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Curriculum Committee Minutes

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3-14-2019

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Recommended Citation

Curriculum Committee, "Curriculum minutes 03/14/2019" (2019). *Curriculum Committee Minutes*. 356. <https://digitalcommons.morris.umn.edu/curriculum/356>

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UMM CURRICULUM COMMITTEE

2018-19 MEETING #12 Minutes

March 14, 11:40 a.m., Moccasin Flower Room

Members Present: Janet Ericksen (chair), Stacey Aronson, Arne Kildegaard, Peh Ng, Stephen Crabtree, Stephen Gross, Benjamin Narvaez, Denise Odello, Simon Franco, Kellie Meehlhause, Stephanie Ferrian, Christina Munoz, Annika Nelson, Julia Scovil, and Josh Westfield, and Judy Korn

Members Absent: Gwen Rudney

Visitors: Brenda Boever and Rebecca Dean

In these minutes: Discussion of MCSA General Education Survey; Discussion of Professor Bezanson's report on General Education; and Basic parameters or required elements of UMN Morris General Education

Approval of Minutes from Meeting #11, February 14, 2019

Minutes were approved by unanimous voice vote.

Discussion of MCSA General Education Survey

Scovil announced that there were 83 responses to 200 emails sent to students. Three questions were asked regarding the Writing for the Liberal Arts (WLA) Gen Education Requirement. One surprising outcome was that only 27.7% stated that they have classes that include essays or papers. We don't know which respondents are in WLA now or took in in the fall, or how many classes they've taken. Gross asked if we know if the students are freshmen or seniors. A freshman would only have had 8 courses. It would be more compelling if we knew that seniors are saying they don't have much writing in their classes.

Nelson stated that the survey asked if people would like to know the content or theme of their WLA course ahead of time. The response was 69.9% affirmative. We can look at this result and say at least a portion of the student really want clarity on what they will be writing about. When asked how difficult the student's WLA class was, only four people said it was very easy. This shows that we are challenging our students. Ericksen state that it would be interesting to share this with prospective or new students who come and say they don't need the course. Students rapidly discover they are wrong and WLA will train them to pay attention to the process of their writing.

Scovil stated the next question was "Compared to other 1xxx courses you've taken, how stressful was WLA?" Nineteen of 83 people thought WLA was a lot more stressful, and a large number thought WLA was somewhat stressful. Ericksen noted that even English majors are stressed out about writing. Kildegaard added that stress is not necessarily a bad thing.

Nelson stated that the next question was "Compared to other 1xxx course you've taken, how heavy was the workload in WLA?" The response was similar to the previous question. 53% said it was heavier than other courses. Crabtree stated that it would be interesting to know what sort of 1xxx courses they are talking about. A 1xxx science lab will have more work with the added lab than in other divisions. Ng added that students are supposed to be spending another 8 hours outside of class. Narvaez noted that it boils down to a lot of students don't do all of the reading that's required of WLA. Scovil stated that the workload, stress, and difficulty of the WLA class are similar across the three questions.

Ericksen asked if it is the best time in their very first semester to teach a writing class. So many students at the junior and senior levels say they wish they had paid more attention in their first-year writing class. Scovil noted that she has had her professor stress the idea that the IC class is prepping you for the rest of your college career. That value was conveyed in her WLA class. Having both IC and WLA in the same semester may not help a lot of students. If you're told that IC is the course that is prepping you for a liberal arts education, then you won't care about WLA. Nelson noted that in her intro classes they told her a lot of things that she was practicing in WLA. When the professor said this is how we are going to structure this paper, and this is what I expect of you. Not everyone had taken WLA and didn't have the same framework. Professors are prepared for those students who have taken WLA.

Nelson stated that she had wanted more practice in writing assignments to build a coherent voice or style to use consistently across her writing. Ericksen stated that the issue to some extent in WLA is are we teaching academic writing or a set of skills applicable to any writing. Gross noted that there is a sentiment among students that we ought to match a section of WLA with a student's major. This is a terrible idea. Scovil stated that she took WLA from an NAIS professor and NAIS is her major. She wanted experience writing in her major. Odello stated that they could have a general writing across the curriculum and then an upper division course in your division. Ericksen noted that most majors do have a writing component.

