

Gallaudet University General Studies Requirement program

Reviewer's report, March 15, 2019

Preface

This section of the report was written by Nathan Rein, Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs, Ursinus College (nrein@ursinus.edu, 610-409-3571). Data-gathering for this report occurred over two days of on-campus meetings, a classroom visit, a public town hall, and informal conversations, which took place Wednesday and Thursday, Feb. 13 and 14, 2019. Team members included Mr. Marvin Miller and Dr. Nikki Proctor-Walden (Claflin U.). The review team was charged with producing a wide-ranging report on the General Studies Requirement program (hereafter GSR) at Gallaudet University. The reviewers' goal in this report has been to provide assessments and recommendations that will help faculty, staff, and administrators serve students and support the distinctive Gallaudet mission as effectively as possible. The reviewers wish to thank the Provost's office, the GSR director, and the entire Gallaudet community for this opportunity to collaborate with such a renowned and historic institution and are honored to be entrusted with this task.

Introduction: Overview

The GSR program represents the general education component of a Gallaudet undergraduate degree. It is an ambitious, complex, scaffolded program consisting of four Foundations courses at the first-year level (GSR-101 through 104); five Integrative Learning courses, one at the introductory level (GSR-150) and four at the intermediate level (GSR-210, 220, 230, and 240); and a capstone-level course (GSR-300). Notably, the 200- and 300-level GSR courses are all worth four credits, in contrast to most Gallaudet undergraduate courses, which earn three credits. The GSR program also includes a single one-credit course, GSR-110.¹ Each GSR course is explicitly tied to at least one of the five Gallaudet learning outcomes and are intended to support the University's mission directly.

The program in its current form is about twelve years old. A MSCHE recommendation in 2007 prompted a major redesign. The 2007 changes reflected a move away from a distribution-based core and towards a general education model organized around staged, integrative learning and oriented toward well-defined learning outcomes. Additionally, the pre-2007 general education program was, by most yardsticks, extremely extensive, and the revisions brought the total number of required credits more closely into line with standard practices.

For details about the content of the courses themselves, the reader is referred to the Gallaudet Undergraduate catalogue.²

Reviewer's observations

As noted, the GSR program is ambitious, thoughtfully designed, and carefully structured. At the same time, the reviewers' conversations with a wide range of stakeholders revealed a concerning

¹ Gallaudet University, *Undergraduate Catalog 2018-2019*, 100.

² 179–84.

level of dissatisfaction with its current implementation. We believe that the program is solid and has many notable strengths, but we have identified a number of obstacles to the effective realization of its potential. These obstacles fall under three broad headings: lack of clarity around the goals of GSR; inadequate institutional commitment and support; and messaging and communication. We will lay out our observations, along with recommendations where appropriate, in the following sections. Following this section of the report is a summary of all recommendations.

A. Program goals of GSR

While learning outcomes for the GSR (and for the entire undergraduate curriculum) are clearly and consistently set forth,³ we found a lack of consensus among important stakeholders about the program's concrete goals. Throughout our two days of discussions with campus stakeholders, we heard a number of claims about what the GSR program *should* do. Some were closely related to the explicit learning outcomes; others less so. To provide context, some of those comments are included below.

According to comments we heard in our meetings, the GSR program should:

- Provide foundational skills.
- Drive student retention.
- Support Gallaudet University's role as "the place where Deaf students can come and get career readiness education."
- Offer an environment in which students can "understand themselves and feel valued."
- Engage substantively and seriously with issues of social justice, audism, and racism.
- Provide an "an introduction to the liberal arts."
- Give students a sense of connection to the campus community and especially to the teaching staff.
- Demonstrate a coherent thematic and conceptual throughline connecting GSR 101 with GSR 300 and all the courses in between, and demonstrate that coherence in a way that students can clearly understand and accept.

The idea that GSR ought to achieve all of the goals listed here – and then some – is probably not impossible, but it is ambitious, to say the least. We have listed these remarks here to give a sense of the wide range of opinions that community members express regarding why GSR exists and what students should gain from it. We offer here an analysis of our impressions during our visit and a corresponding recommendation.

