



Open Pathway Quality Initiative Proposal

Institutional Template

The enclosed Quality Initiative Proposal represents the work that the institution will undertake to fulfill the quality improvement requirements of the Open Pathway.

12/13/2021
Date

Signature of Institution's President or Chancellor

Dr. Robert O. Davies, President

Printed/Typed Name and Title

Central Michigan University

Name of Institution

Mt. Pleasant, Michigan

City and State

The institution completes the Quality Initiative Proposal by responding to the questions in each category of the template. Proposals should be no more than 4,500 words. The institution may choose to submit a brief implementation plan or supplemental charts or graphs as appendices to the template. The Quality Initiative Proposal will be accepted beginning September 1 of Year 5. It is due no later than June 1 of Year 7.

Submit the proposal as a PDF file to hlcommission.org/upload. Select "Pathways/Quality Initiative" from the list of submission options to ensure the institution's materials are sent to the correct HLC staff member. Submission file names should utilize the following format: QIProposal[InstitutionName][State].pdf (e.g., QIProposalNoNameUniversityMN.pdf). The file name must include the institution's name (or an identifiable portion thereof) and state.

Overview of the Quality Initiative

1. Provide a title and brief description of the Quality Initiative. Explain whether the initiative will begin and be completed during the Quality Initiative period or if it is part of work already in progress or will achieve a key milestone in the work of a longer initiative.

Title: *Re-envisioning CMU's General Education Program*

Through a President's and Provost's Fund for Program Innovation and Excellence award in the 2020-21 academic year, Central Michigan University's (CMU) Coordinator/General Education and an Ad Hoc Working Group of eight faculty engaged in initial discussion and review of the current state and future opportunities for CMU's General Education Program. The foundational outcomes of their work highlighted a distinct need for a comprehensive re-envisioning of the program's purpose, scope, content, and relevancy to contemporary society and the students the program serves. Building upon this initial review, the proposed Quality Initiative will undertake a comprehensive re-envisioning process by engaging a wide range of university constituents in a data driven discussion of, and decisions on, the future of general education at CMU. Upon completion of the Quality Initiative in 2024, the primary goal will be to begin implementation of a revised framework, curricular structure, and content for CMU's General Education Program.

Sufficiency of the Initiative's Scope and Significance

2. Explain why the proposed initiative is relevant and significant for the institution.

While CMU added Writing Intensive and Quantitative Reasoning course requirements to its General Education Program in 2014 and restructured its Studies in Discrimination, Culture and Diversity sub-group to require additional focused courses in 2019, the institution has not made comprehensive and wide-ranging revisions to the program's overall framework, structure, and purpose in over twenty years. It was for this reason, and the fact that changes in transfer policies in 2020 led to more students being eligible to count courses towards their general education curriculum, the aforementioned President's and Provost's Fund for Program Innovation and Excellence award was provided to support the Ad Hoc Working Group's review and benchmarking of CMU's General Education Program. This working group's primary goal was to determine if the program was still achieving its stated purpose and outcomes.

This initial review determined that CMU's General Education Program, its affiliated curriculum, and its student learning outcomes assessment plan have significant opportunity for enhancement. In part, the committee found the following:

- CMU's recent implementation of new, award-winning transfer credit options means that there is considerable unevenness in what a CMU student experiences in general education. In short, this means that while all students take an approved equivalency of all general education requirements, some students may not be receiving the full general education program designed to be the foundation of their CMU educational experience. Thus, there is the opportunity to create a robust and inclusive program providing a unified foundational academic experience.
- What is more, our General Education Program assessment plan is cumbersome and difficult to execute. We need to revisit how we assess general education and how we further use that information to guide on-going program enhancements.
- The content, framework, and practice of CMU's General Education Program is not differentiable from that of many other institutions in the state and the wider Great Lakes region. Thus, there is significant opportunity for innovation in CMU's general education framework to create a program which would stand out as unique or cutting edge in its

approach to student learning outcomes and course objectives, but also as it might relate to student retention and progression.

- National trends in general education point to programs that are significantly different from CMU's. We could identify general education on our campus as an area of investment to facilitate moving forward to be a leader in this area within the state and the wider Great Lakes region.

In addition, the opportunity to re-envision the General Education Program aligns with CMU's ongoing Strategic Envisioning 2030 process which is built upon the assertion that "CMU must be prepared to respond and adapt to remain competitive in this changing [higher education] environment." In fact, after a year of deliberations, a broad objective contained within the end of year report for *Enhance the Overall Academic Quality and Environment of CMU* (Envisioning Pathway One) was the aim to "Review and revise General Education courses to focus on rigorous course offerings to transform thinking instead of developing courses to enhance budget models." This finding, along with those of the Ad Hoc Working Group outlined above, indicates that the re-envisioning of CMU's General Education Program is a relevant and significant initiative for the university—one worthy of being CMU's Quality Initiative.

