



ASSOCIATION FOR GENERAL AND LIBERAL STUDIES  
2016 AGLS Awards for Improving General Education: Exemplary Program Processes

**Section #1: Contact Information of Person Submitting Application**

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**Section #2: Institutional Endorsement -- Chief Executive Officer or Chief Academic Officer**

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### **Section #3: Application Summary**

The Global Citizenship Program (GCP) is a re-envisioning of general education at Webster University. GCP is purposeful and aligned with mission and values, satisfies contemporary requirements for assessment of student learning, and establishes a framework to engage and motivate faculty. It was developed through an open, transparent, and inclusive process that took under two years. The GCP has improved undergraduate education at Webster by establishing a developmental arc for general and liberal education study, focusing intentionally on knowledge areas and skills, creating conditions for repeated practice of skills, and weaving integrative learning throughout the general education curriculum. Benchmarking to date highlights several areas of success, and GCP's design provides for ongoing review and improvement. GCP is at the heart of every degree bestowed by Webster University, a private, non-profit university with more than 4500 undergraduate students at campuses in North America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and online.

## Section #4: Award Criteria

### Criterion 1: Identifying the need for new program creation or revision

Throughout the 1970s and '80s, as a newly secular institution, Webster University (College, at the time) students completed 128 credit hours and the requirements of a major to earn a baccalaureate degree – but no general education program. The faculty began discussing general degree requirements in 1985. A faculty committee developed a list of voluntary education goals that students were urged – but not required – to fulfill during their time at Webster. A Higher Learning Commission (HLC) reaccreditation team visit in 1988 pushed Webster to develop a set of clear requirements, and the faculty eventually approved the University's first general education program in 1992.

That program required students to complete twenty-seven hours of study distributed across broad areas of disciplinary knowledge and skills. Alternative programs reduced the required credits to twelve for BFA and other professional preparation degrees and increased the credits to thirty-six for communications students. The programs had little coherence beyond “breadth” and little purpose beyond “our accreditors made us.”

In addition to these inadequacies and a general lack of faculty enthusiasm for the existing general education programs, two other considerations helped move the Faculty Senate to initiate the process of re-envisioning undergraduate, general education: the adoption of a new University Mission Statement, and the Comprehensive Evaluation Visit by the HLC in 2008.

Webster's current Mission Statement reads: *Webster University, a worldwide institution, ensures high quality learning experiences that transform students for global citizenship and individual excellence.*

This replaced the page-long Mission Statement that had been adopted in 1992 and referenced language from earlier strategic planning, which called for “empowering [students] to reach their full potential as productive citizens in the global community” and “expand[ing] the curriculum to promote the values of global citizenship.” Developed as part of the institutional self-study process for reaccreditation, the new mission organized these ideas and connected them clearly with instruction and learning.

The visit report of the HLC peer reviewers found fault with Webster's “lack of progress in implementing a robust, campus-wide assessment program and completion of a full cycle of assessment” and called for follow up in the form of a progress report. With respect to the general education program, specifically, the Report found a need for institutional attention, saying:

The team found no evidence of a clear feedback loop between general education assessment data and the improvement of teaching and learning. (4b) As the institution moves forward with assessment, general education and graduate programs need to be included.

Indeed, assessment of general education was focused on things like ensuring that syllabi included statements regarding course coding – that is on “inputs” rather than learning outcomes. In addition, since the program was without an overall aim or mission, it was hard to know what would count as success. Where clarity existed, available evidence

suggested it was not performing well. For instance, the program was vaguely meant to promote breadth of study, but institutional reporting showed that students in the program were completing courses with fewer total course prefixes than before the adoption of the requirements, despite the fact that course prefixes had proliferated in the interim.

Aware of all this, two engaged faculty leaders requested administrative backing to send a small team to the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) Institute on General Education and Assessment in 2009. That June, in a series of unanimous votes, the Faculty Senate articulated a mission for a new general education program – named the Global Citizenship Program (GCP) – and charged a Task Force to conduct an open, transparent, and inclusive process to identify the core competencies of responsible global citizenship, identify best practices in general education and general education assessment, and to make recommendations for creating and implementing a new program. The new program should meet the needs of (i) being purposeful and aligned with mission and values, (ii) satisfying contemporary requirements for assessment of student learning, and (iii) establishing an identity to engage and motivate faculty.

