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Curriculum Committee Minutes

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## **UMM CURRICULUM COMMITTEE**

2017-18 MEETING #9 Minutes

March 26, 2018, 3:00 p.m., ORL Conference Room

*Members Present:* Janet Ericksen (chair), Arne Kildegaard, Stacey Aronson, Peh Ng, Gwen Rudney, Tracey Anderson, Denise Odello, Stephen Crabtree, Jennifer Deane, Annika Nelson, Mitchell Scanlan, Sarah Severson, and Judy Korn

*Members Absent:* Kellie Meehlhause and Stephanie Ferrian

*Visitors:* Nancy Helsper

### **In these minutes: General Education Program Discussion**

#### **Announcements**

Ericksen announced that the next and final meeting of the year will be held Monday, April 16. The agenda will include a discussion about the calendar and process for the catalog revision approvals that will take up the majority of fall semester. She asked if Science and Math would be prepared to present their proposal for a Data Science minor at the April 16 meeting. Ng replied that although it has been discussed multiple times in the Division, it will have to wait until fall to come before the Curriculum Committee because the Division has not yet voted on it. Ericksen stated that Science and Math will be the first Division to present.

#### **General Education Program Discussion**

Ericksen stated that the first half of fall semester will be taken up by catalog course and program changes and EDP, so she was hoping to have a preliminary discussion at this meeting about the General Education Program. A large amount of administrative readings come across her desk, but recent readings about Gen Ed programs have been quite timely. AAC&U's article *Designing a Signature General Education Program*, and The Chronicle of Higher Education's article *Want to Revamp Your Curriculum? Here's How to Avoid a Quagmire* are the topic of today's discussion. One recent article suggests that the traditional model is less likely to offend but simultaneously least creative. Ericksen asked for comments on the articles.

Anderson asked if there is a place that's actually happy with their Gen Ed Program. Maybe it's a chronic institutional problem. Severson added that most people are frustrated that they have to take a Fine Arts Gen Ed, and others are frustrated that they have to take a science course. The frustration could come from not wanting to take a course outside their comfort zone. Ericksen noted that it shows there is a communication problem. We are not explaining well enough the importance of those Gen Eds. Nelson noted that there is a general dissatisfaction among the student body about having to take Gen Eds. Comments include that they feel they are a waste of time or are not preparing them to do the things they are going to do later in their job after college. Ericksen replied that if students come to a liberal arts college and don't see the point of taking something outside of their degree, there is a communication problem.

Deane stated that the challenge we have is to know how to better align our mission and talents on campus and what we want to get out of Gen Ed. Students take a single class and can't see how it

connects to others. How could we better present and combine Gen Eds? Anderson noted that what Deane said reminds her of distinguishing between a list and a body of knowledge. She strives to get students to see connections and identify connections in synthetic and emerging properties. Severson said that she would rather have taken a survey course than WLA, and would rather Gen Ed courses be more than just introductory courses. Aronson added that a course could be marketed differently, for example Horizons in Psychology instead of Introduction to Psychology. If students see the word Intro a filter goes up immediately, and they expect a course with a lot of rote memorization of facts and data.

Korn stated that she has often thought about Gen Ed classes having great value when students can see connections. The Twin Cities campus has a minor in leadership, not unlike our leadership and stewardship minor. We might have a green focus, or international focus, in which we pull our Gen Eds together and even have a Gen Ed capstone class.

Kildegard stated that he liked the articles as well. They talked about a process that's general, rather than narrowing. He wondered whether we in academia do the opposite. At the outset our review of Gen Ed is not to harness the cutting of programs. The only reservation he has is that Regina harnessed their Gen Ed program to the mission statement. When you do that, you need to ask who wrote the mission statement, and with what interests in mind? We can use templates to legalistically itemize everything we care about, or we can be more poetic and ask what inspires us. He is worried about being tied to the mission statement because that's like an introduction. Ericksen noted that it's important to keep the mission statement in mind, and they have to be somehow connected. Kildegard noted that it seems our mission statement has been the same for a thousand years. There are slight variations from colleges, like waves on top of the ocean. We don't want to confuse the ripple with the water column. Ericksen stated that we are a liberal arts college and must ask how we can be better. Kildegard noted that a lot of times in committees whoever had the most patience and greatest tolerance for boredom sat through meetings and got their ideas included in the mission statements. Nelson stated that the Vision and Planning Task Force is asking students to participate in sessions to revamp the mission statement. She will sign up for it and if there is something this committee would like her to propose, she would be willing to present it. Ng strongly encouraged Nelson to participate in that meeting. Our mission statement is very broad. Instead of a direct connection with the mission statement, we can be proactive and ask what the goals of Gen Ed should be for one of American's best public liberal arts colleges. We can brainstorm about it.

Ericksen asked so what are the goals? Helsper answered breadth and expanding perspectives. Deane noted that one of the things the Chancellor said was that we are sticking with the liberal arts. It's very different from liberal arts as a specific approach to learning. Nelson asked what the liberal arts process is, and what makes it different from a vocational process? Deane answered that as a liberal arts institution, we have a long history of integrating disciplines in arts, sciences, and humanities; there is an interconnectedness in the disciplines. Nelson stated that it makes sense to also want our Gen Ed Program to be more interdisciplinary as well. Ericksen added that would make it a process and a result. There could be both breadth and building. Basically now, it's a distribution process without thought of interconnectedness. So much of it has to do with a student's schedule, i.e., this Gen Ed works in my schedule. Kildegard noted that we shouldn't dismiss the diversity among classes. There is a need for diverse perspectives. An English class and a science lab class are diverse. There is a diversity of approaches across disciplines as well.