We found that views of the overarching goals of GSR cluster around four distinct ideas. By distinguishing "goals" from "outcomes" in this context, we mean to signal the importance of a strong and widely shared sense of *intention* underlying the program as a whole. Any academic course or curricular program can generate effects in students that go beyond a suite of learning outcomes, including, for example, affective or social development. Often these results are regarded as unintentional – though frequently desirable – byproducts of a process aimed at producing purely academic learning. However, we believe that the central place of a general education program in the

³ Gallaudet University, "Student Learning Outcomes."

undergraduate experience, in addition to the unique and distinctive nature of Gallaudet and the communities it serves, justify adopting a more intentional stance toward these sorts of outcomes. With this in mind, we have identified four major areas of focus that emerged during conversations with faculty, students, administrators, and other community members, all of which were broadly distinct from one another and none of which took obvious priority over the others. These four areas are as follows:

- 1.) *Skill / competency development.* These include the acquisition of foundational literacies in defined subject areas, such as mathematics and science. Also classified under this heading are: exposure to the principles of a range of academic disciplines; familiarity with principles of cultural, socioeconomic, linguistic and other diversity; and development of critical thinking, interpretive, and ethical decision-making skills. This is the category that most closely overlaps the explicit learning goals of the undergraduate curriculum, and the one that would be most recognizable to most conventional “gen ed” curriculum designers.
- 2.) *Language development.* In keeping with Gallaudet’s unique and crucial mission as a bilingual institution and as the only signing university on the planet, every Gallaudet graduate should leave the university with optimal fluency in both ASL and written English. Students enter Gallaudet with wildly varying levels of familiarity and skill in both languages, due to the enormous variability in prior schooling. Since the GSR program is the only element of the undergraduate curriculum shared among *all* undergraduates, it becomes the natural “home” for the development of that fluency. Under the current structure of the GSR, students can be “tracked” into four different course configurations depending on whether students place into high- or low-fluency levels of ASL and written English.⁴ The standard sequence – GSR 101 through 104 – can be supplemented with additional English coursework, or by preceding GSR 103 with ASL 101, 102, or 111.
- 3.) *Identity development.* GSR 103 in particular is designed as an introduction into Deaf studies via critical engagement with American Sign Language. In GSR 103, students should gain an awareness of the history, complexity, and cultural significance of ASL and in doing so develop a basic grasp of Deaf identity. As with point 2.) above, given Gallaudet’s mission and identity, and the GSR’s unique position in the curriculum, this seems a natural goal for the program. The reviewers did not see a systematic or consistent articulation of the idea that identity development should constitute one of GSR’s major purposes. However, the importance of the idea surfaced so frequently in our discussions that we judged it to be central nonetheless.
- 4.) *Community formation.* Of the four goals identified here, this is perhaps the most difficult to define or assess precisely. In addition, as with 3.) above, we did not see an explicit consensus about its importance. However, our familiarity with first-year experience programs at other institutions, combined with remarks from faculty, students, and others about the importance of a common, institution-wide, shared set of academic experiences, suggest to us that the formation of a community of first-year students is potentially of great significance. The social and communal value of providing a common touchstone experience that all students can refer back to and draw upon over their four years is attested in, among others, George Kuh’s work on high-impact practices. We believe that consistency and

⁴ “Student Success: GSR,” 9.

commonality across the first-year experience can play a primary role in helping to develop students' sense of themselves as Gallaudet students and to support their integration into the community. This is perhaps especially critical for students whose prior schooling has taken place in mainstreamed environments and who arrive at Gallaudet without feeling of membership in a broader Deaf community.

Our first and possibly most critical recommendation is to prioritize these goals and to achieve consensus among stakeholders regarding that prioritization. When the reviewers raised the explicit question of the program's primary purpose in a group conversation, the responses indicated a general awareness of and concern about this lack of consensus. For the program to be successful, instructors, students, academic advisers, and campus leaders must have a shared sense of why students are required to complete this ambitious and complex program, and they must be reasonably confident of its value and effectiveness.