The GCP mission clearly aligns with the University mission: *The mission of the Global Citizenship Program is to ensure that every undergraduate emerges from Webster University with the core competencies required for responsible global citizenship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

Communicating both the needs and the intended process required that the GCP Task Force engage institutional thought leaders, build a cadre of advocates, and set the stage for a clear majority of faculty to endorse Task Force recommendations. Doing so necessitated using not only the formal governance structure – meetings of the Faculty Senate, presentations to the Faculty Assembly, briefings to the President and academic leadership – but also informal means. The Task Force organized morning coffees and midday lunch meetings in which members discussed the situation as they understood it, presented the findings of their research, suggested potential direction, and - most importantly - listened. These sessions helped to create dialogue across the faculty community as a whole, allowed the Task Force to refine its course (and its messages) as required, and built a foundation for increased trust and credibility as the process moved from exploration to implementation.

Throughout this process, financial support from Academic Affairs was crucially important. It supplied coffee, sweets, sandwiches, salads and so on (which always help increase attendance) and allowed more than 40 faculty members to attend a series of AAC&U conferences. These faculty leaders and stakeholders subsequently shared informed opinions and focused leadership among their faculty colleagues as the process of development and approval moved forward. Their engagement and advocacy was key to building consensus among a majority of full-time, voting faculty members when the GCP proposals came before the Faculty Assembly.

## **Criterion 2: Identification of Goals and Procedure Used to Address Needs**

The need and desire to re-envision general education at Webster gained impetus from both internal and external sources. Internally, constituents were not excited by existing programs of general education, nor did they associate the approach to general education with anything distinctive, original, or linked to institutional identity. Externally, Webster's accrediting agency made clear in a series of reviews that our programs needed attention overall and dramatic improvement with respect to assessment of student learning.

The job of operationalizing needs and forming a plan for a general education curriculum that addressed them fell to the members of the Global Citizenship Project Task Force (GCPTF). The Faculty Senate formed GCPTF with the clear support of academic administration. It included faculty members representing each school and college, one student representative, delegates from key committees (including the Curriculum Committee and interdisciplinary programs), the general education coordinator, an academic director from the international campus network, an administrator from Advising, a librarian, the Dean of Students, the Director of First-Year Experience, members of the General Education Institute team, and the five school and college deans. This large, inclusive group operated through discussion and consensus and only held a single, final vote to endorse its recommendations.

Members conducted wide-ranging research to identify how best to address Webster's need to establish a purposeful program that aligned with its mission and values, to understand undergraduate learning and continually improve the program, and to develop a curricular identity to engage and motivate faculty members. This research included online faculty surveys about the relative importance of various skills, informal coffees and lunches to gather input and present evolving ideas, and an extensive review of relevant literature. Members studied the published research on general education and undergraduate pedagogy; browsed Internet articles; and scoured resources posted by small colleges such as St. Olaf and Pacific Lutheran, large state schools and systems such as North Carolina State, the Council of Higher Education of Virginia, and the University of California Commission on General Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

In addition to the team that attended the General Education Institute, key individuals both within and without the Task Force attended the AAC&U Greater Expectations Institute; the Annual Meeting; and conferences on general education, STEM learning, and student success. The inclusion of nonmembers broadened the base of those deeply engaged in thinking and talking about the reform process, elevated discourse by educating more participants, and built political capital and avenues of outreach.

Communication and discussion included presentations to Faculty Assembly on seven occasions over the course of two academic years, as well as participation in five Faculty Senate meetings, one meeting of the five school and college Deans, one meeting of the Curriculum Committee, and two meetings of the Student Government Association. Extended campus constituents were represented by one Task Force member and included by way of presentations and discussion at two annual worldwide directors meetings (including academic and administrative representatives of domestic campuses in Florida, Texas, California, South Carolina, and international campuses in England, the Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland, Thailand, and China).

Through its research and discussion, the Task Force identified several potentially important practices with which Webster had significant institutional experience and/or

interest. Working with others in our community, members wrote brief white papers exploring the cognitive or intellectual benefits and risks associated with each, as well as the practical benefits and risks or challenges. The white papers addressed learning communities, a general education capstone, co-curricular learning, internships, service learning, authentic learning, problem-based learning, internationalized courses/language/study abroad, and interdisciplinary learning. These were circulated within the community, then presented and discussed in a series of open breakfast and lunch meetings.

