MEMO

DATE: January 20, 2006

TO: Program Review Committee

RE: General Education Program Review – Annual Report

**Program Goal**

Five program review goals for the General Education Program were articulated in the original, 2004 program review plan. When the current (initial implementation, fall 2004) GE program was being developed, one of the explicit goals of the revision was that the new program be more coherent and educative. All five program review goals were related to this question. The original goals were to assess:

- The clarity with which the vision of the GE program is communicated in advising sessions and in their GE courses.
- The ways in which the GE program has helped students develop as more well-rounded persons.
- The coherence of the GE program.
- The degree to which and ways in which the individual GE courses address the articulated goals of the GE area(s) the course is approved to satisfy.
- The extent to which the individual GE courses have informed thinking and discussion in other courses.

Subsequently, the goals have been consolidated, sharpened, and operationalized so that:

- Students will understand the overall purpose of the General Education program as evidenced by:
  - Self-reported understanding in the general survey. Initial benchmark: at least 50% report their understanding is at least “OK” and fewer than 25% classify themselves as having “major questions” or worse.
  - Cohort students (see Data section, below) will be able to articulate the purpose of the General Education program. Initial benchmark: Over 50% of essays from the cohort survey will convey a vision of General Education that is aligned with the one given in the General Education document.
- The place of the individual courses within the GE will be effectively communicated to students as evidenced by:
  - Student reporting in general survey. Initial benchmark: At least 40% of students will assign a score of 1 or 2 on a 1-5 scale in response to the question “How well the GE goals were communicated in this course?” and,
when the goals are being communicated well, at least 50% of students will assign a score of 1 or 2 to for the question “How well were those goals accomplished?”

- Cohort students in the course narratives/descriptions. Initial benchmark: At least 30% of responses should clearly identify how the GE goals of the course were articulated and accomplished. The reported goals should coincide with the published GE goals in the course’s area.

- General Education courses (particularly Common Context courses) will be effective in providing background material that will support work in subsequent courses and in dealing with contemporary issues as evidenced by cohort student’s essay responses and reflections on those responses. Benchmark: When prompted, 50% of cohort students will be able to point to specific courses that empowered them to write more cogently on the requested topic in the spring survey.

Since the 2004-2005 academic year is the first year that the current General Education program was in operation, it seemed important to determine whether students were having difficulties with it.

- Students’ experience with the General Education program should be satisfactory as evidenced by their responses to the general survey. Benchmark: Fewer than 25% of students should report having a problematic experience with the GE program.

Data

In the fall of 2004, a group of 25 entering students was selected to form the initial GE cohort. The cohort students agreed to be part of an assessment program in which they would participate in a survey each term probing various aspects of the General Education program. In addition, an electronic survey was sent out to all first-year students (the first set of students operating under the revised GE program) in the spring of 2005. The GE Committee currently has three main sets of data collected since the program began in Fall 2004:

1. Fall 2004 web survey of the GE cohort. (N=18)
   a. Experience with GE program.
   b. Fellow students’ comments.
   c. How then-current courses/instructors aided the understanding GE goals and contributed to the goals. One short essay for each class.
   d. How GE program has helped the respondent’s development.
   e. Persuasive speech: The goal of General Education.

2. Spring 2005 web survey of the GE cohort. (N=17)
   a. Update on GE experience
   b. How then-current courses/instructors aided the understanding GE goals and contributed to the goals. One short essay for each class.
   c. Essay: On the deaths of Pope John Paul II and/or Terri Schiavo
   d. Reflection on how GE courses have equipped the student to write the essay.

   a. Level of understanding of program (i) goals and (ii) requirements.
   b. Experience with GE program.
   c. Primary sources of information about GE program.
   d. For each GE course rate (1-5) how well the GE area goals have been (i) communicated and (ii) attained.
The data can be accessed on the web at
http://www.westmont.edu/_academics/pages/provost/curriculum/GE/Program%20Review%20Data/

**Interpretation**

The General Education Committee devoted the substantial portions of four meetings on Sept. 16, Oct. 28, Dec. 2, 2005, and Jan. 20, 2006 to the discussion of these results. The results of these discussions are outlined below beginning with the data specifically related to the program review goals.