The proposed Quality Initiative will allow CMU to undertake a comprehensive review and re-envisioning of its General Education Program, the outcome of which would be establishing the foundational educational experience for the next several generations of CMU students. In that sense, the Quality Initiative proposed here is of central significance to the future of CMU. When successful, CMU will have a core educational curriculum to not only prepare its graduates for life and career challenges, but also have a program that differentiates CMU from its state and regional peers.

3. Explain the intended impact of the initiative on the institution and its academic quality.

This Quality Initiative aims to improve the experience and outcomes related to general education for CMU's students and community writ large.

Today's ever-diversifying graduates need to be able to adapt to change quickly, critically analyze information, navigate a diverse and global world, and make decisions based on facts rather than opinion. CMU's own mission statement affirms this by highlighting the university's commitment to "prepare students for productive careers, meaningful lives, and responsible citizenship in a global society." Indeed, in order to thrive in this everchanging and dynamic information-based society, organizations like the Association for American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and the Teagle Foundation agree that an education in the liberal arts is essential. CMU's General Education Program strives to meet the goals of a liberal arts education by offering a program whereby its graduates "demonstrate an understanding of the basic forces, ideas, and values that shape the world. They are aware of the structure of organized human knowledge--the arts and humanities, natural and social sciences. They can organize and access a broad knowledge base relevant to the modern world. They are skilled in working with others, including those of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and in thinking reflectively about themselves as individuals and as members of society. Graduates value rational inquiry, honesty in scholarship, and life-long learning" (The Basic Documents Set, CMU General Education Program).

However, as noted in the 2015 AAC&U publication *General Education Transformed*, general education programs are commonly organized “mainly as an à la carte menu of disconnected survey courses...that emphasize content delivery over critical inquiry while neglecting students’ own active participation in their learning.” Thus, while CMU is fortunate to have a highly dedicated and engaged faculty who are committed to the continuous evolution of providing students with a quality education, recent reviews of the General Education Program’s structure and framework have shown that the very nature of the program may in fact hinder the pursuit and achievement of the foundational educational experience for which it was originally designed to achieve. Despite all good intentions, we now have a highly siloed, dizzying array of courses that pixelate and splinter our General Education Program. There is little that unifies the supposed common experiences of a student’s education at CMU.

The intended impact of the *Re-envisioning CMU’s General Education Program Quality Initiative* is to develop potential frameworks for a general education program curriculum which can be implemented to transform every CMU student’s foundational educational experience. The aim is to develop a general education framework(s) which would:

- Actively engage students and faculty around a common educational experience.
- Prepare students with the requisite knowledge and skills to prosper in a dynamic and ever-changing world.
- Provide a malleable framework and structure for our curriculum to adapt quickly, and over time, to changes in content and need.
- Provide a mechanism whereby faculty can use a variety of pedagogical and instructional methods to teach their content.
- Differentiate CMU from its state and Great Lake region peers by offering an innovative general education program.
- Offer a flexible mechanism whereby both first time to college and transfer students can apply credits towards their degree, but still obtain the CMU foundational and coherent educational experience.
- Create opportunities for faculty to engage and work together in community around a shared project of general education.
- Work to counteract curricular fragmentation brought on by various budget models and structural characteristics which drive general education courses as enrollment and revenue sources rather than direct alignment with program and student learning outcomes.

In addition to the items above, another central topic of *Re-envisioning CMU’s General Education Program* would not just be course scope and content, but an examination of pedagogical and instructional modes and methods to ensure sustained academic quality within a changing higher education operational environment. For example, should CMU place more emphasis on high-impact teaching, community-based learning, game-based learning, study abroad, internships, and/or field experiences to respond both to society’s demands and students’ needs? These and other questions would be explored together intentionally as a campus community.

Clarity of the Initiative’s Purpose

4. Describe the purposes and goals for the initiative.

This Quality Initiative has several purposes and goals to:

- foster a campus-wide discussion about the value of general education, both in abstract and concrete senses: What does general education mean today? What does it mean on a campus like CMU's? What works well with the current program? What could be improved? What current trends and best practices in general education nationwide would align well for CMU's students?
- explore and reach campus consensus on new models for general education at CMU.
- further build faculty engagement and community around general education.
- enhance student engagement with, and outcomes from, general education. In so doing, we expect to better "foster personal and intellectual growth to prepare students for productive careers, meaningful lives, and responsible citizenship in a global society" (from CMU's Mission Statement).
- ensure that all students graduating from CMU have a unifying and foundational educational experience that upholds the mission of the university.

