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Curriculum minutes 03/19/2012

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UMM CURRICULUM COMMITTEE
2011-12 MEETING #15 Minutes
March 19, 2012, 12:00 p.m., BCR

Present: Bart Finzel (chair), Joe Alia, Clare Dingley, Caitlin Drayna, Janet Ericksen, Hazen Fairbanks, Heather James, Leslie Meek, Peh Ng, Paula O’Loughlin, Ian Patterson, Gwen Rudney, Jeri Squier, Tisha Turk

Absent: Bryce Blankenfeld, Carol Cook, Sara Haugen

Visiting: Nancy Helsper

In these minutes: Courses Approvals in Interdisciplinary Studies and Science and Math; General Education Designators (continued discussion)

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Finzel stated that the EDP funding recommendations from the EDP Review Subcommittee will be considered for action at the next meeting. Also, to finalize last year’s program review of Geology, Professor Cotter will meet with the committee and discuss the outcome of the review. In April, computer scientists will meet with the committee to discuss the Computer Science program review. He offered the opportunity for Political Science to do the same, but O’Loughlin declined, stating that the discipline did not feel it was necessary.

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion: (Alia/Patterson) to approve the March 5, 2012 minutes. Motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

2. COURSE APPROVALS

New Honors Courses

IS 3238H: In Search of Nietzsche (IP; 4 cr)

IS 3239H: The Anatomy of Development and the “Common Good”: Sardar Sarovar Dam in Gurjrat, India (SS; 2 cr)

New Science and Mathematics Courses

BIOL 1801: The Animals Around Us: Wildlife of Minnesota (IC; 4 cr)

CHEM 1801: Science Savvy in Our Modern World (IC; 2 cr)

Revised Science and Mathematics Course

PHYS 3003: Computer Modeling of Materials (SCI: 2 cr)

Motion: (Ericksen/Rudney) to approve the two new Honors courses, new IC courses in Biology and Chemistry, and the revised Physics course.

Discussion: Finzel noted that the Environmental Studies courses and Psychology course listed on the agenda have been pulled and will be considered at a later time. For consideration at this meeting are the two new Honors courses, new IC courses in Biology and Chemistry, and a Physics course revision. Ericksen asked if division faculty had talked about how the new courses in Science and Math fulfill the IC component. Ng answered that they were very much aware of it and attempted to write it in the rationale section of ECAS with limited success due to the character limitation in the field (800).

VOTE: Motion passed (12-0-0)

3. GENERAL EDUCATION DESIGNATORS (Continued)

Finzel stated that last week's discussion of Gen Ed designators didn't get very far; there seemed to be a split in the committee. This topic might need to be deferred until next year when Gen Ed will be covered in more depth. He was hoping to find some way to address the concerns regarding the number of Gen Ed designators without making it difficult for worthy Gen Ed courses at the 3xxx or 4xxx course level.

Alia stated that it was not clear to him whether an instructor can remove a Gen Ed designator from a course if they choose to. That would be a starting point. O'Loughlin asked why you would have a Gen Ed designator on a 4xxx-level course. A student taking a 4xxx-level Math course to fulfill a GER would presumably have already fulfilled it by taking a lower-level prerequisite. Ng stated that our Gen Ed program is not defined as only courses at the introductory level. If we want to go that route we should change the definition. Dingley noted that if we changed the name of General Education to Liberal Education, and thought of our curriculum as a liberal arts education, then the broader program we have now would make sense. O'Loughlin stated that she would be comfortable with the idea of changing the language we use to describe our Gen Ed program, but she does not agree that a course in your major should be considered Gen Ed. Also, in order to do good assessment of the Gen Ed program, you have to separate it from the other courses.

Alia stated that removing designators could make it tough for a few students who come in with a sophisticated or strong background in an area other than their major. Why put this hurdle in front of students? If students are prepared for upper level classes, wouldn't it make sense to allow them to take them for the GER rather than force them to take an introductory course? Ng noted that there is nothing to prohibit the student from petitioning the Scholastic Committee to have the upper level course fulfill the GER.

O'Loughlin stated that a liberal arts education is made up of distinctive pieces. Patterson noted that the purpose to come here for an education is to impart skills to understand how subtopics of the world relate to each other.

Ng stated that we are trying to move away from the idea that Gen Ed curriculum consists of a checklist. It is a good thing that a student can choose to take an upper level course that they are interested in and find that they can also satisfy a GER.

James stated that this topic cannot be resolved until we know what the priorities of the General Education program are going to be. Any course at UMM can be part of the liberal arts education. It is something that is carried throughout the curriculum. Do we need a Gen Ed program if there is a liberal arts education? If so, what does it need to be? Depth is a useful component. The elimination of 3xxx- and 4xxx-level courses is not the way to go. There are schools that have a cohort course that is required each year. The design is intentional.

