**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

Between fall 2012 and fall 2015, Florida Gulf Coast University—a 15,000-student public university located in Southwest Florida—engaged in a comprehensive revision of its General Education Program (GEP). Igniting the effort was the need to respond to a “core course options” law enacted by the state of Florida in summer 2012. But FGCU’s faculty and administration viewed the mandate as an opportunity to rethink the University’s approach to general education and create a GEP with stronger coherence and purpose for all participants.

The three-year revision process can be held up as a model of transparency and collaboration, for it was inclusive of all stakeholders at every stage. It produced a new GEP that incorporates the state core course options, but also purposefully integrates revised program competencies and an assessment strategy that involves many stakeholders in the evaluation and improvement of the program.
Section #4: Award Criteria

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

*What the need was at your institution, including the context for the issue at your institution?*
Three factors pointed the Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) campus toward its recent General Education Program (GEP) revision:

- a 2012 state law mandating common “state core” general education course options across all of Florida’s public colleges and universities (House Bill 7135);

- a widespread aspiration among GEP stakeholders to reflect on FGCU’s then fifteen-year-old program—its mission, learning goals, and curriculum—with an eye toward a reinvigorated, more purposeful student experience, as well as broadened faculty commitment to improving teaching and learning in the program;

- a need to develop a five-year program assessment and continuous quality improvement plan.

These three factors combined to influence the FGCU campus toward a GEP revision with far more intention and rigor than any of the factors necessitated on their own.

*How the new or revised program aligns with your mission:* After receiving much feedback favoring a GEP revision that went beyond just responding to the state mandate or the need to create a new assessment plan, the General Education Council—a senate team with broad faculty representation, including the advising office and the library—developed a draft of a revised mission statement, cited here in its final form: “Rooted in the tradition of liberal arts education, FGCU’s General Education Program provides students with opportunities to cultivate the intellectual curiosity, knowledge, and skills necessary for academic success, engaged citizenship, and lifelong learning.”

And for the first time, FGCU’s GEP was given a stated purpose, which like the program mission statement was developed over time from first draft to final version through a collaborative process involving students, faculty, and staff: “FGCU’s General Education Program orients students to college-level expectations and experiences, and helps them to attain:

**Knowledge in multiple disciplines**
*The GEP offers courses in communication, mathematics, the arts and humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences to acquaint students with an array of subject areas and disciplinary methods.*

**Intellectual and practical skills**
*The GEP emphasizes critical thinking, effective communication, and quantitative reasoning to develop students’ academic, career, and life skills.*

**Intercultural Knowledge**
The GEP encourages students to engage with local and global communities in responsible and creative ways, allowing them to realize their impact on diverse and interconnected social worlds.”

FGCU’s institutional mission informed the drafting of this mission and purpose, especially the University’s emphasis on “innovative, student-centered teaching and learning, ... diversity, ... civic responsibility, and cultivating habits of lifelong learning and the discovery of new knowledge.”

Moreover, with its focus on measuring student attainment of specific intellectual and practical skills—and intercultural knowledge, a new competency emerging from our program revision—as well as its pledge to use assessment data toward continuous program improvement, the assessment plan that emerged from the 2012-2015 GEP revision process further demonstrates the program’s alignment with the University’s commitment to student success, quality teaching, diversity, engaged citizenship, and connected knowing.

What process your institution used to identify the need (e.g., review of assessment practices by a campus committee, visit by an accrediting agency, etc.): Upon discussing the 2012 state mandate in the fall of that year, the General Education Council floated a plan to mobilize the state-required program revision process toward a more comprehensive review and revision. But the first step toward this end was to determine GEP stakeholder attitudes about such an extended effort. After a series of surveys and University-wide town hall and “world café,” round-robin discussions, the Council received overwhelming support for pursuing a wide-ranging revision of the program.

