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Scholastic Committee
2019-20 Academic Year
Thursday, February 20, 2020, Moccasin Flower
Meeting Nine Minutes

Present: Merc Chasman (chair), Brenda Boever, Jason Ramey, Kimberly Novotny, Kenzie Marquette, Alyssa Pirinelli, Joe Beaver, Marley Lund, Emma Kloos, Heather Pennie, Mike Cihak

Absent: Jennifer Goodnough, Marcus Muller, Dennis Stewart

Guest: Professor Julie Eckerle, English

1. Approve minutes of February 6, 2020, meeting

Approved unanimously.

2. Chair's Report

No report.

3. SCEP Report

No report.

4. [Change to WLA proposal](#)

Julie Eckerle, English discipline, presented a proposal (addendum one) to change the criteria needed to satisfy the Writing for the Liberal Arts (WLA) general education requirement in response to feedback from the AACRAO consultants and the campus community. The English discipline is not sure what to do with the proposal. They have been working for a few years on revising the WLA program, but their goal has not come to fruition. The English discipline believes that the writing requirement needs to be owned across campus and it needs to be flexible.

A proposal to change the WLA gen ed requirement will be reviewed by the Curriculum Committee, but will not go into effect until the next catalog (2021-23). AACRAO drew out ENGL 1601 as a problem for enrollment and retention, and the English discipline believe that if that is indeed the case then they need to act immediately. The goal is not to leave the writing requirement as proposed for long term (as it would be a step backwards), but they don't want a system that is negatively impacting students with transfer credit. Dean Ericksen feels the proposal would not be able to take effect for fall 2020, so the English discipline would like to hear from the Scholastic Committee (SC), since the SC has authority on exceptions to general education requirements. The proposal looks to accept more forms of credit than previously accepted to satisfy the WLA requirement. In the future, the English discipline hopes there will be a new writing requirement that requires writing in upper-level courses and students will get credit for ENGL 1601 from transfer credit.

Will the proposal from the English discipline be retroactive? Eckerle was not sure, but said it was probably not retroactive since students come in under the requirements of the catalog in place during their admit term. It was noted that students can change to a newer catalog if they choose to do so.

It was noted by a SC member that the current process was voted on by campus assembly and any changes to what can be accepted to satisfy the WLA gen ed would have to go back to campus assembly. Changes to who can review petitions for WLA was also voted on by campus assembly and will require a vote by campus assembly to change it. It is not a decision the English discipline and the Scholastic Committee can do on their own. However, the English discipline does have the authority to accept courses as equivalent to ENGL 1601 which carries the WLA gen ed.

After the campus assembly vote, petitions went to Tisha Turk for review and now they go to Brook Miller. If the proposal was put in place, there would be less petitions to hear, because students would be getting credit for WLA from their transfer work. English estimates the change would reduce enrollment in WLA by 10-20%.

SC members agreed that exceptions to the WLA gen ed could not go to the SC without campus assembly approval, therefore, the English discipline will have to continue reviewing petitions. It was suggested that the English discipline use the new criteria to be more lenient/flexible with petitions. It was recommended that the petition process be updated to utilize a Google form that asks students if they have any of the new criteria. It might make the petition process faster. The proposal from the English discipline includes standardizing the approval of petitions for students with transfer courses that have satisfied the writing requirement at the sending institution (regardless of the credits); a score of 4 or 5 on the AP English Literature and Composition; and/or a score higher than 28 on the English section of the ACT.

In the past, the goal was to force students to take WLA and improve their writing experience, but WLA was never developed to distinguish it from courses students took at previous institutions. For example, a Morris Area High School student was being taught almost the same curriculum in their CIS College Writing course and using the same book as Eckerle was using for Morris' WLA course.

English is looking to develop a more comprehensive writing requirement, but it will require campus buy-in. Most schools require three to six writing courses and the English discipline would like to follow a similar path, but it has to happen in a more disciplinary basis and not having students redo what they've already done before. Another issue with the current model is that the experience in WLA courses varies dramatically. Some courses are extremely rigorous while others are not rigorous at all. WLA needs some standardization because its current framing doesn't work.

The English discipline was hoping to have the proposal go into effect fall 2020, but the dean said it would be problematic to do it between catalog years since the current model is currently written in our catalog. Also, changes to the general education requirement need to go through campus assembly. English tried to get the WLA requirement passed last year, but Judy Korn didn't allow it because of the process that needs to happen. English feels like they are being stymied at every turn. It was noted that the dean doesn't want a quick fix; she wants a more strategic approach, but when AACRAO says it should be done now, English wants to get it done.

It was suggested that English approve the petitions that met the criteria that was proposed. An issue brought up with continuing the same process was how to get the message out that the English discipline would be approving petitions for students who met the new criteria. It was

suggested that the English discipline inform summer advisers of the new process/criteria. It was noted that the process would also help current students who have not taken WLA yet.