Turk stated that a conversation is needed about the ways in which GERs relate to course levels. In English, the courses are organized in such a way that she would have serious concerns about a student wanting to leapfrog over a 2xxx-level course to a 3xxx-level course, because the higher level course assumes an in-depth familiarity with methods and exposure to the field.

O'Loughlin stated that an initial worry has always been a sense that if a faculty member is not teaching a Gen Ed course, then it is harder to make a justification for the position. It would be good to bring in a sense that all courses are equally valued. A 4xxx-level course with ten students should be viewed as equally important as an introductory course with 75 students. It has been her experience in Political Science that 3xxx-level courses are filled with students who have already fulfilled the GER and are taking the class for the major.

Dingley noted that 72 classes in the fall are at the 4xxx level. All have prerequisites, but not all of the prerequisites carry the same Gen Ed category as the 4xxx-level course.

Ericksen stated that liberal education includes the major, Gen Eds, and electives. The Gen Ed portion is to ensure broadness, and the major ensures depth. Students who want to do both by taking a Gen Ed in the major are fulfilling the primary purpose of an advanced depth course in the area of the major and are not taking it for the Gen Ed. Alia stated that it is not an easy case to make for every course. In the sciences, work is becoming more interdisciplinary, blurring the distinction. If students are prepared for more advanced interdisciplinary study, aren't they also getting a broad perspective?

Patterson stated that if the purpose of the Gen Ed breadth component is exposure, what is the quantity of exposure? Who is to say that 2xxx- or 3xxx-level course is not still exposing you to some general material. Rudney stated that in education they have 4xxx-level course that offers the student teacher experience. It has a Gen Ed designator that she would argue to keep. Perhaps for the 4xxx-level courses there should be an option to make a case for a Gen Ed designator.

O'Loughlin stated that we have to change the standard operating procedure. Having to prove why a course fulfills a GER would be a good change. It would be a cultural change. In Political Science they have three 4xxx-level courses next fall. She would propose to remove the Gen Eds from those courses because you cannot get into them without fulfilling the Gen Eds in the prerequisite courses. This begs the question of how such courses are handled in different disciplines.

Helsper stated that when we first converted to semesters, a lot of disciplines did not use the 2xxx level at all. In those cases, by cutting out the 3xxx-level Gen Eds, we would be doing a disservice to the students. Meek noted that the way it is currently structured, that is true. Rudney stated that she was curious to know the number of people in the upper level courses who take them to fulfill the Gen Eds. Helsper noted that students are asked on the Student Rating of Teaching forms if they are taking the course for the major or for General Education.

Dingley stated that she wanted to go on record saying that O'Loughlin's suggestion to require faculty to prove why their course should have a Gen Ed would mean a total revamping of General Education. That is criteria based and it's not a tweak to our current Gen Ed program.

Finzel asked for a motion to move forward or to table the discussion until later.

Motion: (Ericksen/Rudney) to ask disciplines to examine all of their 4xxx-level courses and consider removing the Gen Ed designators in instances where the classes almost entirely consist of students who will have fulfilled the GER in a prerequisite class.

Discussion: Finzel noted that the clear concern that all courses have Gen Ed designators came out of the forums in the fall. Ericksen asked if there is any reason this couldn't begin now. Squier asked if it wouldn't be best to start by counting how many 1xxx- and 2xxx-level courses have Gen Eds and whether we would have enough to offer students. Dingley replied that there are not enough courses and that is why we allowed Gen Eds on every course. Finzel noted that the motion is limited to 4xxx-level courses. Patterson cautioned that removing only one level may lead us down a slippery slope until we no longer have an adequate number of Gen Eds and it systematically reinforces the idea that a checklist exists at the lower level. Ericksen noted that we are only removing Gen Eds from courses for which the Gen Eds are fulfilled by an earlier course. O'Loughlin stated that looking at the 4xxx level is a step that will assuage some concerns and allow us to continue. Ericksen asked how the course changes will come to the Curriculum Committee for approval. Helsper answered that the change could be done on a Multiple Course Revision Form instead of doing an individual ECAS for each change. Ng asked when the change would be made. Ericksen replied that it can be done as part of the catalog process. Division chairs can ask their disciplines to consider the courses as part of any catalog revisions that will come before the committee in the fall.

VOTE: Motion passed (12-0-0)

Ericksen shared a copy of the revised advising worksheet. It will be available on the Student One-Stop and Advising websites.

James asked if there is any place where the student learning outcomes are posted for students. Helsper answered that they are on the Curriculum Committee home page. Ericksen stated that we had talked about making it more visible. Finzel stated that it would be appropriate to have it in the same place as the advising worksheet. Patterson

suggested that it could be a hot internal link on the advising worksheet. Ericksen stated that she would see that it has a live link and will communicate it to Advising.

Adjourned 12:46 p.m.

Submitted by Darla Peterson