Paralleling the expressed desire among GEP stakeholders to revise our program was also the need to develop a new program assessment plan. 2014-2015 marked the last cycle of a five-year GEP assessment plan, and with a new program on the horizon, a new plan had to be developed. The aspiration for an improvement plan that outdid FGCU’s previous assessment plans emerged in the same town hall discussions that motivated deeper program revision, particularly when participating faculty expressed dismay over the ineffectiveness of the program’s previous assessment practices. The suggestion: FGCU needed first to get more faculty involved in assessment, and then to actually do something with assessment findings to improve teaching and learning.

How your institution communicated this need to faculty, students, and other interested parties: After our surveys, town hall meetings, and world café dialogues signaled a need for more in-depth program revision, the General Education Council outlined a plan for the forthcoming effort, presenting it to the faculty senate and posting it on a website chronicling the revision. As it progressed, the revision effort revealed areas of new need (e.g., redefined program competencies, more comprehensive assessment strategies, a dedicated assessment team), and these areas were communicated and deliberated on in forums ranging from the website and a dedicated learning management system page, to faculty senate meetings and six additional University-wide town hall meetings on the topics of “Mission & Purpose,” “GEP Models,” and “GEP Competencies.”
Criterion 2: Identification of Goals and Procedure Used to Address Needs

*What process your institution used to understand and operationally define this need:* To understand the need for GEP revision at FGCU, in the fall of 2012 the General Education Council surveyed full-time and part-time faculty, advisors, administrators, staff, and students. The diversity of respondent roles was further diversified by their varying levels of engagement in, or history with, the GEP: about half of the 234 faculty respondents had taught in the program; about half of the faculty respondents were from colleges that don’t offer many, if any, classes in the GEP; of the 387 students who responded to the survey, roughly one quarter had completed less than 30 credits hours, one quarter had 31-60 hours, one quarter had 61-90 hours, and one quarter had more than 90 hours.

As a result of the diversity in the survey responses, the General Education Council’s process of information gathering about the needs of FGCU’s GEP gave us a robust sense of the entire campus’s view of the program. We learned about our campus’s satisfaction with the existing GEP competencies—*quantitative reasoning, written communication,* and *critical thinking*. We learned if students were satisfied with their general education courses. We learned if faculty, staff, and administrators were interested in exploring other models for our GEP. We learned which themes and topics faculty and students felt were important to cover in the general education curriculum. Finally, with our surveys we learned about what faculty and students thought were areas of needed improvement in our GEP.

After two University-wide discussions of the survey results, one world café-style workshop, and with the survey results themselves, the General Education Council had amassed enough data to operationally define the need for GEP revision: Program revision was necessary, not only because we had to respond to Florida’s state core mandate, but because FGCU’s GEP needed a revitalization—a new mission, a new purpose, a new structure, new learning outcomes, a new improvement plan.

*Who participated in identifying the goals and procedure used to address the need?:* The identification of GEP revision goals and procedures happened in the fall of 2012, when the General Education Council reached out to the FGCU campus community with the above-mentioned surveys and University-wide discussions. Two additional forums to develop the “goals and procedure” for GEP revision occurred after the surveys and University-wide meetings: a “GEP stakeholder” meeting and a faculty senate presentation and discussion.

The GEP stakeholder meeting comprised department chairs, program leaders, and course coordinators who have oversight of GEP courses. This group discussed the campus surveys, the University-wide meetings, and the overall direction of recent conversations pertaining to the state-mandated changes in the general education curriculum. The group’s key insight into GEP revision was that FGCU needed to separate our internal program revision timeline from that mandated by the state—that we should move forward with implementing the state core, but also engage in a far more deliberate revision of our GEP than the state timeline would allow.

(Eventually, the state would extend the state core implementation date from fall 2014 to fall 2015, permitting FGCU to roll out our new GEP with the state core courses integrated.)
Finally, in January of 2013, FGCU’s faculty senate received a formal update on the state of GEP revision at FGCU and then contributed its own thoughts on the goals and procedure for the revision. The update recounted what had been done in the fall, and then it looked forward with a final, but flexible, GEP revision plan. By the end of the meeting, two of the three areas of needed/desired program revision were tightly interwoven into the overall GEP revision plan: addressing the state mandate and initiating a systematic revision of FGCU’s GEP.

