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UMM CURRICULUM COMMITTEE
2010-11 MEETING #16 Minutes
March 30, 2011, 8:00 a.m., 113 Imholte

Present: Cheryl Contant (chair), Clare Dingley, Molly Donovan, Janet Ericksen, Mark Fohl, Tara Greiman, Sara Haugen, Michael Korth, Pareena Lawrence, Ian Patterson, David Roberts, Gwen Rudney, Jeri Squier, Elizabeth Thoma, Tisha Turk

Absent: Leslie Meek

Visiting: Dorothy De Jager, Nancy Helsper, Heather James, Jeff Ratliff-Crain

In these minutes: General Education Review Subcommittee Discussion

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES March 9, 2011

MOTION (Thoma/Patterson) to approve the March 9, 2011 minutes. Motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

2. GENERAL EDUCATION REVIEW SUBCOMMITTEE

Contant stated that within a period of seven or eight months the Curriculum Committee revised the mission statement, passed student learning outcomes, and had a site visit from the Higher Learning Commission team. One of the outcomes of the accreditation process led the committee to have a conversation about revitalizing our general education program, which led to the establishment of a general education review subcommittee consisting of five faculty members (committee members Turk and Roberts, as well as Tammy Berberi, Paula O'Loughlin, and Carol Cook); two students (Luciana Ranelli and Zac Van Cleve); and three staff members (Dave Swenson and Hilda Ladner from Student Affairs; and Heather James from the Library). The subcommittee had six formal meetings and one break-out set of meetings. It was difficult to schedule the meetings, leading to differential attendance at any meeting. Instead of moving toward a consensus, the subcommittee will move forward by putting together the best thoughts of the people who could attend the meetings. Heather James was invited on behalf of the subcommittee to present the work of the subcommittee.

James stated that the charge to the subcommittee was given at the first meeting:

The subcommittee will draft a "white paper" for consideration by the Curriculum Committee

1. Identify key characteristics of our student learning outcomes and distinctive institutional characteristics
2. Identify institutions to examine for ideas on general education models
3. Describe the general education models that are of interest

The subcommittee started looking at key characteristics that describe our campus. After brainstorming, the subcommittee came up with seven that the most people agreed on:

Distinctive, Guiding Characteristics of UMM

- Students are humble but curious
- Students are civically engaged – leadership
- Faculty and staff believe in individualized/personalized attention – we know our students
- Mission as "public liberal arts college" emphasizes access for students to high quality liberal arts education with substantially less cost
- Students are actively engaged in co-curricular activities, clubs, groups, organizations that help them develop leadership skills (run a meeting, agenda, create change)
- Unique history of the campus (its past and its current mission)
- Location small campus in a small community; Prairie 1-3 hours from "civilization"

From there the subcommittee moved on to discussing the purpose of general education, which on many other campuses is called a liberal arts education. The overall purpose of a liberal arts education is to create educated individuals for a life of citizenship. The key purposes of any general education program that the subcommittee came up with consisted of:

- Expose students to different ways of thinking, systems of thought; learn to make connections and distinctions
- Curriculum shared by all students and part of public mission of institution; ability to make connections between majors and other disciplines; ability to infuse general education principles into majors; develop mutual depths (upper level classes outside your major)
- Foster breadth of experience, knowledge, brain (whole-brain); foster ethic of what to think about (not just how to think); develop the choice of what and how to think; foster intellectual versatility while strengthening intellectual skills
- Skills: interpersonal communication, writing, communicate with others in other disciplines and in different modes

During the subcommittee's discussion, interesting moments occurred with inventive and radical ideas, but the subcommittee always returned to its charge to present models of education. James asked for advice on how the subcommittee should present their report. The subcommittee has many ideas of what would be successful models, but they were not sure how to share their ideas with the Curriculum Committee.

Lawrence suggested that the subcommittee subdivide what they looked at and present three models that had risen to the top. James noted that there appear to be three distinct models: There are schools that 1) don't have a general education program, 2) have a core of specific classes that must be taken, and 3) have a distribution model where a set number of credits must be taken in various areas. James asked if the committee is interested in seeing examples from all three models. Ericksen answered that she would like to see the full range of options because we have had the current model for a long time and comments/complaints have been inconsistent, ranging from: there's nothing wrong with it: to students don't see the importance of it: to it needs to be changed. The committee would only need a few examples of the model without a general education program (maybe five). Lawrence stated that for the distribution model, if there are common elements in most of examples, it would be helpful to see what is common and what is unique.

Rudney asked which model was most typical. James answered that the distribution model was the most typical model across-the-board, with 30 credits as the average requirement (significantly less than at UMM). Roberts noted that for liberal arts colleges, the average was 33 credits. Lawrence asked how many schools have a pretty distinctive liberal arts core, meaning that not every course carries a designator but instead only distinct courses are set aside for general education. James answered that the subcommittee had not come across a clear answer to that but can look at institutions and report on that.

Ratliff-Crain stated that, although it was not in the charge of the subcommittee, it would be good to have an understanding of how the general education program will be implemented and what kind of assessment and review will be done after it is in place. Contant answered that the subcommittee is trying its hardest not to think about implementation. That will end up being the work of the Curriculum Committee.

Dingley asked if the subcommittee had made some intentional specification of looking at comparative sized schools or of all kinds of schools. James answered that in the break-out meetings the groups looked at UMM, the other U of M campuses, as well as campuses known to have a unique or successful general education program. Some examples were UND, Asheville, Berea, Luther College, Lawrence, Fort Lewis, UMTC, Hamline, Macalester, etc. The decision was made to cast a large net and not focus on our usual comparison groups of COPLAC and Morris 14, although some of the schools do belong to those groups. Dingley stressed the importance of looking at COPLAC and Morris 14, as well as the UMTC College of Liberal Arts. The so-called liberal education associated with undergraduate education is shared by Duluth and Crookston. Also, CLA with the Twin Cities has added features to its program that makes it unique to other colleges. If there is going to be a comparison to the UMTC, it is important to delve a little deeper.

