In spring 2010, an external panel reviewed the Core Curriculum and recommended that”

“the University regard this review as a possible point of departure for a thorough reconsideration of how it exercises its commitment to general education. All said, we believe it is time for a campus-wide discussion about the purpose and intent of the Core Curriculum Program, beginning with the question of what knowledge, literacies, and competencies should define a graduate of the University of Nevada, Reno. Discussion could identify student learning outcomes and overarching literacies across the curriculum that would characterize a UNR graduate, rather than on specific disciplines and courses.”

In response, the Provost formed a General Education Task Force with the charge:

“to determine what knowledge, literacies, and competencies should define a graduate of the University of Nevada, Reno, identify related learning outcomes, and identify the alternative means by which the University can offer these learning outcomes for its baccalaureate graduates, in various four-year degree programs, in effective and efficient fashion. A task force will propose the learning outcomes and alternative means of effective and efficient delivery.”

The task force was convened in October, 2010 with representatives from each of the undergraduate colleges on campus (Agriculture, Biotechnology and Natural Resources, Business, Education, Engineering, Health Sciences, Journalism, Liberal Arts, and Science) as well as representatives from the ASUN and the Libraries. The committee met regularly between October and April with the first phase of work culminating in a campus wide survey aimed at beginning the campus-wide discussion of which competencies were of highest priority to students and faculty at UNR. This report summarizes the committee’s discussions leading up to the survey, a review of the survey results, and thoughts on the next appropriate steps.

The committee process was to inform ourselves regarding best practices, approach desired student learning outcomes from the beginning, and then to consider what structures, courses, support services, and co-curricular offerings might be leveraged to accomplish those outcomes.

To inform ourselves of best practices, we began by individually reviewing both internal and external documents. The Core Curriculum External Report, the UNR Core Curriculum Self-
Study, the NSHE core requirements and the UNR Strategic Plan were made available to all task force members. External fact-finding included review of university general education web-sites from peer-institutions, review of literature on general education published through the American Association of Colleges and Universities, conversations with faculty involved in redesigning general education at various campuses across the country (including conversations with members on the external review panel), and conversations with faculty in our own colleges. But, as noted below it would be advisable for the task force to pursue gaining a better understanding of trends in general education across the country and compare these with out existing curriculum.

Task force meetings focused on developing a list of goals/competencies derived from our conversations and research that appeared to be common to many universities. Our list was certainly not exhaustive, but an effort to capture the breadth of competencies considered important within each of the teaching colleges at UNR. The task force also developed short statements defining the intent of each competency. Through ongoing discussions in meetings of the task force, discussions with colleagues in our colleges, and discussions with interested committees (such as the Core Board), the list of competencies and definitions was refined for use as a campus survey. The purpose of the survey was to get input from faculty and students from across the campus concerning their priority for competencies that should be part of the general education.

The survey (Appendix A) was tested by a small user group consisting of faculty and students from each of the teaching colleges as well as the libraries. To the extent possible, comments from the survey were then used to clarify the survey instrument before disseminating it across campus. The survey was created using the Checkbox software and administered through WebCampus. No personal identification information was collected; however basic demographic data were collected, including faculty/student status and college of the participant. The survey was open for a two week period and distributed to all faculty (Academic and Administrative, full-time and part-time) and students (undergraduate and graduate).

Survey Results

Demographic Results
There was an excellent response rate to the survey, particularly among academic faculty and undergraduate students, confirming that there is a great deal of interest in what happens with general education at UNR. At total of 3,442 participants responded to the survey, including 388 Faculty (301 Academic and 87 Administrative), 2,743 undergraduate students, 256 graduate students and 55 other and unknown. At the time of the survey in Spring 2011 there were 949 academic faculty (including all faculty on payroll throughout the state) so that 301 surveys represents a 32% response rate and 687 administrative faculty for a 13% response rate. There
were 12,723 undergrad students for a response rate of 22% and 3,123 graduate students resulting in an 8% response rate. Of the respondents, 8.7% were Academic Faculty and 79.7% were undergraduate students. Faculty and students from within every college participated.