In these ways, faculty stakeholders were repeatedly informed about the Task Force's progress and current thinking and offered multiple opportunities for input. Both formally in presentations and informally in individual and small-group conversations, the community explored research-based best practices, employer expectations, effective program models, assessment techniques, and more. Over time, this approach broadened and deepened the base of those engaged in the reform effort. It allowed us to educate the faculty who would be voting as a body on any new program. It allowed us to listen to colleagues, shape a successful proposal, and persuade an ample majority to support recommended changes when the time came. Indeed, when the Faculty Assembly voted, instead of the simple majority needed to pass, the Global Citizenship Program received approval by a vote of about two-thirds.

The Global Citizenship Program responds directly to the needs of Webster students and the institution overall by being purposeful, engaging, rigorous and cumulative in design. GCP has a clearly stated mission, an originating First Year Seminar, and a culminating Keystone seminar. The program prioritizes 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills (written and oral communication, critical thinking, intercultural competence, and ethical reasoning) and knowledge areas (Roots of Cultures, Social Systems and Human Behavior, Physical and Natural World, Global Understanding, Arts Appreciation, Quantitative Literacy). Students must take eight courses ranging across the knowledge areas, and each course also addresses a skill. In addition, most BA and BS students must meet GCP requirements outside the requirements of their majors. As a result, students practice the required skills to cumulative effect in the eight courses in the middle of the program, in major courses, and in electives. The Global Keystone Seminar serves as a capstone for general education study, using engaging, problem-based and experiential learning to help students practice collaboration and integrate study of multiple academic disciplines and lived experience.

The GCP aligns with employers' desires for skill improvement, the "skills strategy" of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, students' desires for flexibility, and, importantly, with the mission of Webster University, its values statements, and its strategic plan. Integrative learning is woven throughout the program by the merging of skill and content instruction and by the focus on that component in the two seminars. In these ways, it is purposeful and aligned with mission and values. Moreover, because of the definition of program components and operationalization through analytic rubrics, and because of the use of points of initial entry and capstone, it is infinitely better suited to assessment of student learning. Finally, although flexible, it has coherence and distinctiveness that enhance its ability to motivate and engage faculty.

### **Criterion 3: Actions Taken**

#### **Organizational and Operational Structure**

To implement the Global Citizenship Program, Webster created a committee of the Faculty Senate, with responsibilities that parallel those of the Curriculum Committee for the undergraduate curriculum. The GCP Committee (GCPC) meets twice a month during the academic year. The Provost appointed a Director to oversee GCP operations (upon recommendation of the GCPC). The Director subsequently empaneled an informal leadership team comprising himself, the GCPC co-chairs, the Director of First Year Seminars, and the Director of Keystone Seminars. The leadership group meets approximately monthly and communicates almost daily. Academic partners from Advising, Institutional Effectiveness, the Faculty Development Center, and Student Affairs join as needed.

#### **Phased Implementation**

As recommended by the GCP Task Force, implementation was staggered in two different ways. First, no transfer and no continuing students were bound by GCP at the outset. The first two years of the program included only students new to Webster who had never matriculated at another post-secondary institution. Year three added transfer students with fewer than 75 hours. By year four (2015-2016), all new students fell under the requirements of GCP. Second, at the outset, GCP applied to students in BA and BS programs, with the stipulation that departments responsible for more specialized programs and the GCPC would consult to determine how best to serve those students' needs. In the previous general education regime, these students were required to complete only four of the nine required areas (which often included courses within the major).

Specialized programs of study differ markedly from BA programs. BFA programs in the Conservatory of Theatre Arts are professional undergraduate degrees in theatre, with intensive, narrow disciplinary and practical study that is (as the National Association of Schools of Theatre puts it) "supported by a program of general studies." Many of these majors require more than 100 credit hours within the major. In music education, the BME degree requires 142 credit hours. The Bachelor of Science in Nursing is a professional program for students who are already working RNs. Thus, it made sense to tailor the integration of these diverse students based on their respective programs.

Phased implementation allowed for an aggressive overall timeline. Faculty Assembly approved GCP in April, 2011. The GCP Committee first met in May, with the expectation that the program would be rolled out in the June, 2012 Undergraduate Catalog.

#### **High-level Administrative Buy-in**

A new President, followed closely by a new Provost, joined the University during the year-and-a-half the Task Force developed its program recommendations. Both leaders recognized immediately that they needed to support this endeavor and allow it to continue along its current path. Most importantly, they deliberately refrained from taking positions on the resulting program's final form. Their confidence strengthened the leadership of the GCP Committee and translated into widespread support for the program's swift implementation.