To achieve such a consensus, program leadership will have to adopt a strategy that suits the Gallaudet culture. In general, our view is that greater transparency and wider participation, although they may come at the cost of efficiency and speed, are particularly valuable in such processes. Thus, we would generally recommend in favor of an inclusive, structured process. One promising strategy might be to convene a broadly representative working group, made up of instructors, department heads, representatives of key administrative offices, and student leaders, and provide the group with the necessary resources and authority to conduct surveys, assemble focus groups, hold town halls, and otherwise gather as much information as possible about campus-wide perceptions and needs with respect to general education. Such a group should be tasked with producing a document, within a specified timeframe, that explicitly lays out the mission of the GSR program; this document should ideally be available to the community for comment and critique, again over a predetermined timeframe. We believe that an effective process must be deliberate and thoughtful, and thus it must allow enough time to ensure broad and diverse participation in a substantive fashion. However, a process that drags on too long or that doesn't have an explicit end-goal in view will eventually undermine itself, generating discouragement or even cynicism, and ultimately limiting rather than supporting wide, energetic engagement.

Our strong impression is that given the current level of institutional support, funding, and staffing, it is not feasible for the GSR program as it now stands to fulfill all four of these purposes. The review team agreed that if we were to recommend putting the emphasis on one of these four areas, we would choose 3.), the development of Deaf identity and self-awareness. GSR appears to be the only place in the institutional curriculum in which students can be expected to confront these difficult and critical issues head-on in a sustained and focused way. 1.) and 2.) can potentially be addressed elsewhere in the undergraduate curriculum, and a well-designed program to nurture and develop Deaf identity, we believe, will necessarily have a community-building effect as well.

One additional point deserves explicit emphasis. While our on-campus discussions did not indicate a high level of shared concern about the connection between GSR and student retention, the idea came up several times. Typically, across institutions, retention challenges are most acute for

students finishing the first year and moving into the second. Thus, careful and data-driven planning for first-year curricula, as well as co-curricular and extracurricular activities, will often yield significant retention results. In this context, we note that several stakeholders commented anecdotally that while a strong GSR program can and should be a driver of student retention, their impression was that in practice it appears to have the opposite effect. One document even suggested that retention had declined concurrently with the declining proportion of GSR courses staffed by full-time faculty.⁵ If students don't understand the value of the courses and feel that they represent hurdles to be "gotten out of the way" with the minimum viable effort, then these courses can all too easily act as obstacles to successful degree completion and thus as a drag on retention. A perception that the courses are treated as afterthoughts by faculty mentors and advisors – which can result from the over-reliance on adjuncts with only limited connection to the broader campus life – can be equally toxic. This tends to be especially true for lower-income students, whose financial situation makes them resistant to taking courses they perceive as "unnecessary" or irrelevant to their career or personal goals. We do not have any data at our disposal that could confirm or disconfirm this impression, but in the current higher education climate, retention is of such vital importance that we wished to call attention to this concern nonetheless. We recommend further analysis of enrollment data to determine whether GSR helps or hurts first-year retention.

B. Structural obstacles to program effectiveness

If asked to identify the single most glaring problem with the current structure of the GSR program that emerged from our two days of discussions, we would unhesitatingly point to the apparent mismatch between what the GSR program is tasked with, on the one hand, and the level of institutional support the University has committed to it, on the other. The GSR represents an extensive and ambitious program, covering a great deal of curricular ground, and faculty justifiably expect that a student who has completed – for example – the Freshman Foundation courses will have mastered some core competencies in English-language writing, ASL presentation skills, and college-level math. At the same time, we saw evidence from many areas that indicates that the program director simply does not have the required resources to achieve those goals consistently and reliably. This is most evident when it comes to staffing. We have several recommendations in this area, but ultimately they are reducible in sum to a need for the institution to allocate enough support to GSR that it can staff, schedule, assess, and develop its programming effectively and efficiently.

1.) Staffing.

The GSR director, department heads, and departmental faculty all expressed frustration about the difficulty of staffing GSR courses. The course scheduling and staffing process at Gallaudet, we conclude, is not entirely different from the process at our home institutions and at other institutions with which we're familiar, and the GSR program's ongoing staffing problems are by no means unique or exceptional. At Ursinus, where the current writer works, we confront much the same challenge on a semesterly basis, and instead of Gallaudet's five 100-level courses (plus a panoply of 200- and 300-level courses), Ursinus only needs dedicated staff for a single two-

⁵ Gallaudet University Office of Institutional Research, "Full Time Faculty Teaching General Studies Requirements (GSR)."

semester first-year sequence! Our experience, however, is that our first-year seminar coordinator must frequently call on the VP for Academic Affairs' office for the "muscle" necessary to pry departmental teaching staff away from their departments and into the core. The GSR director, however, does not appear to have sufficient institutional leverage to pull this off consistently, semester after semester.

