

## Response by GETF to Some Persistent Misconceptions About the Liberal Education Proposal

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Letters recently posted by Dr. Gilliland of the Philosophy Department and by faculty in the History Department, as well as comments made in the last UCF meeting, indicate that, beyond philosophical differences, there are enduring misconceptions about the LEP proposal that need to be addressed.

### **Misconception #1:** *Tier 1 courses are primarily remedial.*

Tier 1 (Foundations) is not remedial at all. Rather, Tier 1 assures that students have solid foundations for thinking, for communicating, and for problem solving; the courses that qualify for Written Communication, Quantitative Reasoning, and Critical Thinking are **college-level courses** designed to help students become more empowered learners, gain more from their coursework, and sharpen the tools for life-long learning.

Furthermore, the proposal mandates that all Tier 1 courses incorporate appropriate content so that students not hone their intellectual tools in a vacuum. Consequently, Tier 2 general education courses and major's courses will have better-prepared students with more to contribute to class. Even Harvard University recently revised its general education program and now requires prerequisite courses that focus on developing what Harvard calls "critical skills".

In fact, we have actually **reduced the amount of credits and semesters** needed for developmental or remedial work in the freshman year in three ways: the ENG 111 curriculum is addressed in the FYE seminar; ENG 110 would be taken concurrently with the FYE seminar; the summer math academy is incorporated into the LEP. Remember that developmental courses (e.g., ENG 110, MAT 95, MAT 100) are part of the current system; indeed, according to the Board of Trustees' resolution, students have to complete all developmental coursework in their first 24 credits.

### **Misconception #2:** *Tier 2 courses are non-disciplinary.*

All Tier 2 course will be devised and taught by departments. Tier 2 has among its goals:

- a) to teach content critical to becoming an informed and effective citizen in the 21st century,
- b) to reinforce students' facility with critical thinking, written communication, and other important intellectual tools, and
- c) to introduce students to a variety of disciplines.

We have sought to achieve (a) and (c) by organizing Tier 2 around important areas of knowledge (e.g. global awareness or social conflict) that most people believe are important, especially given the challenges that face the world today. Furthermore, the proposal specifically states that "in order

to maximize the breadth of exposure to different disciplinary perspectives, students may take no more than one Tier 2 course from a particular department" and that any Tier 2 course must "provide an introduction to the analytical tools of the discipline(s) offering the course". (These quotes come from page 10 of the LEP proposal.) Consequently, Tier 2 courses should provide students with greater depth in the subject matter covered than current survey courses do, and they should enable students to see how different disciplines can be used to address current or enduring issues.

**Misconception #3:** *The program is more complicated than the current AUR system and advisement will be more difficult.*

The LEP appears complex to some because a) it is new and people are in the process of learning about it, and b) the General Education Task Force has included considerable detail in the proposal as per faculty request. (Many faculty requested greater detail because they found the program difficult to evaluate without that detail.) Because the LEP is structured in tiers, it is actually more sensible and easier to follow: Take the Tier 1 courses, then take the Tier 2 courses, then take a Capstone course. To add flexibility, students can wait until their sophomore year to complete quantitative reasoning and technological fluency and until their junior year to complete multilingual communication.

Furthermore, the LEP requires a General Education director, and this person would be responsible for helping with advisement questions when they arise.

**Misconception #4:** *The LEP would require many new faculty lines to staff the new competencies.*

The Computer Science Department currently teaches about half the sections needed for Technological Fluency as electives. With the ENG 111 curriculum addressed by the FYE seminar, adjunct money can be diverted elsewhere. The Philosophy Department is currently staffing an AUR by itself; some of those resources could be turned to the new critical thinking competency. In addition, because the LEP is not limited to a few select departments, it can draw on a wider pool of faculty to design and offer courses. Finally, the Provost and the Vice President for Planning and Assessment have assured that support for General Education will be an administrative priority.

**Misconception #5:** *The assessment of general education is optional.*

Assessment is NOT optional!! Our accrediting body, NEASC, has made that perfectly clear. The LEP proposal recommends that assessment measures be developed by the teaching faculty to determine if the LEP is working as we wish, calling for assessment to be done in a sensible and faculty-friendly way.

In closing, it must be pointed out again that this proposal has been carefully crafted and informed by significant research into the current thinking in general education. Be that as it may, if

the faculty decides to approve this proposal in referendum, the process will be just truly beginning, because the proposed LEP is designed to be dynamic and to evolve via faculty dialog and involvement.