

Table Discussion Notes from the 10/11/18 GE Faculty Meeting
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Faculty approve of the use of “your” to personalize the mission statement for students, but most feel that it is still more useful to faculty than students in its current form.

- Some think that the GE mission statement too closely mirrors the college’s mission statement without adding anything new.

- How will the GE mission statement operate alongside/support the college’s mission statement but still reflect the unique goals of the GE?

- Others feel that the language is too jargon-y for students to connect with, though faculty tended to like the second sentence more than the first.

- There are concerns that the language of the first sentence is too vague.

§ Several faculty are particularly unsure about the intention behind “inclusive academic approaches” – what does this look like? How will we ensure that students understand the meaning of this aspect of the curriculum?

§ Similarly, what is the meaning of “ways of knowing” in this context?

§ Some think that there are too many buzzwords

- Many question the specific reference to experiential learning.

§ What is meant by calling this out within the GE mission? Will every course in the new GE be expected to have an experiential component? If so, what does that look like and how does it avoid the appearance of being too prescriptive/telling faculty what to teach? What counts as “experiential” (lab work, community engagement, practicums, plays/performances, internships...)?

§ Some feel that this mission statement creates a false dichotomy between experiential and classroom learning.

- Some questioned why faith and values are first in the second sentence, rather than lifelong learning.

- Several suggested that the ideas in the second sentence should come first to introduce the goals/outcomes of the GE and place learning at the forefront.

§ The mission statement should answer the question of why students need this type of education.

- Many think that the mission statement needs more inspirational and active language overall.

- Many like the use of the verb “explore” but note that it still refers to the curriculum rather than the student.

§ “*Your curriculum explores*” rather than “*You will explore*”

∅ Similarly, the second sentence has the curriculum rather than the student as the subject.

§ Framing it in terms of exploration/opportunity/examination/empowerment/ cultivation/etc. rather than a set of requirements could help students avoid the current “box-checking” mentality.

§ Still needs to convey a sense of shared ownership between faculty and students. Perhaps one mission statement for each? Or “our” instead of “your”?

- Some faculty specifically expressed dislike of the choice of “support” in the second sentence—not strong enough.

- Some of the language from the rationale could be moved into the mission statement. STOGGoals could be another place to find language.

- Could draw on past/existing phrases such as “lives of worth and service” and “ideals to action” for inspirational language.

○ The GE mission statement should highlight what is unique about a St. Olaf education. Currently, there is a sense that it is general enough to apply to many different liberal arts institutions.

§ The mission statement should allow students to imagine the actual content/ tangible structure of the GE. What will they actually be doing?

§ It should also help guide faculty in building the curriculum.

§ Perhaps some sort of visual/graphic representation of the mission statement (and eventual curriculum) would be more accessible for some students. There could be multiple versions of the same statement in different formats. (This would also help exemplify many ways of knowing.)

∅ This, along with exploring the meaning/values of the liberal arts and general “college knowledge” could also be a regular activity of a first-year experience.

· Some faculty could see the potential for a strong mission statement to guide development of the new GE curriculum and assist with advising students in navigating it, but don’t find that the current GE mission statement offers much.

○ Need to start with who we want students to be and then describe how the GE helps them get there.

○ Some suggested writing the mission statement last, after the content is developed. The current statement could be used as a guide, and a final statement voted on later.

Some felt that certain important elements were missing from the mission statement, such as:

· Specific reference to/definition of a liberal arts education (most commonly cited)

· Interdisciplinarity (perhaps this is suggested by “ways of knowing” but could be more clear)

· Breadth (e.g., the idea presented in the rationale that the breadth of GE should complement and/or be the foundation for depth in a major)

· Creativity (specifically, the arts were commonly cited as missing)

· Other missing terms: curiosity, integration, (intellectual) challenge, reflection, rigor, “nourished by Lutheran tradition”, growth, vocation/vocational discernment, critical analysis/thinking/ engagement, knowledge/skills

Finally, some tables’ notes included various name ideas for the GE:

· St. Olaf Core/Ole Core

· Adventure

· Exploration

· Mind Expansion

· The Ole Path

· St. Olaf passport

· Common Curriculum

· Sapientia (Latin for wisdom)

· Ole Ed

· St. Olaf Bridge

· Ask students for name ideas! Perhaps time could be taken in class (first-year writing was offered as a possibility) for students to reflect on this statement and rationale and offer feedback/ideas.