Revising the General Education Requirements (GER)

I. The premise of general education is: There are certain things every educated person needs to know.

II. Why Revisions?

A. Educational Problems

1. Over time, the GER have lost their force and shape. Stated in (equivalents of) semester courses, the development has been this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>year</th>
<th>number of required GE courses</th>
<th>number of available choices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>441</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. The lack of rigor is apparent in the presently succinct but opaque statement of the Distributional Requirements. More transparently the Distributional Requirements would say that there are six Perspectives, that six credits have to be taken in each Perspective except that in two Perspectives, other than Perspective 6, only three credits are required. The resulting looseness and variability make it possible for a student to graduate without having taken a single course in

a. the arts,
b. literature,
c. history,
d. either the physical sciences or the biological sciences (e.g., a student might take two biology courses and not a single course in the physical sciences).

3. The lack of rigor also makes it possible for some students to take most of their GE courses without venturing outside of their major departments.

4. In the two decades since the inception of the current GER, the world has changed, but the GER have not kept pace. Hence the GER need to take account of issues that have become more prominent since:
a. The need for greater awareness and understanding of globalization.
b. The need for an inclusive and comprehensive grasp of U.S. society.
c. The need for greater attention to the environment.

5. Our students need two composition courses. Most universities and colleges require two such courses.

B. Technical Problems

1. The GEP needs a preamble.

2. The Writing Competency allows a student to pass the Upper Division Writing Requirement and then to fail the Upper Division Writing Proficiency Assessment which is the "gating exam" for the Upper Division Requirement.

3. The Foreign Language/Symbolic Systems Competency is a collection of quite different competencies, not one Competency.

4. Perspective 1, Expressive Arts, is really a combination of a competency (communications) and a Perspective (expressive arts—a substantive field).

5. Perspective 5, Ethics and Human Values, distinguishes between two kinds of courses, but it is a distinction without a difference.

6. The "non-western" requirement is ill-defined.

III. Revised Competencies and Perspectives

Competency Requirements:

Students must demonstrate proficiency in the Competencies or successfully complete the required courses.

Writing (two composition courses)
Mathematical Literacy
Modern Language other than English or a Classical Language
Communications

Distributional Requirements:
Students must successfully complete one course in each category of each Perspective.

**Perspective 1 U.S. Society:**

a) Survey of U.S. History and Culture  
b) Topics in U.S. History and Culture

**Perspective 2 Ethical and Human Values:**

a) Democracy, Human Rights, and Ethics  
b) Ecology and Human Well-Being

**Perspective 3 World Citizenship:**

a) Survey of Global History and Culture  
b) Topics in Global History and Culture

**Perspective 4 Scientific Literacy:**

a) Physical Sciences  
b) Biological Sciences  
c) Social Sciences

**Perspective 5 Cultural Literacy:**

a) Expressive Arts  
b) Literature

**IV. What will the revisions accomplish?**

1. They will be **effective**. They will cure most of the problems listed above, and they provide a framework for solving remaining issues.

2. The result will be **simple**.  
The statement of the Competency Requirements will read:

Students must demonstrate proficiency in the Competencies or successfully complete the required courses.

The statement of the Distributional Requirements will read:

Students must successfully complete one course in each category of each Perspective.
3. The result will be relatively conservative.

Four Perspectives are substantially preserved:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present Perspectives</th>
<th>Revised Perspectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perspective 1: Expressive Arts</td>
<td>Perspective 5 a) Expressive Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective 4: Social Sciences</td>
<td>Perspective 4 c) Social Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective 5: Ethical and Human Values</td>
<td>Perspective 2 a) Democracy, Human Rights, and Ethics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective 6: Natural Sciences</td>
<td>Perspective 4 a) Physical Sciences and b) Biological Sciences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The literature part of Perspective 2: Literary and Artistic Studies will be preserved.

Courses in present Perspective 3: Historical and Cultural Studies and courses in artistic studies will have a place under revised Perspective 1: U.S. Society and revised Perspective 3: World Citizenship.

V. Guidelines for Implementation

1. The General Education Requirements (GER) should be simple and stable.

2. They should begin with a preamble that sets out the principles and justification of the GER.

3. The courses of the GER should be appropriately designed for general education and accessible to all students.

4. A Standing Committee should be in charge of the GER.

5. Future planning and oversight of the General Education Requirements at the University of Montana-Missoula, done by the Standing Committee, should be accomplished within the framework of State Statute 20-01-501, also known as the "Indian Education for All Act."

6. Interdisciplinary and team-taught courses are encouraged.

7. The number and variety of GER courses should be sufficient to allow for some small, discussion-based class experience.
8. The details and the outcomes of the GER courses should be worked out by ad-hoc committees drawn from faculty who are expert in the subject area.

9. Any faculty member can design and teach any of the GE courses so long as he or she presents evidence to the Standing Committee that he or she has the requisite qualifications and that the course is academically sound.

10. Revisions of the GER need financial resources for the second writing course. There should also be stipends for those who will design new GE courses.

11. The impact of the revised GER on the redistribution of teaching loads and student credit hours among departments and schools should be minimized.

12. Students should be encouraged to demonstrate mastery of Competencies through placement examinations on entering the University.

13. The GER should conform to the MUS Transferable Core Curriculum.

14. GER courses can satisfy major requirements.

15. Students are exempted from one Perspective course that falls within their major area.