The GSR staffing problem at Gallaudet is, thus, familiar to anyone who has attempted to organize and sustain an institution-wide curricular initiative on a tight budget. Despite the fact that most stakeholders have a generally favorable attitude toward the program and its goals, the program is dependent on departments to supply faculty to staff its course offerings. In turn, lacking clearly defined expectations for departmental contributions to GSR staffing needs – not to mention any accountability associated with such expectations – it is to be expected that department heads will prioritize the scheduling needs of their own majors and faculty above the needs of GSR. In effect, the program depends on the largesse of departments for its staffing. Comments made during our visit indicate that in the eyes of many department heads, staffing levels are already below what is needed to adequately support the needs of their own major curricula. Thus, an ongoing conflict between GSR's needs and the needs of departments is virtually guaranteed. Our impression is that the only strategy available to the GSR director to secure departmental commitments to the program is, in effect, an appeal to department heads' goodwill. Without intending to imply that goodwill is in short supply – as noted, everyone we spoke to was broadly supportive of GSR – any dependence solely on individual departments' ability and willingness to deprioritize their own needs in favor of GSR seems like a losing strategy. To flourish and develop, the GSR program as a whole needs to be able to rely on consistent staffing levels and on a wide-ranging, explicit, ongoing institutional commitment.

In our meetings we were presented a consistent narrative from instructors and department heads that confirmed this picture. We saw very little evidence, on the other hand, that the institution had taken concerted action at any level to address these concerns. The GSR director shared with us a set of documents going back to 2014 showing a long-standing effort to document staffing needs and to advocate for a permanent strategy for addressing ongoing staffing shortfalls. These documents include emails, Institutional Research analyses, presentation slide decks and handouts, and spreadsheets.⁶ The staffing problem is evidently complex and touches not only on questions of resource allocation – both within departments and independent of them – but also on perceptions of mission, faculty morale, and incentives and reward structures. For example, faculty recounted the enthusiasm for exciting and innovative projects like team-taught integrative courses in the early years of GSR, and then disappointment as team-teaching gradually vanished from the program without much discussion or transparency. The perception of GSR by department faculty as an "unfunded mandate," so to speak, is problematic. Other faculty mentioned the workload discrepancy between conventional departmental courses and GSR courses. In their view, a commitment to teaching in the GSR program reflects the voluntary assumption of uncompensated

⁶ Rach, "Strategies for Allocating Faculty"; "Strategies for Regular Faculty to Teach GSR"; "General Studies Academic Program Review (APR)"; Gallaudet University Office of Institutional Research, "Full Time Faculty Teaching General Studies Requirements (GSR)."

extra work, partially but not only because many GSR courses carry an extra credit-hour beyond what a faculty member's typical teaching load would be. Many faculty, rightly or wrongly, also believe that GSR courses are simply more difficult to teach, perhaps because the subject matter frequently falls outside the instructor's primary area of expertise. Finally, faculty perceive that the tenure and promotion process provides a strong disincentive for participation in GSR; faculty fear that they will be punished for taking on demanding teaching assignments outside of their specialty and for neglecting the needs of their departments.

A few additional issues that complicate the staffing and scheduling picture deserve explicit mention.