#### **Intra-institutional Collaboration Key**

At the start of implementation, GCP consisted of only one course (First Year Seminar) and a collection of requirements. The committee set about developing procedures to review, recertify, and bestow course codes; revise assessment rubrics; and articulate external courses. GCPC also established broad partnerships that reached beyond faculty members and department chairs thanks to enthusiastic support, human capital, and budgetary outlays

from Student Affairs, the Faculty Development Center (FDC), the Library, and Academic Advising. (Notably, all save the Faculty Development Center were also represented on the Task Force.) These partnerships helped to build a framework for professional development and resources about curriculum, skills, and pedagogy to make it possible for faculty to develop new courses and to retool existing courses to satisfy the requirement that each address both a knowledge area and one of the required skills.

The GCPC also staged the Inaugural Global Citizenship Program Collaboratory: a three-day event featuring consultation and presentations from external experts (Gail Evans, Susan Gano-Phillips, and Margaret Cohen) and drawing on internal expertise from faculty and staff. The collaborative conference included presentations on the rationale for the GCP, course and syllabus design, curricular alignment, assessment, and more. It also included a workshop in which participants brainstormed ideas for new course designs, several of which produced Global Keystone Seminar courses. The Collaboratory is now an annual, multi-day, event for 100+ attendees from throughout Webster's worldwide campus community.

The FDC has been instrumental to success implementing GCP. We developed faculty learning communities for each skill area. They provide a means by which to focus and direct faculty attention and cross-pollinate across academic disciplines (an intentional use of the same practices that research shows have impact on undergraduates). Broad participation helped to result in first-semester biology becoming a writing-intensive course, public speaking becoming an arts appreciation course, environmental ethics becoming a physical and natural world course, and other valuable hybrids.

In addition to learning communities (which assume ongoing participation), we held series of course development workshops in the first year of implementation. These focused on course design and pedagogy and furnished resources and consultation for integrating skill development into traditional disciplinary instruction. Our academic partners in the library used the learning communities and the workshops to help develop LibGuides for each of the areas within GCP. Some of these developments led to classroom and curricular innovations that are presented each February in the FDC's Teaching Festival.

### **Implementation Support and Participation from Faculty**

GCP leadership spans the faculty. Committee Co-chairs have come from six academic departments (and four of the five schools and colleges). The GCP Director has been with the project from the start to ensure continuity, although succession planning is in its early stages. Seminar Directors play roles similar to department chairs, with responsibility for staffing and supervising the courses that fall under GCP directly rather than academic departments, while the GCP Director functions more like dean. (GCP has no full-time faculty of its own.) The FDC Director plays a significant role collaborating with GCP leadership to facilitate course creation and enhancement, as well as professional development for faculty. The Dean of Students championed the concept "learning happens everywhere" and led Student Affairs departments to develop learning outcomes and program assessment that align with GCP. The Director of Undergraduate Advising championed learning communities and helped recruit key faculty, used the freshman registration summer program to educate faculty, and led his staff in developing transfer evaluation and syllabi for advising sessions.

Each step of the phase-in process provided an up-or-down vote on progress, and all succeeded. Breadth of participation demonstrates support: GCP Committee membership and leadership positions, the programmatic participation of all schools and 18 of 21 departments offering undergraduate courses (including 38 different course prefixes). Recently stalled progress in some areas has produced a new initiative that is discussed under Criterion #4.



## **Criterion 4: Evidence of Improvement and Continuing Commitment to the Process**

The Global Citizenship Program improved undergraduate education at Webster by establishing a developmental arc for general education study, by its intentional focus on both knowledge and skills, by creating conditions for repeated practice of skills, and by weaving integrative learning throughout the general education curriculum. The GCP Director has used the WASC general education assessment rubric to hold himself and the GCP Committee accountable, marking progress in developing the GCP assessment program and soliciting feedback on the accuracy of his scoring at the past three Collaboratory events. Compared to the prior general education programs, GCP assessment is one to three steps improved (on the four-point scale). We also have strong evidence of success with respect to student learning and with outcomes that go to the sustainability of the program. In addition, we are engaged in projects that show commitment to ongoing program improvement.