Contant stated that when we look at the typical comparison groups we always look at, we are limited to saying that this is what COPLAC does, when what COPLAC schools actually do is all over the map. The intent of the subcommittee was to identify some themes and find out if there are schools with similar distinctive qualities. That's why Berea keeps coming up. It is an interesting institution both in terms of size and location, and some of the distinctive qualities are intriguing in the context of Berea. Lawrence noted that the question will come up about COPLAC and Morris 14 so we have to be ready with an answer, but at the same time we need to find out what is interesting out there as well. That will help us decide if we want to be innovating or stay un-innovating.

Roberts stated that, as a member of the subcommittee, he felt that the subcommittee had been working in isolation and needed to hear, for example, what was discussed at a conference that the division chairs recently attended about general education. To what extent we compare to other schools should be secondary. We have a lot of expertise on this campus. That should be what's driving us. Taking 2000 schools across the country and picking one because it is innovative is not helpful. Roberts did not believe that the great majority of those the subcommittee looked at were innovative. The innovation probably takes place in the coursework and not in the framing of the program.

James noted that, over all, the subcommittee agreed that the current program is byzantine. It is difficult for faculty to follow and even more difficult for them to translate it to their student advisees. One improvement of the current model might be to clarify the distribution model we use. The intent of looking at other schools was to see if there was anything the subcommittee had not thought of or ideas that UMM might want to incorporate into its general education program.

Contant noted that one notion that came up was that our students are pretty independent and want the freedom to establish and chart their own future. They might want to put together combinations of majors that we wouldn't think of doing. They are thinking of things in new ways. Along with that self-determination are students who come from relatively modest and humble backgrounds where they were not introduced to or exposed to the variety of things that would help them to make those choices. The understanding is that, while students should be allowed freedom to choose, there cannot be a free-for-all, and it probably cannot be as structured as "take these 5 courses."

Contant noted that she made a profound change in the way she was thinking about what we need to do and who our students are. She had never heard the statement about students coming from humble backgrounds articulated before. Although it is a generalization about our students, it kept the subcommittee mindful that we may have students who need structure; we also have highly self-determining students.

Turk stated that the more she thinks about the simultaneous need for independence and structure, the stronger the need is to look at the number of courses that currently have general education designators. It would be helpful in introducing students to things or helping them put together combinations of classes if the general education program is not a stack of little tiny things. When the subcommittee began their discussions, Turk was of the impression that a distribution model was just a series of checked boxes. She doesn't think that anymore, but there are too many choices. It might be good to funnel that down to make our system more manageable.

Ericksen stated that the division chairs went to a conference where they learned about how to implement a general education program and how to communicate it to the students. Most of the sessions were process-oriented. There was not a lot of comparing programs. Korth agreed that it wasn't the central focus of the presentations, but that there was talk about distribution. It was nothing dramatic or different. Ericksen stated that she came away from the conference hoping the committee would report to the Curriculum Committee about what is being done at other schools. Lawrence agreed that she also thought that the subcommittee would do the research. Some schools have leadership in their mission statement, and it would be interesting to see how schools with modest means do things. Rodney added that in the sessions she attended they looked at assessment and talked about how to get faculty to buy into it. One session talked about examining the general education process. Lawrence added that one session was called "data" and that is what the Curriculum Committee is looking for from the subcommittee. Contant agreed that the subcommittee was not charged with implementation or getting people to buy into anything. They were charged with providing data and models to the Curriculum Committee. It is important to keep that in mind.

Ratliff-Crain stated that he was interested in the underlying philosophies for how the general education program is being

approached. The current program's focus is on obtaining skills without thought to the content of the course. He asked why a different approach has been taken this time.

Korth stated that it seems the subcommittee has been derailed. It needs to present models for UMM to consider. The task has become so complex that the subcommittee is struggling to make progress on that. There are a lot of factors to think about, but the charge seems relatively simple. The committee should have freedom to develop models. James noted that rather than looking for models, the subcommittee had long preliminary conversations about our current program and how it could be improved. Roberts stated that a little more guidance from the Curriculum Committee would be helpful. He also stated that he would like to stop talking about the model of having no general education requirements. He would also like to stop talking about the core curriculum model, if that model is understood as a set of required courses. He does not see UMM choosing either of those models. Turk suggested that the subcommittee present 5-10 models that might be interesting. Korth stated that if the subcommittee will not be talking about the first two model types, they should state that and give a reason for it in their report. Ericksen agreed.

Dingley stated that she did not think that the core curriculum model should be thrown out. It seems that the definition Roberts is using is limited. The University of Minnesota has other ways to define core curriculum. Roberts answered that if it means a list of required courses, then it fits his definition of a core curriculum. James agreed that the idea of the core curriculum model is a standard set of introductory courses. We have come across semantic issues.

James asked if they could include in their report an outlet created for general education like study abroad meeting an intercultural competence requirement. Extracurricular examples would not have concrete examples behind them but it would come from the subcommittee. The Curriculum Committee agreed that if the subcommittee considered the option, it should be included in the report.

James asked to what extent the committee would want a discussion of the learning outcomes to be a focus of the report. It is pointed out in the charge. Lawrence answered that she sees that as step two—after the data part. Ericksen answered that it should be included only insofar it would be helpful to point out if a model appears to overlap with our learning outcomes.

Adjourned 9:00 a.m.

Submitted by Darla Peterson