- The difficulty of fitting four-credit courses into teaching loads organized around three-credit courses adds extra friction to the recruitment and scheduling process.
- The need for faculty to identify a topic for each integrative or capstone course slows down the process of getting courses listed in the online registration system.
- When faced with staffing shortfalls, the GSR director will typically need to fill gaps by hiring adjuncts on short notice. Without additional administrative support, the work associated with recruiting, vetting, and onboarding several dozen adjuncts each semester is not sustainable or reasonable.
- The University and the GSR director share the goal of staffing GSR courses with experienced, permanent faculty to the greatest extent possible. There is convincing evidence that the greater the proportion of permanent faculty that staff GSR courses, the better the course outcomes will be. This appears to be the rationale behind the GSR director's stance. However, although we weren't presented with an explicit statement of the administration's view of this point, we received the impression that the reliance on permanent faculty could also be seen as a cost-containing measure, i.e., to avoid the need to hire additional instructors. We note that these two rationales are potentially in tension with one another.
- Cross-listing of departmental courses with GSR courses has served to address some of these concerns, but it is clearly a stopgap measure. In effect, this strategy requires that course designed primarily to meet departmental needs be adapted to fit the needs of *both* the department and the GSR program. This is not a trivial task. Cross-listing creates a problem of dual accountability, in which tensions between departmental requirements and GSR program goals will inevitably tend to disadvantage the GSR program. The difficulty of ensuring that such courses effectively address the GSR's learning goals and comply with GSR's administrative needs – for example, for the collecting of syllabi – is great enough that in many cases it simply won't take place. The end result of this strategy is to reinforce the problematic push-pull relationship between departments and GSR *in the individual classroom*.

There is no one simple fix for GSR's staffing dilemma. To maintain the program in its current form will require a multi-pronged solution and real institutional commitment. The Provost's office, we believe, must work with departments to establish clear and fair expectations for departmental contributions to the program. Those expectations, in turn, must have teeth; if a department fails to meet those expectations, real consequences should follow. For example, the Provost's office could direct that underenrolled departmental courses be cancelled and that the affected faculty be directed to work with the GSR director to fill gaps in the program. This strategy has the

disadvantage, however, of reinforcing the perception of conflict between departmental and GSR needs. It would cause faculty to see participation in GSR as a punishment, and it would alarm departments whose courses are typically seen as less popular than others. At the same time, dragging underprepared or inadequately trained faculty into participation in the program would bring its own risks. Given the scope and breadth of GSR (ten courses), most faculty are unlikely to be prepared at any given moment to teach more than two or three of those courses with confidence. Staffing crucial first-year courses with resentful or inexperienced faculty would undermine efforts to use GSR as a way of bolstering first-year retention. Additional discussion of this point appears below, under “Recommendations.”

2.) *Governance.*

Although perhaps less obvious and immediate than the staffing and resourcing issue, we found that the governance and decision-making structure associated with GSR to be inefficient and unclear. Our impression, though it was not explicitly confirmed and we saw no documentation, is that final responsibility for the program rests with the GSR director, but that there are no other faculty or administrators specifically tasked with ensuring the success of the program. As we understand it, each GSR course has a coordinator, typically a faculty member who may or may not be nominally compensated (say, with a one-course release). In many cases, it appears that these coordinator roles are allocated mostly on an ad hoc basis. Individual faculty volunteer for the role, and there appear to be some tacit rules about who is eligible to serve. For example, there seems to be an implicit understanding that the coordinatorship of GSR 102, Critical Reading and Writing, “belongs” to the English department. Although we asked, we did not receive a full explanation of the coordinators’ responsibilities. Our general impression is that the coordinators do not meet together or confer frequently, that each coordinator’s responsibility is limited to the course or courses that fall under his or her area, and that different coordinators understand their roles differently.

In a well-established, smoothly operating program with no challenges, this kind of distributed, loose governance could be effective. However, given the struggles that the GSR director faces in staffing and assessing the program, it would be valuable to formalize the governance structure and more explicitly define the coordinator role. The structure itself, we think, deserves rethinking. A smaller group of coordinators, all of whom had some level of responsibility for the program as a whole – and who were compensated and/or given release time, and whose appointment was made transparently, for a time-limited period – would be more likely to achieve a big-picture view of the program’s needs and strengths.

The effects of an inadequately formalized governance structure can be seen in several aspects of the program’s management and ongoing development. For example, there does not appear to be much documentation about effective practices in individual courses, which means that training for new instructors is necessarily haphazard. Similarly, decision-making processes and information flow are not clearly delineated. We were presented with several stories in which instructors’ questions about specific aspects of GSR went unanswered, apparently because it was unclear who among the staff was in a position to provide an authoritative response. We did not see evidence of any type of

repository of teaching materials or supporting documents that might be accessed by new instructors or easily shared among veterans.

