

Response to GERTF letter

Dear Former Members of GERTF,

I feel confident saying that all members of GERAC and GEAC respect and honor the tremendous amount of time and effort that went into the production of the GERTF model and report. Many of us participated in one form or another early on, and have since worked toward implementing the GERTF model. That has not been possible, and while inconstant leadership has been a huge obstacle, it would be naive to think that it was the only major obstacle.

GERAC was formed to address concerns with the GERTF model from a variety of stakeholders who felt (rightly or wrongly) that their input had not been received. These included faculty (particularly faculty from other campuses), staff involved in budgeting and marketing, as well as many others. Their concerns included (but were not limited to):

1. The potential effect on programs
2. The potential effect on transfer students
3. The potential effect on faculty workload
4. The feasibility and potential effect of the ESSE

The authors' letter brings up a number of issues about the current state of general education reform. Let's begin with the first bullet, **Lost pedagogical value**. The authors are entirely correct that much of the pedagogical value of the GERTF model will be lost following the recommendations of GERAC. There were two main recommendations relevant to this bullet, and they should be treated separately.

1. The removal of vertical integration: This aspect of the GERTF model presented significant logistical challenges to the registrar, as well as curriculum challenges to several important programs—particularly those with inverted curricula. However, the most important factor in GERAC's decision not to recommend going forward with vertical integration was its effect on transfer students. Seth's subsequent excellent work showed that credit hour losses for potential transfer students due to this aspect of GERTF's model were significant. The pedagogical loss from removing this aspect was also significant, as the authors point out, but in this case GERAC decided the concerns voiced (repeatedly and loudly) by a wide variety of faculty and staff were, in fact, well-founded. If the authors want to revive vertical integration, they will have to address these concerns.
2. The de-emphasis of program integration: The problem here was very different. In the case of program integration we were never able to reach a consensus (either in GERAC or in discussions with individual programs) that, outside of the assessment we presently do, program integration was worthwhile. The objection was that, while ESLO content which appears naturally in programmatic classes can and absolutely should be reemphasized, there are programs in which some ESLO content simply does not appear in any meaningful way. The idea that such programs should have to either find or produce such content anyway was viewed as unnatural and unhelpful. The opinion was even more strongly voiced for capstone courses, which faculty view—rightly!—as the crowning experience **in their program**. Even after long discussion there was

great resistance—even resentment—that general education would try to interfere with these most programmatic of courses. To paraphrase an infamous demand at one of the GERTF presentations to faculty, the feeling seems to be “Who are you to tell us what to do?! (in our program)”

In the end GERAC **did not** preclude future moves toward more program integration. One can certainly imagine requirements such as asking programs to point out where (if anywhere) ESLO material appears in programmatic courses (perhaps as part of a later amendment to the assessment process). However, as part of this early phase of what we do view as a “phased implementation”, GERAC did not recommend going forward with this aspect. If the authors wish to go forward with program integration now, they will have to address this resistance **among faculty**.

Let’s now address the third bullet, **Increased credit burden**. Here I am disappointed to read some simply false statements. First, the GERAC model does **not** “increase program credit count for nearly all programs.” Perhaps the authors are thinking of Seth’s “First Pass” through the curriculum maps, which was necessarily a conservative and automated analysis. In fact, after making some necessary compromises (e.g. allowing Math 465 to count as QL-Stat) and looking more carefully at individual programs (including talking with faculty in those programs), the credit hour add is zero for most programs. What problems remain are mostly associated to the QL pathway—an issue that will be resolved soon. The impact of credit hour adds will certainly have a large influence on how that issue is resolved, though in the end, it may be that a handful of programs will have to add a single class. For a reform of this scale, that does not seem such a big ask. (See page 17 of Seth’s “Paths Forward for General Education Reform” attached to the end of this letter for a list of the remaining program adds.)

Even more disappointing was the authors’ ill-informed statement that “there is no justification for additional credits in the GERAC model except to support current staffing”. While it appears that GEAC and GERAC differ from the GERTF in that we **do** believe that faculty workload is a valid and important concern, this was not the reason for the credit hour adds. Those came from our collective distaste at two compromises embraced by the GERTF.

First, most members of GERAC and GEAC feel that “double-dipping” is intellectually suspect, and should be avoided if at all possible. If an ESLO was determined to be “worth” two (formerly vertically integrated) courses, then combining the second course with the second course in another ESLO short-changes both. Further, making a single course count as a “double ESLO credit” produces an unnatural and unwarranted pressure for all students to take that course.