**Program Goal Reflections:**
- Students will understand the purpose of the General Education program as evidenced by
  - Self-reported understanding in general survey.
    **Initial benchmark achieved:** Almost 75% indicated that they understood the requirements “Well” or “OK.” Approximately 24% reported having “Minor Questions” and fewer than 7% indicated that they had “Major Questions” or worse. There was a similar, though more dispersed breakdown (76/14/9%) for their self-reported understanding of the goals.
  - Cohort students will be able to articulate the purpose of the General Education program.
    **Initial benchmark achieved:** Nearly 60% of the GE program review cohort wrote descriptions of the GE program that were aligned or well aligned with the program goals articulated in the GE document. The General Education Committee classified the responses as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>35%</td>
<td>Well aligned with GE document</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24%</td>
<td>Aligned with GE document</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29%</td>
<td>Consistent with GE document</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12%</td>
<td>No vision articulated or inconsistent with GE document</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, the following themes were identified in the students’ essays.

**Individual Oriented**
- Transform individual: 3
- Produce agents of change: 2
- Produce well-rounded individuals: 1
- Spiritual formation/development: 5

**Knowledge Oriented**
- Provide breadth: 7
- Integrate knowledge: 3
- Provide background for other classes/major: 5
- Understand the world: 3
Skill Oriented

2 Support calling
1 Support career
6 Interact effectively with the world/society
2 Develop communication skills
2 Develop thinking/evaluation skills

While the surveyed students may not have a clear understanding of all of the aspects of Westmont’s particular implementation of general education, they do seem at ease with the idea of a general education program, understand that it is part of a Liberal Arts program, and are able to articulate aspects of our implementation that correspond to the structure of general education at Westmont. The level at which the cohort students were able to process the GE program in their first semester was surprisingly good. We will look for a maturing understanding in future surveys.

- The place of the individual courses within the GE will be effectively communicated to students as evidenced by
  - Student reporting in general survey. (Histograms can be found in the appendix at the end of the report.)

**Part 1 of initial benchmark achieved:** At least 40% of students assigned a score of 1 or 2 on a 1-5 scale in response to the question “…how well the GE goals were communicated in this course?” in each of the GE program areas. The percentages ranged from a low of 41% in Doctrine, one of three areas below 50%, to a high of 80% in Philosophical Reflections on Truth and Values, one of three areas above 60%.

**Part 2 of initial benchmark not achieved:** Whatever the students’ understanding of the GE goals of the course, multiple areas had fewer than 50% of students assigning a score of 1 or 2 on a five-point scale for the question “…how well were those goals accomplished?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% 1-2</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Reasoning Abstractly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>Modern Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Quantitative and Analytical Reasoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Physical Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>Life Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>Doctrine *</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Common Context Area

At least 50% of the respondents assigned scores of 1 or 2 for the remaining areas. Several GE areas were rated very highly by students. Common Context areas are well represented in this group.
Not surprisingly, there is a strong correlation between the percentages of students who thought the GE goals of the course were well articulated and the percentage who thought those goals were accomplished. (Pearson R = .81)

Cohort students in the course narratives/descriptions. Initial benchmark achieved: Students responded to the following prompt:

For each new course above, please comment on
a. the ways the course through its syllabus or instruction has (not) helped you understand the goals of the GE
b. the ways in which the course has (not) contributed to these goals.

The responses were classified by how well they corresponded to the goals for the GE area. The results reveal that while students do not perceive faculty as communicating course goals related to the GE program, course activities are generally aligned with the goals of the corresponding GE area.

- 17% Well aligned with GE document
- 46% Aligned with GE document
- 34% Consistent with GE document
- 3% No vision articulated or inconsistent with GE document

In contrast to the overall idea of general education, we have not been particularly effective in communicating how our individual courses fit into the overall scheme of general education. The divergence between this set of responses and the previous set is probably the result of a difference in the seriousness with which the various academic areas are taking their responsibilities to communicate the relationship of their courses to the GE program. It is worth noting that three of the five Common Context areas (in particular Philosophical Reflections) appear on the list of courses for which students are most clear about the relationship between course goals and the general education program. This is gratifying since Common Context courses are specifically charged with the task of introducing students to the Liberal Arts.