*What research was used to identify the desired goals and procedure that would most effectively address the need?:* (Before addressing this section, we must note that, because FGCU needed to respond to the state mandate, part of our revision process involved attending to various items in the law by specified deadlines. The state invited Florida institutions to submit feedback on the new law by January 31st, 2013, and since we had been interacting so closely with GEP stakeholders throughout the fall semester, we were well-positioned to reach out to them to solicit their ideas. The forums for gathering this feedback ranged from all-faculty and staff emails to all-faculty college meetings, and even a meeting of the Council of Deans.

FGCU submitted a forty-page feedback document to the state, which contributed to the state granting all Florida schools a one-year extension on implementing the core requirements, as well as permitting additional core courses for students beyond the few proposed in the original law.)

The General Education Council developed the final goals and procedure for program revision through a local, grassroots effort, allowing our campus’s collective experience with previous GEP review, academic program review, and Quality Enhancement Plan efforts to inform our process. At this early stage, the General Education Council drew on the expertise of on-campus individuals and programs to share their local experiences of similar program review efforts. More in-depth research informed GEP revision as it begin in the summer of 2013, as will be recounted below.

*What process your institution used to select the desired goals and identify the appropriate procedure: In sum, GEP revision at FGCU began when the General Education Council saw an opportunity to use a state-mandate to spark a bigger conversation about overhauling the program. What began as an idea in a General Education Council made up of faculty and the administrator of the GEP grew into a full process for program revision as that idea travelled through multiple feedback forums.*

*What process your institution used to win institutional commitment to the desired goals and appropriate procedure: Institutional commitment to GEP revision emerged quickly as all program stakeholders realized that the goals and procedure for GEP revision would be developed out of a collaborative process facilitated by the faculty’s General Education Council. This collaborative enterprise continued after the goals and procedure were finalized, as stakeholders continued to be consulted through a designated on-line forum, six additional campus-wide forums, and two additional faculty senate meetings.*
Criterion 3: Actions Taken

*Who were the individuals involved in the implementation process?:* The full implementation of GEP revision at FGCU began in the summer of 2013, when the General Education Council convened eight meetings between May 28th and June 27th. This summer team built the foundation for the new program in the form of a mission statement redrafted in response to faculty feedback, a draft statement of purpose, multiple GEP models for eventual consideration by stakeholders, and an updated list of program competencies and outcomes.

Implementation of the state core involved a host of program stakeholders: department chairs, who planned for the increased demand on state core courses, and in some cases, created new courses to align with the state list; the General Education Council, who reviewed newly-proposed courses and course curriculum changes; the Academic Advising Council, who learned the specifics of the new GEP requirements to effectively advise students; the Office of Academic and Curriculum Support, who reprogrammed advising software to facilitate the new GEP requirements; new-student orientation leaders, who learned the details of the revised GEP in order to present the new program confidently to fellow students.

Another group central to the implementation of FGCU’s GEP revision was the Competency Assessment Advisory Team, which emerged in response to ongoing calls for more meaningful program assessment. This team—then made up of faculty representatives from each of FGCU’s five General Education Program subject areas, a representative from the library, and the director of the GEP (an academic advisor has since been added to bridge assessment efforts with the advising office)—began meeting in the spring of 2014 to process all feedback received in previous forums related to the assessment of general education, and to develop a five-year plan for the assessment of FGCU’s updated general education competencies: *written communication, quantitative reasoning, critical thinking*, and *intercultural knowledge*.

Finally, implementation of GEP revision depended much on stakeholders who were not directly affiliated with any of the abovementioned groups, but instead were individual faculty members or administrators who steered program revision by offering feedback on the mission and purpose, the draft program models and competencies, the challenges of and opportunities in delivering the state core, and the assessment plan.