Second, I feel—and those members with whom I’ve discussed it agree—the GERTF requirement that second IA courses should be “outside the program’s traditional area of support” (never well-defined by GERTF) is confusing and misleading. Again, if it has been determined that, say, IA-HUM is “worth” two courses, then everyone should have to take two such courses. The fact that some students will get some general education courses “for free” because they are required by their program should be irrelevant. A valid concern was raised that there is a dearth of truly “gen ed” IA-N courses. The Natural Sciences department has expressed willingness (even enthusiasm) for teaching such courses, however, only asking that there be a population willing to take them.

Addressing your fifth bullet, **Phased implementation**, almost everyone I know on either committee completely agrees—there should be a phased implementation. That is essentially what the GERAC model proposes: ESLO alignment for Fall 2020 with ESSE pilot development over the summer of 2019, and pilots running in the 2019-2020 school year. Then, having presumably learned what works with ESSEs, they may be introduced for all students in Fall 2021—assuming, of course, that they are feasible. Another scenario might be that the number of ESSEs just slowly increases over time until almost everyone ends up taking one. We’ll see. The GERAC model reserved three IA:SS course slots with the understanding that one of those slot could be replaced with an ESSE if the student is willing and an appealing ESSE course is available.

Seth is producing a much more elaborate timeline for the possible implementation of general education reform, starting with the issues he outlined in the Academic Council meeting on 11 Jan. He (and GEAC) can be forgiven, I hope, for not planning too far in advance just yet, as it is still unclear whether this whole enterprise will, in fact, go forward.

Which seems like a good place to segue into my final point: Will this go forward?

In GERAC last summer, we laid out a set of options for moving forward with general education reform. We then saw that we really should have an “Option Zero” for **don’t go forward at all**. This would be the “Gather more data for a couple of years and then start all over” option. It remains on the table, and it should certainly be taken if we (all of OIT, together) decide that the reform, in the form I’ve outlined here for you, is now so watered down that it is no longer worth the trouble. Once GEAC has ironed out the last few points and come up with some draft language, I will suggest that Faculty Senate take up the question. I am fairly certain that, if it is voted down in Faculty Senate, Option Zero will be in effect. I will be OK with that. Many people have made their very best, good-faith effort to produce something that is both worthwhile and has broad consensus, but failure is a part of life.

I do caution the authors that, if it is to be Option Zero, it is my strong suspicion that many of the principals (including leadership) will throw up their hands and walk away from the reform effort. Momentum in a process like this is a real thing, and once it is lost, it is not at all clear to me when or how it may be reacquired.

Respectfully,

Randall Paul
GEAC Chair and GERAC member

If the credit hour pressures that are resolvable either by adding a course to those that can fulfill a requirement or by adjusting a requirement that currently allows for statistics, the remaining credit hour pressures are:

<i>Program</i>	Remaining credit pressure	<i>QL – “Finance”</i>		<i>IA-NS</i>	
		No stats	No QL-F	No QL-F (ECO)	1 NS
<i>Medical Laboratory Science</i>	3		X		
<i>Civil Engineering</i>	3		X		
<i>Dental Hygiene (Completion)</i>	3		X		
<i>Applied Math</i>	3		X		
<i>Biology-Health Sciences</i>	3		X		
<i>Respiratory Care</i>	2*		X		
<i>Respiratory Care (Completion)</i>	2*		X		
<i>Professional Writing</i>	3		X		
<i>Renewable Energy Eng (KF)</i>	3			X	
<i>Renewable Energy Eng (PM)</i>	3			X	
<i>Environmental Sciences</i>	3			X	
<i>Business - Management</i>	4				X
<i>Business - Marketing</i>	4				X
<i>Health Informatics</i>	4				X
<i>Information Technology</i>	4				X
<i>Operations Management</i>	4				X
<i>Business - Accounting</i>	4				X
<i>Cybersecurity</i>	4				X
<i>HC Management - Admin</i>	4				X
<i>Diagnostic Medical Sonography</i>	7	X	X		
<i>Echocardiography</i>	7	X	X		
<i>Nuclear Medicine</i>	7	X	X		
<i>Radiologic Science</i>	7	X	X		
<i>Vascular Technology</i>	7	X	X		
<i>DMS (Completion)</i>	7	X	X		
<i>Echocardiography (Completion)</i>	7	X	X		
<i>Rad Science (Completion)</i>	7	X	X		
<i>Vascular Tech (Completion)</i>	7	X	X		

* Impact in Respiratory Care programs is 1 credit less due to a 1 credit Math/Science/Social Science block within the current curriculum maps.