Ericksen stated that one of the things we came away with in our discussion is what are people actually taking in their Gen Eds? She asked if it is possible to gather that information from APAS. Korn stated that it would have to be done manually.

Ericksen noted that we have 13 different Gen Ed categories, and by the end each student will have taken 13 courses, including any 2 from Global Village. Is that enough of a diversity experience? Ericksen asked Helsper to present her findings in a report she had prepared on the *Gen Eds Possible in the Majors*. Helsper stated that last fall she had a student worker look at how many Gen Eds can be fulfilled in each of the majors. The list shows all of the possibilities and may need tweaking, but will give you some idea of where the Gen Eds are located. The table shows majors sorted by divisions, and the list and number of all required courses that have Gen Ed designators. Global Village was pulled out and counted separately. Additional Gen Eds possible with electives in those majors are counted separately as well. The percentage of Gen Eds as a percentage of GER is noted, and courses that offer over 50% of Gen Eds or less than 35% are highlighted in the last two columns.

Ericksen noted that the Social Science major is a fairly large block, and one that can be largely ignored when you look at the number of students who take the major. Odello noted that there appears to be a lot of errors in Music, e.g., she wasn't aware that Music has an HDiv or Env't course. Perhaps those Gen Eds are required for education licensure. Crabtree pointed out some errors in the total number of possible Gen Eds throughout the table, and Helsper replied that she would correct those errors. Ericksen stated that this is valuable information. She had heard that people majoring in the sciences don't have to take courses outside of Science and Math. Helsper agreed that the argument has been made that students in the sciences aren't getting breadth in the Gen Eds. This shows that no Science and Math major offers more than 38% of the Gen Eds. Ng agreed and stated that it confirms what she had thought. It's especially true for the Math program that encourages students to go outside the major.

Ericksen asked if it would be a bad thing to offer an English course with a Gen Ed that would be outside of Humanities, such as Env't. It would get students who might not already take an English course to take it for the Gen Ed. Deane answered that we want our students to come away with different methodologies from different fields of study so if we ask a student how human beings solved this problem their answer can come from different fields of thought. This builds connections across disciplines.

Nelson suggested we add a freshman interdisciplinary course that covers two Gen Eds such as WLA and IC, with topics that drive home why we need diversity and the liberal arts process while getting a couple of Gen Eds out of the way. Anderson responded that the idea suggested by Nelson involves talking about new types of courses as a way to go back to our old checklist. There are some Gen Eds we want to be sure we keep, but there are other areas that would be kept in spirit that would not be on the list. Ericksen asked how we would decide which Gen Eds to throw away. How do we say this one is better met in an interdisciplinary course, and that one requires a whole-semester course? Anderson answered that she did not think we should start with our list. Ericksen asked how do we decide where to begin. Helsper suggested that instead of connecting to the mission we should look at campus level student learning outcomes. Deane stated that to answer the question of where to begin, she would ask people to be creative and ask what else we could do on a campus level. People have said why invest time and energy in this process if there is nothing fundamentally wrong with the Gen Eds. The answer is that they could

be better, more fun, and more purposeful. Ng stated that communication is important. When we teach our Gen Ed courses we are not often intentional in making a connection with other Gen Ed courses. If she is teaching a MSR class about the history of math, it behooves her as an instructor to make the connection to the Hist Gen Ed. Odello added that it would be nice to have Gen Eds that are cool opportunities to step out of a student's comfort zone. We can try to do it in courses, as Ng suggested, or we can do it during advising sessions.

Nelson asked what would happen if we had no Gen Ed requirements. Aronson replied that there are majors that would go away, such as history, French and German Studies. Ericksen explained that people don't always come in knowing about those majors. Taking a course for the Gen Ed may spark their interest in further studies in the major.

Rudney stated that faculty love their area of expertise, but not everybody shares that love. If we want students to take a course in our area, then there will be students who feel that they have to just get through it. We do want people to be happier with their classes and understand how they connect, but also have to remember that education is slow. We don't meet our outcomes in a given semester, and it comes sometimes later, and sometimes we never like the class. Students can understand the importance of what they are taught, but not like the class. Anderson added that there were things she learned in college that she came to appreciate a lot more afterwards. Those longer term seeds that are planted are much more valuable. Ericksen added that they are also not as measurable.

Deane stated that last week she had asked what the problem is with our Gen Ed program. Is there evidence there is a problem? Now we clearly have a problem maintaining our first-year students to their second year. The first year is when we are asking students to take disparate and less accessible material. Couldn't we do something that doesn't put the hardest part of liberal arts on those students in their first year of classes?

Rudney stated that some people may be unhappy teaching integrated courses, and some students may be unhappy taking them. The learning is better when there's a thematic approach. If the first semester is good and helps make connections through the content, it lives on. That's a better use of our time. Aronson noted that the process works differently in languages, which are taught and learned developmentally. The content comes after the student has enough language skill so they can do something with it.

Scanlan asked how many of the Gen Eds are required by the State. He had a lot of credits transfer in through the Minnesota State Transfer Curriculum (MSTC). Ericksen asked what would happen if we had a wild set of Gen Eds. Korn answered that we would have to go to the Board of Regents and ask to be different.

Ericksen stated that she should know by the end of the semester if the Mellon Foundation planning grant will let us experiment with our review of Gen Eds. We could then just dive in and offer some courses and see what the student interest is and whether they work. She thanked the Committee members for their ideas on Gen Ed and asked them to keep thinking about it and share possibilities with her.

Submitted by Darla Peterson