Part of the lower ratings in the sciences may be due to the fact that approximately one third of the physical and life science general education sections were taught by adjunct instructors. This may merit closer investigation.

- General Education courses (particularly Common Context courses) will be effective in providing background material that will be effective in supporting work in subsequent courses and in dealing with contemporary issues as evidenced by cohort student’s essay responses and reflections on those responses.
Benchmark achieved: Of the 17 cohort responses, 10 identified specific courses which helped them to respond more effectively to the following prompt: *Write a brief (2-3 paragraph) essay on the deaths of Pope John Paul II and/or Terri Schiavo.* In fact, most students identified multiple courses. The types of courses are recorded in the table below.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Common Context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Common Inquiries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Common Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Four of the students who did not identify a specific course, commented that the GE program in general helped them be better communicators and thinkers. The following three responses were each given by one student: (a) the community context was helpful, (b) the GE program had expanded their world view, and (c) the GE program provided no help in formulating the essay.

Since the 2004-2005 academic year is the first year that the current General Education program was in operation, it seemed important to determine whether students were having difficulties with it.

* Students’ experience with the General Education program should be satisfactory as evidenced by their responses to the general survey. Benchmark achieved: 8 of 89 or fewer that 10% of respondents reported that their experience with the general education program was problematic. A comparison of the sources of information used to select classes used by these eight students vs. the sources used by the remainder of the population is instructive. Students with problematic experiences were twice as likely to have made their course choices based upon other student’s recommendations and much less likely to have based their choices on the catalog or their advisor’s advice (see chart below).

**Other Reflections:**
In the process of reflecting on the collected data, committee members observed that overall, students seem to agree that class syllabi were very explicit and helpful as to why the course fulfilled a GE requirement. On the other hand, they also seemed to agree that the instructors did not verbally articulate in class how their course was relevant to the GE program.

In retrospect, it seems obvious that the general survey should have queried students not only about their sources of information for selecting courses, but also for understanding the general education program. Unfortunately, this was not done. However, by reviewing comments in the cohort surveys, some related themes were identifiable. In order of prominence, the most influential/helpful sources for understanding the goals of GE were:

- The summer freshman orientation and the information handed (but this did not help them choose courses)
- The website
- The catalog
- Syllabi
- Connections made between classes – unity seen in diverse subjects
- The Christian perspective in all courses helped students understand the GE
- The diversity of schedules helped them understand the purpose of GE
- In some classes content made the goals obvious

Some sources were notably missing:

- Advisors, for the most part, helped students to pick the courses to fulfill GE’s, but not to understand the GE program.
- Professors, with a few exceptions, spent no time connecting course material to the GE program
- Upperclassmen, in general, were of little help since the GE program is new

In addition, a review of cohort comments revealed the following responses to the General Education program.

Positive:

- allowed students to take a variety of courses they would not have taken
- students learned about various subjects, which allowed them to choose a major
- helped students identify their strengths and weaknesses
- the program was flexible; they always found a class that satisfied a GE
- the program allowed them to take classes relevant to majors
- it has given them a broad education that is relevant to their life and faith
- students obtained a stronger foundation as Christians and grew in their faith
- students have gained a breadth and depth of knowledge and perspectives
- they have learned to question and become more global thinkers
- broadened their idea of what learning and education means
- allowed them to improve writing, oral communication, and reasoning in many fields
- ideas in one course carried over into other courses – there was an overlap
• prevented students from specializing too much
• equips them to get involved and participate in the world
• allowed students to develop different forms of learning and understanding

**Negative**
• general lack of understanding of the GE program
• GE is not discussed in class
• The GE program is too new – students can’t rely on older students or even advisors
• course enrollment is limited, resulting in problems with schedules
• there is a need for more classes to fulfill requirements
• confusion as to what courses fulfill GE’s and creating a plan for them
• too many GE courses – overwhelming
• limits students’ possibility of Study Abroad
• is not specialized enough for Oxford
• forces students to take courses in language or ‘Fit for Life’