5. Select up to three main topics that will be addressed by the initiative.

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Advising | <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership | <input type="checkbox"/> Retention |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Assessment | <input type="checkbox"/> Learning Environment | <input type="checkbox"/> Strategic Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Civic Engagement | <input type="checkbox"/> Online Learning | <input type="checkbox"/> Student Learning |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Curriculum | <input type="checkbox"/> Persistence and Completion | <input type="checkbox"/> Student Success |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Diversity | <input type="checkbox"/> Professional Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Teaching/Pedagogy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Engagement | <input type="checkbox"/> Program Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Underserved Populations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Faculty Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Program Evaluation | <input type="checkbox"/> Workforce |
| <input type="checkbox"/> First-Year Programs | <input type="checkbox"/> Quality Improvement | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> General Education | | |

6. Describe how the institution will evaluate progress, make adjustments and determine what has been accomplished.

Each semester, the Coordinator/General Education (primary Quality Initiative lead), the Executive Director/Curriculum and Instructional Support (as the representative of the Office of the Provost), the Ad Hoc Working Group, and the CMU Academic Senate's General Education Committee will evaluate progress towards benchmarks set on the timeline below. The Coordinator will then submit a report to the Senior Vice Provost/Academic Affairs and Provost for review and provide feedback. If needed, the Coordinator will meet with the SVP/AA and Provost to discuss the report and develop a plan or benchmark revisions for the following semester. Regular updates will also be provided to the Academic Senate's General Education Committee. Please see timeline below for further detail.

Evidence of Commitment to and Capacity for Accomplishing the Initiative

7. Describe the level of support for the initiative by internal or external stakeholders.

CMU's President, Provost, and Senior Vice Provost/Academic Affairs have fully endorsed *Re-envisioning General Education Program at CMU* not only as the focus of the *Quality Initiative*, but also as an important component of the university's overarching re-envisioning process. Similarly, the desire among the university's administration to have general education as the focus of the *Quality Initiative*, has also been enthusiastically supported by the members on the original faculty Ad Hoc Working Group as well as the members of the Academic Senate's General Education Committee. Thus, there is broad based support for this initiative.

This, however, obviously does not address the necessity for wide-ranging support among the university community as a whole to undertake rethinking a university's general education curriculum. To better understand the level of support already existing for this initiative among CMU stakeholders, it is important to point out overarching discussions on campus right now.

First, CMU's strategic envisioning process, Rigor, Relevance and Excellence, is currently planning around five goals: (1) Enhance the overall academic quality and environment of CMU with a commitment to rigor, relevance and excellence in our curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular programs; (2) Distinguish CMU as fostering a dynamic exchange of ideas and thoughts, leading to actions, while fundamentally committed to equity and inclusion; (3) Build and foster a reciprocal ecosystem to promote innovation, economic development and cultural enrichment by engaging with Michigan's communities for partnerships; (4) Understand and proactively address the dynamic nature of the college student – both current and future; and (5) Redefine and expand our business model to increase partnerships with organizations and help individuals advance lifelong learning and achieve career development goals.

Over the past 18-months the Strategic Envisioning process has engaged students, faculty, staff, and administrators in a candid and collaborative discussion of the future of many aspects of the university. This is a productive and supportive environment through which to focus more directly on how CMU's General Education Program aligns with Strategic Envisioning goals 1, 3, and 4. Basically, there is already an environment on CMU's campus where examinations of how to enhance academic programs, including general education, to better serve our students moving forward is seen as a necessary priority; this *Quality Initiative* will dovetail with those discussions well.

Secondly, we are currently re-examining our academic and instructional processes and goals in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, there are on-going conversations within the university community about the functionality of our curricular processes, the modalities in which we teach, our assessment tools and practices, and the appropriate way to distribute tuition revenue to ensure equity across colleges. Here again, general education, specifically the "how" of the underlying operational processes, aligns directly into these other on-going campus discussions.

In spite of the on-going conversations on academic and operational contexts which will support and underpin *Re-envisioning CMU's General Education Program*, let us not obfuscate the difficulty with

which many discussions around general education are had within institutions of higher education. It is clearly understood that it will take purposeful community discussions with many campus stakeholders to productively examine this topic and arrive at something resembling consensus around general education at CMU. The people and groups working on the *Quality Initiative* will need to engage with its constituents including but not limited to, students, faculty, advisors, deans, staff, administrators, and others to make purposeful headway to achieve initial, and sustainable change. A steering committee will be formed to ensure that all constituents are represented, and lines of communication are clear, open, and informative throughout the review process.