*What action steps were identified and taken?:* We’ll focus here on the action steps of two groups central to the revision process: the General Education Council summer team and the Competency Assessment Advisory Team. The summer team began its efforts to draft models for the revised GEP by studying the general education programs of nine of FGCU’s peer and aspirant institutions (e.g., Appalachian State University, James Madison University, The University of North Carolina-Wilmington, etc.). We looked closely at the feasibility of implementing the unique features of these institutions’ programs on the FGCU campus, thinking especially about what would and would not work at FGCU, with attention to the state core law and the requirements of FGCU’s accrediting body: the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Much of what we understood as “what would and would not work” came from the ideas we had received throughout the entirety of the previous academic year, when—as discussed above—we engaged a process of garnering comprehensive stakeholder feedback.
The summer team then researched best practices in general education and developed a set of competencies and associated learning outcomes for the new program, drafted with close attention to AAC&U VALUE rubrics. We drafted a GEP purpose statement that included the updated competencies and outcomes, and also redrafted the new mission statement, incorporating feedback received after presenting the initial draft that spring. Finally, to complete our efforts in preparation for a series of fall 2013, campus-wide town hall sessions, we drafted two models of a new FGCU general education program.

Two fall 2013 “Mission and Purpose” town halls and two fall 2013 “GEP Models” town halls produced the faculty, student, and administrator feedback necessary to finalize the mission and purpose as well as identify and hone the favored GEP model. By early spring 2014, the General Education Council had produced a complete revision of FGCU’s GEP—a new mission and purpose, updated competencies and associated learning outcomes, and a full integration of the state core general education courses.

At that point, the work of the newly-established Competency Assessment Advisory Team (CAAT) began in earnest, as that group further vetted the drafted competencies and learning outcomes, and also considered methodologies for assessing these outcomes. The CAAT, which oversees GEP assessment, is not a faculty senate team, but it comprises faculty members who are recruited through the faculty senate’s appointments team. Members of the CAAT serve as a unified entity to coordinate program-wide assessment of general education, including assessment planning and implementation; share assessment results with the University community; and provide opportunities for professional development in the teaching and assessment of general education.

Action steps for the CAAT’s development of the assessment plan included reviewing and honing the draft GEP competencies and outcomes; hosting two fall 2014 “General Education Competency” town hall forums to get feedback on the proposed competency outcomes for written communication, quantitative reasoning, critical thinking, and civic identity (later changed to intercultural knowledge in response to campus feedback); and hosting two spring 2015 “GEP Assessment Plan” town halls to gather feedback on assessment processes.

**What process was used to gain faculty and administrative support and participation?:** To gain support for and participation in the implementation of GEP revision, we maintained constant contact with program stakeholders through campus-wide email announcements, a dedicated learning management system page (which allowed for feedback at every step), and a real-time tracking of revision activities on the GEP revision website. We also scheduled two sessions of every town hall meeting to assure opportunities for stakeholders to participate.

**What process was used to check the progress of the new program implementation?:** The progress of GEP revision and program implementation was checked through bi-weekly meetings of the General Education Council and annual faculty senate presentations, which measured progress against the plan developed with senate feedback in January 2013. In the area of program assessment, the CAAT stayed true to the first-year assessment schedule published in the five-year plan.
Criterion 4: Evidence of Improvement and Continuing Commitment to the Processes

What results (including some examples of evidence of student learning and evidence for support of the improvements) your activities produced: The FGCU faculty senate showed its support for the General Education Council’s transparent, collaborative, and rigorous GEP revision process by awarding the group the Team Faculty Service Excellence Award in spring 2014.

FGCU’s GEP revision produced a new program that (1) incorporates the mandated state core courses; (2) refocuses student and faculty attention on updated, mission- and purpose-driven competency outcomes for written communication, quantitative reasoning, and critical thinking, and aligns with nationwide best practices by integrating an assessed, six-hour intercultural knowledge requirement; and (3) invigorates program evaluation and improvement activities by involving more GEP stakeholders in both the assessment of student work and “closing the loop” on assessment results. Of these three revision achievements, the latter two demonstrate FGCU’s effort to institutionalize an improvement process built on continuous evaluation of student attainment of competency outcomes.