Judy Korn worked with Tisha Turk to evaluate courses for the College Writing (CW) requirement. Most of those courses still have the CW designator. Given that the English discipline still has the power to approve equivalencies, if it's possible to query those courses, would the English discipline want to make those courses equivalent to ENGL 1601 which would give them the WLA gen ed? The English discipline will need to review this option.

Would ENGL 2109 The Essay still satisfy the WLA gen ed? Yes, but English is also looking for courses across disciplines to satisfy the writing requirement in the future. Student members noted that other courses in their major such as Biological Communication was a great writing course that helped them learn to write in their field. They voiced their agreement about having more courses in the major used for the writing requirement because they all thought the courses were very useful. Some students who took ENGL 2109 didn't like the course and felt they could have satisfied the WLA requirement with an easier course like 1601.

A member asked, "The 28 score on ACT seems like it should have some data to back it up or at least there is data available from the last few years on the students who had 28+ and took WLA (perhaps compounded if they also had college credit too). This was the part of [the]switch from 1101 to 1601 that was almost unanimously supported. And I think was a direct action of Campus Assembly too. If memory serves there was an early proposal to raise from 27 to 29 back in 2012 before it was decided to remove it entirely -- so why was it 29 back then and 28 now?" Eckerle responded that the English discipline simply did not remember that it was 29 back then. Their data for the score of 28 comes from reviewing scores accepted by our peer institutions. The English discipline feels more confident accepting coursework versus test scores, but they also want to be comparable to what peer institutions are doing. Student members noted that the work done for the ACT exam is very different than what is learned in a writing course. They noted that the exam does not test you on writing skills. The student felt that their ACT writing score improved simply by writing a longer essay. They didn't believe test scores were a good option for satisfying the requirement. It was also noted that campus assembly was least bothered by removing ACT scores as a way to satisfy the WLA requirement and members of SC agreed. If the English discipline was to move forward with accepting ACT scores to satisfy the WLA requirement, members requested there be an equivalent SAT score as well since some students don't take the ACT.

Eckerle would like suggestions on how to get the message out about the new criteria being used to review petitions. English will always encourage more writing, but they don't want to impede students' progress or keep them from attending Morris. Boever recommended meeting with Eckerle in March/April to help disseminate the information to advisers.

Eckerle plans to follow up with the English discipline to discuss suggestions provided by the SC. The English discipline will continue to work on changes to make the gen ed robust and differentiate the course from the requirement. They are working on a potential list of courses from across disciplines that could satisfy the writing requirement.

5. Petition # 1279

Request: Based on meeting the spirit of the requirement, allow a course to satisfy a different

GER than the assigned designation. Motion to approve. No discussion. In favor: none. Opposed:
ten. Abstaining: none. Petition denied.

Respectfully submitted,

Angie Senger
Office of the Registrar

Addendum One: WLA Proposal

Dear Members of the Scholastic Committee,

The English Discipline proposes immediate changes to the criteria by which incoming students can fulfill the current Writing for the Liberal Arts (WLA) GenEd requirement. While we imagine these changes to be only the first step of a multi-stage plan to renew and deepen our campus's commitment to student writing, we offer this initial proposal separately because we, like the AACRAO consultants we have asked to address our critical enrollment and retention problems, believe that the changes are urgently needed. We also believe that these changes are consistent with the principal learning outcomes of the current requirement, and can thus be made quickly, even before the campus approves any more substantial revisions of our writing GenEd requirement. We think the changes proposed here, which largely concern requirements and exemptions for the existing WLA course, fall within the purview of Scholastic. We will be gladly meet with you to discuss the proposal.

Background

The current WLA requirement went into effect at the beginning of the 2013-14 academic year. At that time, we began to offer a class, ENGL 1601: Writing for the Liberal Arts, as the single course that fulfilled the campus writing requirement. Students who would have been exempted in the past (by test scores, for example) from our composition requirement were no longer to be exempted. One of our chief goals was to make certain that Morris students were writing more; an earlier report from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) had shown that our students reported a level of writing instruction and practice that, relative to our peer institutions, was insufficient. The new general WLA requirement was meant to raise that level. We regarded it as a first step toward a writing requirement that would strengthen our campus commitment to writing as a skill at the heart of a liberal arts education.

We are now in our sixth year since instituting the WLA requirement, and we have new data to guide us as we move forward. A more recent NSSE report, for instance, shows that the institution of WLA has had little impact in the areas we had targeted, which tells us that this class alone has not improved the culture of student writing on our campus. Our experiment has also taught us that, more qualitatively, students regret our writing requirement's inflexibility, and even resent WLA when it too closely resembles courses they have already taken. Over the last two years the English discipline has regularly discussed ways to enhance and build upon the current model, and we have come to be guided by the principles that students should both (1) have more writing experience overall and (2) that they should be granted more flexibility in the ways they receive it.