The next two questions were 1) "I learned everything I needed to know or busy work," and 2) How often do you see interdisciplinarity (the same topic approached through different Gen Ed courses? Scovil stated that almost 50% of the respondents don't really know or notice that interdisciplinarity was a value in their Gen Eds. Nelson stated that the last question might be leading, saying that you should agree. Ericksen asked if it's the package or the course that you are expecting to be interdisciplinary. Is it a core value?

When asked how important it is that one course could fulfill more than one Gen Ed requirement, the majority really liked that idea. Nelson stated that people want to get their Gen Eds done. Ericksen stated that she had read it as a request for flexibility. Students want options. Narvaez replied that if it means students want more classes in the major or more options to take electives in the major, then it means the expansion of majors to fill the void, which means we would be moving away from the liberal arts. Ericksen stated that students have to take 60 credits outside the discipline of their major. No matter how many you take above 120, that 60 credit requirement would remain to ensure a liberal arts education. Nelson stated that it might make it easier to get a second major or minor. It would give students the opportunity to randomly pursue options before you no longer have a chance and are in a major path.

The last question asked what course or subject you would add to the Gen Ed program. Suggestions included:

- Fitness classes
- Gender and sexuality
- Financial literacy
- The current Gen Eds are too specific
- Nearly all are the same, from a perspective of a non-major in that field
- More choices in the Fine Arts (AP) category (almost all are fulfilled by a ArtH class)
- A better system with three or four broader categories and a number in each, while still being forced to take classes outside the discipline of the major
- Mycology (the scientific study of fungi)
- Special Education major
- Supply Chain Management

- There are already too many specific Gen Eds which impedes me in taking classes I'm interested in across disciplines
- Handbells
- Journalism
- Archaeology

Ericksen thanked the students for doing the survey. There is a lot of information, even if nothing is conclusive. As we move forward with ideas we could send out another survey. Ericksen noted that she would like to make sure now that something like journalism is searchable. We don't have journalism program, but we can provide something that states what they need for the career. We have sent a lot of students on to journalism careers. Skovil stated that she did a search an area of concentration comes up, but a student wouldn't see an academic program ready for them.

Discussion of Professor Bezanson's report on General Education

Ericksen stated that there was little time remaining to discuss the report that professor Bezanson shared with the committee when she was a member in spring 2016. She asked for highlights or comments from those who were able to read it. Kildegaard stated that he was struck by how similar the Gen Ed programs are. There are skills courses, public speaking, writing, a first course, distributive, a couple of science requirements, etc., and thematic perspectives. It's packaged in different more or less elegant ways, but that's the structure of a Gen Ed program. Ericksen stated that a lot of schools are trying to figure out changes with more repackaging than substantive changes.

Basic Parameters or Required Elements of UMN Morris General Education Program

Ericksen asked if Korn knew in what direction the Twin Cities campus is moving. Korn answered that there is a core them matching up with the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum (MTC). We can't change too much so that we aren't honoring the MTC. They are talking about making changes to the MTC and are moving toward core and theme with simplified categories. Part of the conversation is being fueled by new progress toward degree that can be put in APAS. In order for that to work, requirements have to be very simple. Surveys have shown that there is a need for simplification. Ng asked if they were moving toward a distributive model. Narvaez asked if it might be as simple as requiring courses in at least two disciplines – or even simpler to two majors. Ericksen stated that we will still need to be sure we say we want 60 credits outside the major and our key core parameters, however we decide to package them.

Korn stated that she is an advocate for more Gen Ed requirements, but at fewer credits per course. Then, they can use other courses to fill out the 60 bucket. Fewer credits would be required, and they would still have to have at least 60 outside the major. That would give students more flexibility to fill up the 60 credit bucket with things they love.

At our next meeting on March 28, we will discuss CSLOs; Gross will provide some background on our current Gen Ed Program at the April 11 meeting and there will be a vote on the CSLOs [meeting was canceled due to the weather]; at the April 25 meeting we will decide the committee's plan for next year; and the May 9 meeting is canceled.

Submitted by Darla Peterson