8. Identify the groups and individuals that will lead or be directly involved in implementing the initiative.

- The Coordinator/General Education will be the lead person on the project. The Coordinator will be responsible for coordinating campus-wide focus groups on the program, working with both the Ad Hoc Working Group and the Academic Senate's General Education Committee, keeping to the timeline established in this document, communicating the initiative's progress to the Senior Vice Provost/Academic Affairs, Executive Director/Curriculum and Instructional Support, and Academic Senate.
- The Ad Hoc Working Group and the General Education Committee, will work closely with the Coordinator/General Education to partner in leading the campus discussions around general education. Along with the Coordinator, they will report to university Senior Leadership and the Academic Senate about the progress of the initiative.
- The Executive Director/Curriculum and Instructional Support will work with the Coordinator in overseeing the day-to-day activities of the project.
- The Director/Curriculum and Assessment will provide support to the Coordinator, especially as it relates to developing and enacting a new assessment plan for general education.
- The Senior Vice Provost/Academic Affairs will be the administrator in charge of communicating the needs and progress of the initiative to the Provost.
- The Provost will communicate, as needed, with the President about the initiative.

9. List the human, financial, technological and other resources that the institution has committed to this initiative.

As outlined above, the Coordinator/General Education will be the lead facilitator of the *Quality Initiative*. They are a tenured faculty member who receives a half-time release from other duties to head this initiative. An administrative support staff member from the Office of Curriculum and Instructional Support will be assigned to the Coordinator to help with day-to-day scheduling and record keeping activities. The Executive Director/ Curriculum and Instructional Support will assist the Coordinator with higher-level facilitation of the project. Other staff members will be assigned as needed. Members of the Ad Hoc working group and General Education Committee have also expressed interest in directly participating in the project.

An initial \$85,000 has been allocated from the President and Provost's offices to support the *Re-envisioning CMU's General Education Program Quality Initiative*. Currently these funds have not been assigned to any particular aspect or component of the project but are available to be allocated as needed when it becomes clearer of the resource needs. For example, they could provide a summer

stipend to the Coordinator/General Education and stipends to additional faculty for work on the initiative or “buying them out” of teaching responsibilities during the regular academic year. Funds could also be allocated to attend conferences or workshops or request consultations from recognized experts in the field. It is possible that additional funding could be allocated, but that will depend on need as the *Quality Initiative* progresses.

Required technology equipment and resources are already in place. If discussions identify the need to enhance technology platforms, these will be addressed at the appropriate time. It should be noted that CMU is in the process of implementing new curricular tracking and assessment management system platforms, and it is anticipated that these systems are robust enough to underpin any technology platforms required to facilitate the implementation of a new General Education Program.

Appropriateness of the Timeline for the Initiative

(The institution may include a brief implementation or action plan.)

10. Describe the primary activities of the initiative and timeline for implementing them.

- **AY 2021-2022:**
 - **November/December 2021:** The Coordinator/General Education works with the Ad Hoc Working Group, the General Education Committee, and the Executive Director/Curriculum and Instructional Support to review and prepare the initial survey for the campus community about perceptions of general education.
 - **First Half Spring Semester 2022:** The survey will be released to campus community.
 - **Second Half of Spring Semester 2022:** The Coordinator, the Ad Hoc Working Group, and the General Education Committee will analyze and report to various groups on campus (Academic Senate, Council of Deans, Student Government Association, advising staff) about the results of the survey. At this point, the Ad Hoc Working Group and the Coordinator will begin to discuss possible future models for general education at CMU. These will be communicated widely on campus, including at Academic Senate.
 - **May 2022:** The Coordinator will write a report summarizing the discussions about the data gathered during the reporting of the survey data to submit to the Executive Director of CIS and the Senior Vice Provost/Academic Affairs.
- **AY 2022-2023:**
 - **Fall 2022:** The Coordinator, the Ad Hoc Working Group, and the General Education Committee will lead discussions with groups on campus (e.g., Council of Deans, Council of Chairs, General Education Committee, Academic Senate, Student Government Association, advisors etc.) to examine the two or three proposed models of general education. At the end of the semester, the Coordinator will write a report summarizing the discussions about the data gathered during the reporting of the survey data to turn in to the Executive Director/ Curriculum and Instructional Support and the Senior Vice Provost/Academic Affairs.
 - **Spring 2023:** The primary goal for this semester would be to work to establish the new model. It would entail further discussions across campus with a goal of a new

proposed model of general education by the end of the 2022-2023 academic year – accompanied by a summary of data collected.

- **AY 2023-2024:** The Coordinator/General Education would call for and approve new courses to populate the new program, have the program curriculum approved, and an assessment model created.
- **AY 2024-2025:** The new general education program would be implemented and begin its initial cycle of assessment.

Institutional Contact for Quality Initiative Proposal

Include the name(s) of the primary contact(s) for the Quality Initiative.

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