### **Assessment of Student Learning**

Most departments rely on the TK20 system to manage assessment data for GCP courses. At the end of each course, instructors enter scores in multiline GCP rubrics (developed based on the AAC&U VALUE rubrics) for each student in each GCP-coded class. That data forms part of the basis of annual reports on each course in the GCP, and that data and those reports are used by the GCP Committee in determining the continuing fitness of courses for GCP coding and in making decisions to recertify courses on a rotating, tri-annual basis. In addition, the directors of the First Year Seminar and Global Keystone Seminar programs review student statements in course evaluations and query their faculty about their observations (in addition to assessment data entered in TK20).

Review of data from the rubric scoring says that students develop markedly as they move through the program. Data from the “Middle Eight” courses – those courses integrating knowledge and skill occurring conceptually “between” the First Year Seminar and Keystone Seminar – represent students from all undergraduate years. Aggregate averages for each knowledge area and each skill are above the midpoint on the rubric scale, hence, on average at the “Proficient” level. (Rubrics range from Beginning to Developing to Proficient to Exemplary, with the latter being a very high level of performance for any person.) Scores are (on average) lower in First Year Seminar and higher in Keystone Seminar. This at least suggests the sort of growth that we would hope to achieve by establishing a developmental arc for students and by insuring cumulative instruction and practice of the skills as a result of program structure and the breadth (outside-the-major) requirement.

Instructors in Keystone Seminars report that students are less well prepared with respect to Ethical Reasoning than other skills. Students responding to a survey (sent to all juniors and seniors bound by GCP, greater than 12% response rate) were asked whether “GCP has given you the opportunity to practice the following skills,” and “Ethical judgment and decision making” received the highest rate of “Yes, a lot” responses (41% with an additional 30% answering “Some, but not a lot”). In the coming year, we will explore this more carefully, in order to determine what might be improved in our instruction and practice with respect to ethical reasoning.

### **Other Evidence of Success**

This spring, a sophomore student received an undergraduate research grant from the Provost’s Office to conduct survey research on all juniors and seniors concerning their

attitudes and perceptions towards GCP. (She has since been appointed to represent Student Government Association on the GCP Committee.) The student survey shows that students by and large understand the requirements of GCP (78%), although many still have questions about why any such program is required. Because it was an anonymous survey, we cannot determine whether there are differences between “traditional-age” and “older” students or between students in the United States and at our international campuses (where they will typically have completed a “thirteenth year” program, International Baccalaureate, or the like). These and related questions will be addressed in follow up research that will help us to develop a communications plan for helping students understand the rationale and motivation behind the program. This fall, we will also use videos created especially for First Year Seminar and other points for students’ entry into the GCP.

### **Continuous Improvement**

Review of assessment data for the most recently available academic year (2014-2015) revealed something worthy of attention. As mentioned above, average student performance on each skill was “Proficient.” Among subcomponents for skills, though, the lowest sub-score for the Written Communication skill was for use of sources and evidence, the lowest for Oral Communication was the rubric line for reasoning and support, and rubric lines for evidence and assumptions were low for Critical Thinking.

Because of this finding, we developed a new initiative to improve critical thinking and communication – with a focus on reasoning and supporting positions. Departments with courses coded for the GCP skills Written Communication, Oral Communication, and Critical Thinking will be invited to participate in 2016-2018. Each participating department will be provided with aggregate assessment data on the skills in question as well as data for the specific department. This summer, the GCP Director, GCPC Co-chairs, and FYS and Keystone directors, working with the FDC and Office of Institutional Effectiveness, are developing a menu of suggested plans of action. At a meeting in the fall, department chairs and faculty teaching such courses will discuss the results and share ideas. Each department will then formulate an intervention and assessment plan for student learning with respect to those skills in GCP-coded courses in the department. Departments will carry out their intervention and assessment over a one- to two-year period. A report on the project will substitute for the chair’s assessment reports on each individual course.

### **Need for Continuing Communication Efforts**

Finally, we continue to recognize the challenges in communicating effectively with students about the goals and rationale for the GCP and about what we know of its impact on student learning. In the coming year, we will conduct a follow up survey of students under GCP. In addition, the Director and GCP Committee members will hold open office hours in the student center. A simple Twitter search (“#gened”) reveals that we are not alone in having students who struggle to understand the value of liberal education beyond the confines of their majors. That should not alter our commitment to make every GCP course excellent and to help students recognize the amazing value they gain from that learning.