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Regents approve NSU's new general education curriculum

After three years of assessment and a collective nod from the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, an adjusted general education curriculum will be installed at Northeastern State University.

NSU received a letter March 22 from the OSRHE formally approving the curriculum and it is effective beginning with the Fall 2010 semester.

Provost Martin Tadlock said the revisions allow NSU to maintain a relevant and challenging course of study for undergraduates.

"Such a curriculum can empower individuals by providing a broad base of knowledge, transferable skills, and a strong sense of value, ethics, and civic engagement," he said. "The current revision was a chance to assess how we can provide students with real opportunities to encounter important issues and how we can meaningfully assess learning as those encounters take place. This work was important to curricula and pedagogy across all academic programs since general education is the base for all academic majors."

This modified curriculum was identified by the General Education Task Force, which was formed in 2007 to review NSU's requirements. The task force studied the curriculum models used by other institutions, surveyed faculty and students and held forums to obtain feedback.

"The preliminary report was shared with faculty and students for feedback before the final report was submitted," said ex officio task force member Dr. Janet Bahr, associate vice president for Academic Affairs. "The new general education curriculum is consistent with our new focused mission statement of 'empowering students to be socially responsible global citizens by creating and sustaining a culture of learning and discovery.'"

One GE modification is the "Global Perspectives" portion. Students must take two consecutive courses in a second language or select six hours from second languages, American Indian studies, geography, political science, or literature, customs and beliefs.

Dr. Amy Aldridge Sanford, assistant professor of Communication Studies and chair of the task force, noted NSU's previous GE requirements predated widespread Internet use and said technological advances necessitate some familiarity with other cultures.

"Today, mostly as a result of technology and travel accessibility, our students are truly global citizens," she said. "The task force wanted to create a category of general education in which our students will be exposed to a culture outside of the dominant one many of them already know and understand."

Another change is the elimination of the four-hour health and physical education requirement. In its place students must choose six hours from a list of life skills courses; however, one class must be Personal Health or Basic Nutrition.

Sanford said the option remains to fulfill the requirement with traditional PE classes, but the adjustment addressed an evident concern in the survey of hundreds of students.

"We had many people tell us that they would like to have classes in personal finance, relationships, leadership and other life skills," Sanford said. "We didn't have a category in the former general education that allowed for that. So we decided to keep the physical education credits, since physical activity is also a life skill, but to allow students other options for life skills development."

Other GE curriculum changes include:

- Fundamentals of Communication will no longer be mandatory, but be one of four options to meet the oral communication requirement
- Geography will also be a "menu" course and no longer mandated
- A lab course must be taken to fulfill the physical science or biology requirement
- A computer proficiency course is no longer necessary, but students must still demonstrate proficiency

Returning students can take the general education courses listed in their degree plans and are not affected by the new curriculum.

"If a continuing student is considering switching from the old GE to the new GE, it is recommended that he or she visit with an adviser to see whether or not it will be to the student's advantage," Sanford said. "With an associate of arts or associate of science degree from a state institution in Oklahoma or approved out-of-state institution, a transfer student does not need to take any of NSU's GE requirements except for those that are specifically required for the major."

To see a table contrasting the old and new general education requirements, visit <http://offices.nsuok.edu/firstyearexperience/GeneralEducation.aspx>. A FAQ page is at <http://offices.nsuok.edu/firstyearexperience/GeneralEducation/GenEdFAQs.aspx>.

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