

Part 3. Why Does the GE Program Need to Change?

The objectives of Kean's General Education Program historically have been informed by the mission and Core Values of the institution, mandates from the State of New Jersey, and the guidelines of its accrediting body, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE). These resources were consulted and provided guidance for the proposed GE reform.

The existing GE Program has demonstrated success in many areas:

- developing critical foundational skills with student work consistently meeting benchmarks in rubric categories across most GE Student Learning Outcomes,
- exposing students to a variety of disciplines and majors,
- administering interventions based on assessment data to foster a culture of continuous improvement,
- building community among first-year students,
- implementing the General Education Mentor (GEM) Program to provide peer-to-peer support for students in their first year in the Transition to Kean course where GEMs model positive student-to-student and student-to-instructor interactions in the classroom, offer direction and answer questions, and share a student perspective on campus involvement and academics,
- carrying out High Impact Practices (HIPs), such as the Common Read Program, the First-Year Seminar course, e-portfolios, and initial research and technology courses.

These achievements are borne out by GE Program assessment data, including the most recent GE Program Review (2021-22) and the MSCHE Self Study (2021-22). The GE Program Review Committee made a series of recommendations that highlight areas for improvement in the Program's current structure and are central to the new GE curriculum being proposed. Those recommendations, and other motivations for change, are listed here.

1. The GE Program Review found that students lacked a clear understanding of the goals or sequencing of courses in their GE experience. Learners do not necessarily have a sense of purpose tied to their Foundational or Distribution courses and the GE courses are often seen as burdensome barriers to courses in the major rather than opportunities for growth and exploration. This lack of a self-evident "why" regarding GE coursework is a common challenge of the Foundation/Distribution model (Lattuca & Stark, 2009; Mayhew et al., 2016). The GE Program revision seeks to address this obstacle to student success by better articulating the program's goals using specifically named PLOs that clearly identify the competencies to be gained through GE coursework.

2. The GE Program Review Committee recommended the GE Program should bring a renewed focus on further development of High Impact Practices (HIPs). Research demonstrates that strategically implementing HIPs across the GE curriculum will foster deeper learning, offer students a sense of identity and community through their core coursework, and provide an experience that is unique to Kean's GE Program. Although some HIPs have been integrated into GE, as stated above, there is currently not a program-wide, sustainable commitment to these proven strategies or a systematic approach to implementing them, nor is there an assessment process associated with oversight for, and analysis of, the effects of such approaches. The new GE proposal aims to change that.

3. An additional challenge for the current GE Program is the lack of a clear strategy or structure for scaffolding student learning vertically from the first and second year through the major's GE Capstone. Although faculty teaching Capstone courses assess learning outcomes associated with the GE Program, there has not been a consistent, focused approach for bringing faculty together at regular intervals to think about how General Education courses build on one another and how student learning is developed over time. An example of this relates to writing skills development. Some faculty have expressed concern about student writing in their Capstone courses. Greater vertical integration and discussion about writing instruction and expectations across various levels of GE courses, and the implementation of a robust Writing Across the Curriculum Program, working closely with the General Education and Writing Emphasis Committees, would support teaching and learning in the communication literacy PLOs: Written Communication and Oral Communication. In the new proposal, after taking their Essential Learning courses in Written and Oral Communication, students would select a Writing-Intensive course housed in the Core Competency course roster, preparing them for the Passion Project, or some equivalent research experience, thereafter. This creates a vertical progression: Written Communication course (Semester 1), Writing-Intensive course (Semester 2), Passion Project (Semester 3 or 4), and capstone course (Semester 7 or 8).

4. The Committee recognized that the University mission and core values have been significantly reconceived in the last five years, and the GE Program should more fully align and give substantive curricular expression to them. Although many of the current GE Student Learning Outcomes reflect Kean's institutional values (such as current GE SLOs in Active Citizenship and Diversity), the new GE Program seeks to foreground Kean's Core Values and strategic direction in new and more expansive ways (e.g., by including Wellness as a PLO and building HIPs into the program in a sustainable manner). This will bolster crucial links between the principles guiding the University and the experiences Kean commits to offering all students through their GE coursework.