Immediate problems with the current WLA requirement

WLA alone has not had the impact we had hoped, and it has introduced other problems in addition to student dissatisfaction. It has begun to pose staffing problems, for instance, which are likely to become even more pressing in the foreseeable future. It has also been singled out by the AACRAO consultants as one of our most glaring impediments to recruitment and retention. The consultants point out that students who sincerely believe they have already fulfilled the requirements for college-level composition (through courses at other schools or through PSEO classes, for example) are frustrated to hear that Morris will not give them credit for this work. As

the AACRAO report concludes, “It is hard to imagine a greater disincentive to transfer to a place.” This problem is likely to grow more acute in coming years as more and more Minnesota students avail themselves of opportunities, such as PSEO or CIS, to earn what they believe will count as college writing experience. We have found, anecdotally, that in some cases our classes really are close approximations of what these students have already done, including the same exercises and the same textbooks.

Proposal

Ultimately, we will want Morris students to have more options to fulfill their writing requirements. English has a plan in which all students will ultimately have many more opportunities than they have under the current requirement to write and to learn through writing. We feel many students should still take WLA, and all should continue to practice composition in an additional writing-intensive course. But our first step has to be to allow more students to fulfill the criteria for the single WLA course in order to mitigate student frustration and the recruitment/retention threat, along with challenges to staffing, in the near term. We agree with the consultants’ conviction that we must begin to plan these changes now, during our current academic year: “during the 2019-2020 academic year, faculty should consider options for ensuring that transfer students (including PSEO students) have exposure to writing for the liberal arts outside of the current WLA class.”

The AACRAO report focused particularly on transfer students and those who have taken PSEO classes in writing. We believe, having studied the writing requirements of our Morris 14 comparison group, that the list of possible exemptions should be widened to include all students who have successfully completed coursework that has been offered to them as the equivalent to a college-level introductory writing course. Currently, students can petition to be exempted if they have earned transfer credit from another college. We propose standardizing the following ways of earning credit equivalent to English 1601:

- Transfer of equivalent composition course on the campus of another college
- PSEO or CIS credits
- A score of 4 or 5 on the AP English Literature and Composition
- A score higher than 28 on the English section of the ACT

We expect that these additional exemptions will reduce the number of students required to enroll in our WLA course by about 10-20%, though that number could grow in the years ahead if increasing numbers of students take college preparatory work. By the time the numbers reach higher levels, we hope to have instituted a wider writing requirement, one that reaches beyond basic composition and that can be fulfilled in a variety of ways that students find more engaging and pertinent.

We have presented the Curriculum Committee a complete outline of our multi-stage plan. Again, we have separated out this step because it is a revision of existing exemptions to the GenEd requirement rather than an entirely new GenEd, and thus becomes relevant to the Scholastic Committee and not just Curriculum and its GenEd subcommittees. We’re also submitting this to

you now because we agree with the AACRAO findings that this is a problem we must address immediately.

Please see the relevant passages from the AACRAO report attached below.

Excerpts from AACRAO report regarding WLA (emphasis added)

Principal mention of transfers was in light of these PSEO students who have taken college English classes before enrolling as first time students at UMM. **There is much concern from those students that the college English credit they earned while they were still in high school does not transfer to Morris as the required Writing for the Liberal Arts (WLA) course.** However, students who attend another college after high school and transfer to Morris will receive credit for English composition courses they have taken. It was also suggested that students transferring into some disciplines at UMM would not receive credit for their work, necessitating retaking courses they already have. **It is hard to imagine a greater disincentive to transfer to a place.** This is definitely not a best practice in attracting transfer students! In fact, in a number of states, it would be legislatively impermissible for any public college or university to do so.

Because students tend to take a very dim view of being told they have to do something they have already done (speaking from the student perspective), PSEO students' attitudes about WLA are probably not very good. This may contribute to negative student perceptions of WLA reported by both faculty and staff in the campus interviews. This is often the case for a required course. However, it is almost certainly exacerbated here by unhappy students sitting in the courses. These students will also be likely to tell their younger friends back home about "losing" credits when they transferred their PSEO work to UMM. And, should there be students who found they could not have credit for their PSEO college-level English course and they lost credits they had taken in their major, they may be more likely to become among those students transferring away from UMM. (pp. 26-7)

...

If another accredited college has granted credit for a freshman writing course, UMM should accept it. This is not to say that UMM should lose the value of students' exposure to a course such as WLA: it is an expression of the value of the liberal arts experience. **Instead, the university should explore how to provide additional opportunities for all students to gain experience in writing for the liberal arts across the curriculum,** or by including an upper division writing course that would ensure consistency in writing proficiency by the time of graduation. (p. 28)

...

Analysis of transfer graduation rates should begin immediately. The dean and divisional chairs should charge faculty with review of transfer credit practices at the beginning of the new academic year. Additionally, **during the 2019-2020 academic year, faculty should consider**

options for ensuring that transfer students (including PSEO students) have exposure to writing for the liberal arts outside of the current WLA class. (p. 29)