The most concerning issue under in this category is the difficulty of providing any oversight of the way GSR courses are actually taught. Repeatedly we learned of concerns – from administrators, department heads, and faculty – about the quality of teaching in the program. These concerns had less to do with a sense that GSR teaching is poor, and more, rather, with the problem that teaching quality is largely unknown and extremely difficult to assess. Similarly, given the sprawling nature of the program and its multidisciplinary character, it can be prohibitively difficult simply to ensure that the content of every GSR class – particularly those taught by untrained, short-term adjuncts – is correct and fits the catalogue description. We did not see evidence that regular classroom observation, or other peer evaluation of teaching, regularly takes place. Without clearly established, transparent, accountable governance, this is unlikely to be remedied.

C. Messaging and communication

Even the most well-designed curriculum, the most efficiently-managed program, requires a minimum level of buy-in by faculty, academic advisors, administrators and students if it is to live up to its potential. Our impression is that campus-wide perceptions of the GSR program are mixed. There is, we think, a fair amount of goodwill toward the program, but this goodwill is in many cases combined with frustration, confusion, and skepticism. Of course, we face a national environment in which all institutions of higher education, particularly those that explicitly embrace the liberal arts, are experiencing brutal economic, cultural, and even political challenges. Some of the negative perceptions we encountered are undoubtedly due to factors that have very little to do with Gallaudet University itself and much more to do with external pressures. However, we believe that careful, strategic messaging to the campus can help to build buy-in and thus strengthen the program's place in the curriculum and the institutional culture.

It is clear, for example, that for long-serving faculty and staff, the curriculum overhaul that took place in 2007 left a problematic legacy. Academics, as we all know, have long memories, and even twelve years after the fact, a sense of alienation and disempowerment is still detectable. The impression we received was that the revision process, partially driven by concerns over accreditation, was conducted on an extraordinarily compressed timeframe, that the process was perceived as lacking transparency, and that it wrought enormous changes in the curriculum and student experience, which were then presented to faculty as something of a *fait accompli*. That being said, however, the program's fundamental goals and structure are generally supported by faculty. We were explicitly told several times that faculty had no wish to return to the previous, distribution-based core, and that the current form of the program is much preferable to the pre-2007 version.

At the same time, there is a widespread perception – which, based on our other observations, seems somewhat justified – that while the general goals of the program are laudable, it doesn't have enough support from the institution to meet those goals. The current structure all but guarantees that the program will continue to face challenges with staffing, with disorganization, and with the

perception of lack of coherence. Our discussions with students, in particular, suggest that while many students enjoy their GSR coursework and find it beneficial, they do not understand why they are required to do it, and they don't see much connection between one GSR course and the next. Despite the prominence on course syllabi of learning goals and assessment strategies, students don't always see the relevance or value of the courses themselves. As a general rule, we believe that curricular coherence only exists to the extent that it exists *in the mind of the student*, and by that metric, GSR is only coherent in parts, not as a whole.

To address these concerns, we believe that in addition to addressing the problems referenced in sections A. and B. above, there should be a focused and intentional process of educating community members about the mission and value of GSR. The perception of transparent governance, shared goals, and effective execution should help to drive buy-in across the campus. Improved buy-in, in turn, will help to support the recruitment of instructors from among the permanent faculty, which should then reduce pressure on coordinators and director.

Summary of recommendations

In the foregoing, we have identified several concrete recommendations. These are summarized below and in some cases provided with additional detail. They are organized roughly in order of priority.

- 1.) *Build consensus around the purposes of GSR.* As detailed under section A. of this document above, we suggest that a working group be convened made up of a representative selection of stakeholders. This group should be empowered to hold focus groups and town halls, to conduct surveys, and otherwise to seek community input on the program. It should work on a timeline – a year would be reasonable – and produce a position paper at the conclusion of its work, laying out its interpretation of the community's priorities regarding GSR. It should, in addition, be prepared to offer suggestions about next steps in implementing those priorities.
- 2.) *Aggressively confront the staffing problem.* If Gallaudet wishes to maintain GSR as a core curriculum, it must be adequately staffed. There are essentially three options for staffing, namely, (a) the use of regular departmental faculty, (b) the creation of new faculty lines specifically for GSR, or (c) the use of adjuncts. All sources we spoke with expressed a strong disfavor for option (c), and pointed to the fact that reliance on adjunct faculty has diminished somewhat in recent years, to 38%. Option (b) would require substantial new investment by the university, which we judge to be unlikely in this climate. Thus it seems logical to concentrate on (a).