Table 1. Survey respondent numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th># responses</th>
<th>total possible</th>
<th>% response</th>
<th>% of survey respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Faculty</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>949</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Faculty</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>687</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Students</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>3,123</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Students</td>
<td>2,743</td>
<td>12,723</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>79.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>32</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>3,442</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Numeric Results
The complete numeric results for all faculty and students, as well as by college both as raw data and illustrated graphically are attached to this report (link to data here). Here, selected data are presented.

The majority of responses came from Academic Faculty and Undergraduate Students. This seems appropriate since these are the two groups most impacted by the general education. Figure 1 graphs the percentages of academic faculty and undergraduate students who judged the listed competencies to be of ‘high’ importance (given a choice of Low, Medium or High).

Several competencies stand out in this analysis as ranking high both among faculty and students (≥60% of all respondents in each group ranking these as high priority), including Critical Thinking, Integrative Thinking, Written Literacy, Ethics, and Information Literacy. A second group rank in the middle (≥40% but ≤60% ranking these competencies as high priority) including Oral literacy (faculty >60% but students <60%), Citizenship, Technology, Mathematics, Diversity, and Physical and Natural Sciences. A third group generally has both faculty and students with <40% giving this competency a high priority, including Visual literacy (although students were just above 40%), History (although faculty were >40%), Arts (faculty again >40%), Social Science, Financial Literacy, and Foreign Language. Two competencies stand out for having very different responses from faculty and students; Global Awareness (Faculty = 58% and Students = 37%) and Wellness (Students = 48% and Faculty = 29%).
Figure 1. Faculty and undergraduate responses as a percentage of “High” priority.

Figure 2 represents a different way of visualizing the same data. In this analysis, the mean of the percentages from Figure 1 was calculated (Academic Faculty mean = 54.6%; Undergraduate Student mean = 47.8%). The difference from the mean was calculated for each competency and plotted as above or below the mean. This figure also illustrates congruence or incongruence between faculty and students.

For example, there is general agreement between these two groups concerning their prioritization of Critical Thinking, Ethics, Information Literacy and Oral Literacy as “higher” priority,
Citizenship, and Mathematics as “medium” priority, and Arts, Foreign Language and Social Science as generally ‘lower’ priority. Examples of incongruence include Wellness, where faculty consider this a much lower priority than students.

Data by college suggest that faculty and students within a college perceive the priority of different competencies similarly, but different colleges have different priorities. This can be illustrated by comparing CLA (College of Liberal Arts) and COS (College of Science) (Fig. 3).

Figure 3. Faculty and student responses where blue = Faculty of the college specified, Green = undergraduate students from that college, and Red = all other faculty.
In both colleges, there is general agreement among faculty and students that Critical Thinking, Integrative Thinking and Written Literacy are a high priority. There is also general agreement that Financial Literacy and Foreign Languages are of lower priority for general education. But there are distinct differences between the colleges as well. In CLA, both students and faculty place a higher priority on Citizenship and Diversity, and a lower priority on Mathematics and Physical and Natural Sciences, as compared with COS. Similar differences can be noted by examining each of the college’s responses.

**Written Comments**
Space was left on the survey for written comments. When the data were downloaded, all responses >255 characters were truncated by the download software losing some information. All written comments have been placed into an attached Appendix, organized by Faculty/Students and college or unit.

A number of comments support each of the competencies and argue that all are equally important. There were a number of comments making suggestions on how the survey could be improved, or competencies that appeared to have overlap, or that were missing.

In general, while most comments support some levels of the general education over others, there is widespread support for general education. Given the broad range of comments, it is difficult to pull out trends, however as the task force continues its work, these will be a good source of ideas as well as concerns across the campus.