Data from this year’s quantitative reasoning assessment show that students in FGCU’s GEP perform well in “converting relevant information into mathematical context for analysis and understanding” (only 9.9% show “no evidence” of achieving this outcome, versus the remainder, who show “partial” or “solid” evidence) and in “demonstrating the ability to perform necessary mathematical calculations for problem solving” (13.6%, “no evidence”). However, our assessment also demonstrates that students need improvement in “performing quantitative analysis to draw qualified conclusions from work” (30.9%, “no evidence”).

Our intercultural knowledge assessment shows that students in FGCU’s GEP perform well in “demonstrating understanding of human diversity (e.g., cultural, social, historical, political, biological)” (2.3%, “no evidence”), but they need improvement in “analyzing cultural artifacts or customs of expression (e.g., thoughts, behaviors) that emerge in diverse contexts” (11.4%, “no evidence; but 43.2%, “partial evidence”).

Our quality improvement effort is young, but the most significant result of our 2012-2015 GEP revision is an assessment plan that codifies a collaborative process for acting upon results like those cited above.

How the results address the needs identified by the institution: The incorporation of the mandated state core into FGCU’s new GEP addresses the needs of the state of Florida, but the updated, mission- and purpose-driven competencies and the new assessment plan to evaluate and improve on student attainment of these competencies meet the institutional needs identified very early in FGCU’s GEP revision process.

Together, these program revision results address the overall revision goals of creating a more purposeful, coherent general education experience for students, and broadened faculty commitment to and participation in the program and its enhancement.
How the institution is improved by the results: FGCU’s General Education Program now provides a more coherent and visible general education experience for students and for faculty who teach in the program, and its stakeholders engage in a more transparent and collaborative process of evaluation and improvement. We have institutionalized significant changes in both the integration of program competencies and the practice of program assessment and closing the loop.

What evidence or justification exists for the institution’s improvement claims?: Every GEP course now includes at least one program competency in its curriculum, and is assessable in at least one of these competencies. When a program proposes a new general education course, it must identify the GEP competency that the new course will teach, and then the General Education Council reviews the competency proposal in its course approval process. Additionally, the FGCU registrar assures that students can search for general education courses by competency attribute, and the Office of Academic and Curriculum Support assures that student audits display competency requirements. Finally, our course catalog and our first-year advising general education checklist prominently advertise FGCU’s competency requirements so that new students are aware of them as they choose their classes. All of these efforts put written communication, quantitative reasoning, critical thinking, and intercultural knowledge at the forefront of FGCU’s general education experience—for students, faculty, programs, and other stakeholders.

As for program evaluation and improvement, one aspirational goal for GEP revision at FGCU was to create an improvement plan that involves more faculty. To this end, our new assessment efforts go beyond just looking at student performance in multiple sections of one course, as we did in previous assessment cycles. Now, we evaluate student work from multiple sections across courses and across subject areas that teach the competencies scheduled to be assessed. This practice assures a broader awareness of the GEP competencies and evaluation strategies among faculty, because more faculty understand and are involved in some way in program evaluation.

In our first round of assessment, not only did a more interdisciplinary group of faculty submit student work for program assessment, a more diverse group also scored this work. Quantitative reasoning assessors came from the mathematics, physics, and business faculty. Intercultural knowledge assessors came from the art, language, literature, communication, and sociology faculty, as well as from the library and the advising office.

What evidence exists of on-going commitment to the improvements?: As codified in FGCU’s “2015-2020 General Education Program Assessment Plan,” during the 2016-2017 academic year, the CAAT will repeat its 2015-2016 assessment processes, this time for the written communication and critical thinking competencies, while closing the loop on the assessment results for quantitative reasoning and intercultural knowledge.

Following the transparent and collaborative spirit of FGCU’s 2012-2015 GEP revision, developing these closing the loop activities will begin in fall 2016 with town hall sessions presenting the assessment results and inviting stakeholders to propose ways of acting upon the results to improve teaching, student achievement, and the strength of FGCU’s GEP, as well as continuing to build campus-wide commitment to the new GEP.