

Summary of Small Group Discussions for Provost's GE Task Force  
Presented to Task force on 12.9.15

Members of our group – Christopher Brown, Kathy Roark-Diehl, Maria Gurrola, Frank Hodnett, and Tom Smith.

Responses to THE BIG QUESTION - what do we want students to have in their skill set and knowledge base as they leave NMSU? (These are NOT ranked in any priority order).

- **Career development skills** - In large part, students don't know how to translate knowledge from degree into how to develop a career development (CD) strategy and secure a job. NMSU offers the skills and tools to do this, but students don't take advantage of them. Kathy offers a mentorship program at NMSU-A, as does ACES, and they can't get students to engage. Can we develop a 1<sup>st</sup> semester junior year course that hits the major efforts that a CD strategy should have that would be part of the GE curriculum? The idea for a junior class is a good one, but students also need to connect to college culture in year one. Could this be inserted into the GE core, replacing one of the existing classes?
- **Awareness of cultural differences and biases** – We probably can do better at the way we help students become self-aware and set this self-awareness in the context of a multi-cultural world.
- **Ethical awareness** - We don't teach or expose students enough to key concepts in ethics and leadership (what is right and wrong?) Remember the definition we teach young kids about what is right, doing the right thing then when no one would know if you did the wrong thing?
- **Civic engagement** – We are part of a larger society in which we need to engage; our membership comes with rights and responsibilities that we need to answer. We need to be better about helping students learn this.
- **Awareness of the global context** – We are one facet of a very diverse global community, and our students need a stronger sense of this as they graduate from NMSU.
- **Spatial awareness and cognition** - Students should leave NMSU with strong skills in spatial cognition and literacy and have a solid grounding in cultural geography that is at the heart of all of the contemporary conflicts we see in the world.
- **Information literacy** – How do students gather, access, evaluate and process information from an ever-increasing number of sources?
- **Financial literacy** – Students need to develop the ability to objectively and critically evaluate financial opportunities and challenges.
- **Communication skills** – Both writing and oral communication skills are required at NMSU; we have good people teaching the classes that teach these skills, the students take and pass them, but we still could do better.
- **Project and problem oriented learning** – Rather than rote memorization of facts and in class assessments, students need to know how to draw information and data from a wide range of areas, and synthesize this data and information into solutions to riddles or problems that they will face.

The following ideas “rose to the top” from past discussions:

- **Global awareness** – We all felt this was really important, and this was supported from several voices at the table. Ideas that came from the group:
  - One idea is to revise required GE classes in areas IV and V to include a list of globally aware classes from various Colleges. World Regional Geography is such a class, and other disciplines and Colleges also have similar types of classes.
  - Another idea is to revisit or drop VWW classes to free up credits that would allow us to develop Interdisciplinary classes across colleges and disciplines.
  - The above is based on our charge to ignore existing structures to give us room to dream up new ideas and ways to meeting our students’ needs.
- **Communication skills (written and oral expression)** – English 111, 218 and 318 and Communication Studies classes are on the list of things we require, and these classes do introduce students to the challenges of capturing data and citing sources. The challenge is that these classes need to deal with the mechanics of writing and building an argument, as well as the “research 101 skills.” This is a HUGE amount of content to get into a class. Ideas to deal with this challenge that we developed include:
  - Beef up “writing across the curriculum” exercises to stress these skills throughout students’ time at NMSU;
  - Develop a class on “information literacy in the Internet era” that all students would take to pull this research training out of the ENGL and COMM classes;
  - Ask faculty teaching science classes to raise the bar on writing exercises in class.
  - Let’s explore a “lab or workshop class” added to the ENGL 111 class similar to what we do with lab classes in the sciences that stresses this skill set.
- **Project and problem oriented learning** – As noted in earlier discussions, to meet real world problems that students will face, they need to synthesize disparate data into applied solutions. We didn’t get a chance to explore if this would form the core of a new class, or if we could find a way to get this type of exercise broadly into GE or VWW classes. Some faculty deploying Team Based Learning or other participatory models have had success advancing this in existing classes.
- **Spatial awareness and cognition** – As noted earlier, many of the conflicts that plague the world reflect the complex cultural geographies that exist in the world’s regions, Students should leave NMSU with strong skills in spatial cognition and literacy and have a solid grounding in the cultural geographies that drive these conflicts.
- We also asked the question, “are we training students to get jobs in the profession or are we training them to go to graduate school?” Observations include:
  - Many ACES students need a grad degree to go into extension or get promotions in teaching.
  - Geography students do well in both their concentrations with a BS.
  - Most theatre students need grad credentials for good jobs.
  - Social Work students also need grad degrees for career development.
  - How we answer this question can have a major impact on revision to the GE mission of NSMU, be this through tinkering with individual classes or larger changes to G or VWW classes.