**Committee Recommendations**
A review of other universities efforts to revise their general education found that generally institutions spent multiple years in developing and implementing a new general education curriculum. The committee recognizes the magnitude of this process and the importance of working across the campus to integrate faculty and student ideas. The results of this report are an important step in this dialogue.

Uncertainty related to budget cutting, elimination and downsizing of departments, and discussion of moving to a 120 credit minimum made an open discussion of revising the general education particularly difficult during the spring semester. Written comments included a fair amount of suspicion that the process was associated with either budget cutting or reducing credit hours in the core. There is much more work to do, but the task force felt that they should not reconvene until the Provost feels that the timing is appropriate. Once there is clarity on what the total number of credit hours in a undergraduate degree will be, and the campus culture has stabilized following the next round of budget cuts, the task force should continue its work.
The focus on competencies was consistent with our charge, and provided a focal point. However, there was general consensus that we have still not fully grappled with the goal of general education at UNR, nor fully reviewed the breadth of possibilities reflected in general education reviews being attempted at other universities. One suggestion is that several task force members attend a workshop on general education revision to fully inform ourselves of current trends as part of our review process. The charge asked us to determine knowledge, literacies and competencies for all students graduating from our campus. Our discussions have still not yielded a guiding principle that the general education should adhere to, and this should be among the first tasks when the task force reconvenes.

Knowledge, literacies and competencies represent three different goals of general education. Several ‘competencies’ such as Critical Thinking and Integrative Thinking’ were consistently ranked as a high priority among both faculty and students across all colleges. It would seem clear that this then is a guiding principle that should inform our general education. But these are not related to specific knowledge or even particular literacies. Therefore it would seem that as we move forward, this is an element that needs to be explicitly present in any course meeting the general education requirement, but this competency is not specific to any course.

Several literacies also were indicated as a high priority among both faculty and students, including Written Literacy, Information Literacy, Oral Literacy, and more broadly defined, Ethics. Once again, these literacies cut across all disciplines. How best to incorporate this within the general education is another important topic to discuss.

There was much less consistent agreement on the importance of particular knowledge areas, such as Arts, History, Mathematics, Physical and Natural Sciences, and Social Science. The response as to the priority of these different disciplines varied between colleges, and not surprisingly reflected the specific emphasis within that college. This begins to address to what extent the goal of our general education requirement is to broaden the knowledge base of our students, and possibly more importantly, how extensive that broadening should be. There was general agreement among the task force members, and also articulated in written comments, of the benefits of a broadly educated student. There was also a concern that the breadth be made relevant to one’s field of interest. The goal of what ‘knowledge’ should define a UNR graduate implies courses beyond one’s major. A key discussion moving forward will be to determine whether the current level of knowledge breadth is appropriate for UNR undergraduates, or whether this should be changed, and if so, how? The survey data provide some guidance regarding how students and faculty in different colleges regard certain knowledge areas. We recommend substantial discussion between members of different colleges (perhaps through working groups) on how best to address the goal of ‘knowledge’ within the general education.
The role of assessment of the general education was repeatedly brought up in our discussions. A strong general education plan requires a strong integrated assessment plan. The plan should include no goals or outcomes that cannot be assessed. Assessment requires resources and given the recent elimination of the assessment office, this raises concerns on the potential success of a revised general education. This is a serious problem that will need to be addressed before substantial energy is spent on redesigning the general education.

A number of articles on reviewing general education, as well as the experience of those at institutions who have just completed this work take note that this task cannot be done without resources. There is a substantial time commitment required by members of the task force, as well as the need for support for collecting and analyzing data. This semester, faculty were supported by assistance from Robert Newberry, Sarah Bennett and Jill Wallace with Instructional Design (survey upload and delivery), Arthur Chenin and Serge Herzog with Institutional Analysis (data analysis), Sean Pries, graduate student in Geography, funded by the Department of Geography (data analysis and report writing), and support from COS Dean’s office to assist Scott Mensing. We recognize that resources are tight, but it is unreasonable to expect to complete this task without additional resources for the task force. Thought must be given to this.

Respectfully submitted,

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