As noted by the GSR director, there are three ways departmental faculty can participate in GSR.⁷ They can “adopt” a course that has already been designed and taught by others, such as one of the GSR-10X courses. They can design and teach a new course, such as one of the

⁷ Rach, “Strategies for Regular Faculty to Teach GSR.”

integrative learning courses. Or they can cross-list a departmental course under one of the GSR course numbers. As noted previously, the third option, cross-listing, represents a stopgap measure that ultimately will not support the development of GSR as a strong and distinctive curriculum. (In fact, it is hard to avoid the impression that extensive use of cross-listing amounts to the recreation of a distribution-based core under another name.)

The first two options, however, both require that departments “loan” their faculty to the GSR, either temporarily or on a more ongoing basis. For understaffed departments, this can be problematic. We strongly recommend that a policy be developed to address this problem. As with the previous point, policy development must take place in an open and transparent manner, and fair and equal treatment of departments must be scrupulously upheld. A satisfactory policy should lay out clear expectations for departmental contributions to GSR, and it must include accountability provisions, so that departments cannot easily evade those responsibilities. The determination of what is “fair” and equitable, and of what level of contribution is reasonable, should, similarly, be addressed transparently and openly, without any perception that individual departments are able to negotiate special “deals” or exceptions with the administration.

In addition, new instructors in GSR must receive the necessary support. Following are several concrete ways in which the university can provide it.

- a. Formal training and ongoing mentoring for new instructors.
- b. Clear policies on how the extra workload associated with GSR is to be compensated (or a clear explanation for why it is not, and assurance that this extra workload will not fall disproportionately on one group of faculty more than another).
- c. Explicit and widely-understood rules regarding the tenure and promotion process that prevent pre-tenure faculty from being penalized in any way for their participation in GSR.
- d. A transparent and documented evaluation and professional development process for GSR instructors.

We strongly urge the administration to take this recommendation seriously. If GSR is to continue, this problem needs immediate and focused attention.

3.) *Formalize, and possibly restructure, the governance of GSR.* As noted above, we believe the current coordinator structure is too diffuse and unwieldy to provide effective and efficient leadership. The GSR director cannot possibly perform all of the work associated with administering this program; it’s simply too much for one person. Thus, we suggest the following:

- a. Formalize and document the roles of the coordinators, and establish consistent and adequate compensation for their work.
- b. Consider reducing the number of coordinators.
- c. Establish regular meetings of the coordinators and director.

- d. Ensure that information about the program is readily available to instructors, administrators, and other stakeholders, and establish who is responsible for answering queries when they arise.
- 4.) *Build campus-wide awareness and buy-in.* Ensure that points 1.) through 3.) above are addressed, that this process takes place in full view of the campus. It is important that faculty, students, donors, and other community members understand that Gallaudet is committed to the success of GSR and that the administration is prepared to take on the challenge of strengthening and developing this unique and distinctive program. This should include explicit communications with students, which might, for example, take place via academic advising or first-year orientation.
-

List of documents referenced

- Gallaudet University. "Student Learning Outcomes." Accessed March 14, 2019.
<https://www.gallaudet.edu/academic-catalog/undergraduate-education/learning-outcomes>.
- . *Undergraduate Catalog 2018-2019*. Washington D.C.: Gallaudet University, 2018.
<https://www.gallaudet.edu/Documents/Academic-Catalog/UG/2018-2019%20Undergraduate%20catalog.pdf>.
- Gallaudet University Office of Institutional Research. "Full Time Faculty Teaching General Studies Requirements (GSR)." Washington, DC: Gallaudet University, May 13, 2016.
- Rach, Leslie. "General Studies Academic Program Review (APR)." Washington, DC, Fall 2018.
- . "Strategies for Allocating Faculty," April 12, 2017.
- . "Strategies for Regular Faculty to Teach GSR," April 12, 2017.
- "Student Success: GSR: Senior Academic Affairs Administrators Meeting," November 11, 2015.