SUNY have rebounded to some extent governance will be better able to judge what additional or expanded General Education requirements are feasible and they can be phased in responsibly without jeopardizing major programs, students’ finances and time to degree, or our tenure-track faculty.

In addition to state operated campuses taking best advantage of SUNY’s redefinition of General Education, SUNY community colleges are already assuring their students that the General Education requirements are completed before they transfer. Once they have completed the lower level writing and mathematics and five other of the ten SUNY requirement categories. Currently, upwards of half of our graduating seniors entered the University as transfers. That statistic, plus the latest SUNY concerns that baccalaureate institutions not impose needless impediments to students transferring from SUNY community colleges are among the items University governance needs to consider as it defines our General Education program.

As for UAlbany’s definition in 2000 of the original SUNY-wide General Education, since our other two “local” requirements “U.S. Diversity and Pluralism” and “Global and Cross-Cultural Perspectives” can and often do also meet one or another of the 10 SUNY requirements, any currently matriculated undergraduate at the University who wishes to complete those requirements will be able to do so.