---

**Using the Results**

• The overview of the General Education program during the preview sessions plays an important role in student’s view of the program. This session needs to be maintained.
• Students who experienced problems with the General Education program were much more likely to have based decisions on input from classmates and upper division students. This information will be incorporated into the perspectives presentation so that students will understand the dangers of using fellow students’ advice.
• Many students are not finding their academic advisors to be helpful in understanding the General Education at Westmont. An advising program is being considered which would employ advisors who are well versed in and committed to communicating the goals and structures of the General Education program. In addition, these advisors should be attuned to the special needs of beginning students – particularly those who have not yet settled on a major. Upon declaring a major, a student would receive an advisor in the discipline.
• With some notable exceptions, students do not perceive faculty as providing help in understanding the ways in which individual courses fit into their overall education. This information will be shared with the faculty in the hopes of securing a more intentional and effective treatment of these issues in classes.

---

**Next Steps**

While work on helping students better understand the structure of the General Education program and to have a positive experience with it remains to be done, these efforts are well under way. At this point, it seems appropriate to turn from the question of students’ perceptions and experiences
to determine whether or not students are actually experiencing the types of change and growth that they report and that we hope are taking place. Our goals for the coming year are:

- Continue to monitor student perceptions of the GE program with specific attention to the way that the relationship between the individual course and the GE structure is communicated by professors.
- Develop and administer a survey instrument to seniors graduating under the old GE to provide a benchmark to determine whether graduating students under the current GE have a better understanding of its structure and purpose.
- Begin to assess the effectiveness of the Common Context courses in achieving their General Education goals. Next year, the departments charged with oversight of the Common Contexts sections of the GE program will be conducting effectiveness reviews of their GE courses. The General Education Committee will review these reports and incorporate this data into its program review.
- A second cohort needs to be established in the coming year, and the cohort model in general needs to be evaluated.
- Recommend that the issue of adjunct instructors in GE courses be evaluated.
- Recommend a review of the number sections offered of first-year GE courses, with particular emphasis on Common Contexts courses. Assure that sufficient courses are offered to accommodate entering students.
Appendix: Collected Responses

For each of the areas, please indicate how well the GE goals of the course were communicated in the course and how well those goals were accomplished. Use a 1-5 scale with 1 being best and 5 being worst.

Common Contexts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Communicated</th>
<th>Accomplished</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doctrine</td>
<td>18 7 12 13 11</td>
<td>17 10 10 6 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Testament</td>
<td>21 10 2 11 12</td>
<td>10 11 10 9 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Testament</td>
<td>33 10 1</td>
<td>42 0 1 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspectives on World History</td>
<td>10 6 3 3 2</td>
<td>7 9 2 5 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophical Perspectives</td>
<td>5 3 1 0 0</td>
<td>6 3 0 0 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Common Inquires:

**Reading Imaginative Literature**

- Communicated: 17, 5, 2, 7, 7
- Accomplished: 16, 6, 4, 4, 9

**Exploring the Physical Science**

- Communicated: 9, 6, 5, 5, 2
- Accomplished: 8, 4, 6, 5, 4

**Exploring the Life Sciences**

- Communicated: 11, 8, 5, 6
- Accomplished: 10, 10, 2, 9

**Reasoning Abstractly**

- Communicated: 9, 9, 6, 5, 5
- Accomplished: 8, 8, 7, 7

**Performing and Interpreting the Arts**

- Communicated: 6, 4, 3, 3, 3
- Accomplished: 4, 6, 3, 3, 3

**Thinking Globally**

- Communicated: 5, 3, 2, 6, 7
- Accomplished: 7, 2, 2, 5, 0

**Thinking Historically**

- Communicated: 5, 3, 1, 3, 3
- Accomplished: 3, 3, 2, 2, 4

**Understanding Society**

- Communicated: 7, 7, 8, 1, 7
- Accomplished: 9, 6, 4, 3, 6
Common Skills:

**Writing Intensive**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicated</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplished</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Quantitative and Analytical Reasoning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicated</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplished</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Modern and Foreign Language**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicated</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplished</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Physical Education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicated</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplished</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>