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Curriculum Committee Minutes

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## **UMM CURRICULUM COMMITTEE**

2018-19 MEETING #11 Minutes

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

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

*Members Absent:* Benjamin Narvaez, Josh Westfield

*Visitors:* Brenda Boever, Rebecca Dean, Jeri Squier

### **In these minutes: Discussion of the process and semester goals regarding Gen Ed program, Report from CEI, and update regarding student survey on Gen Ed**

#### **Discussion of the process and semester goals regarding the General Education program**

Ericksen stated that it was unlikely that a review of Gen Ed can be completed spring semester. The process may take years, but this committee can begin by setting some goals that can be completed this semester in preparation for a thorough review next year. She asked the committee members to think about the steps that can be taken, the consultations, and range of input that can be requested by students, alumni, and other institutions that have undertaken a recent review of the Gen Ed programs. She shared a document prepared by David Langley, titled “Innovative Liberal Arts Colleges in the U.S. The document examines aspirational institutions identified by Morris and as well as other liberal arts colleges. Ericksen stated that a good place to start might be to identify innovative models to consider.

Ng asked why Langley didn’t include Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges (COPLAC) institutions. Ericksen replied that Langley started with our aspirational institutions. Kildegaard noted that UVa-Wise is a COPLAC institution that is on our peer list, and the University of Maine at Farmington is also on our peer list. He added that it may be interesting to look at what our COPLAC peers are doing. Ericksen replied that we can request Langley look at the COPLAC institutions.

Ericksen asked what is accomplishable between now and May with every-other-week meetings. Korn stated that the committee could work backwards from the next catalog and prepare a timeline to be sure that any Gen Ed program revisions are finished in time to be incorporated into the catalog. Ericksen answered that to be finished in time for the next catalog changes to the Gen Ed program will need to be approved next spring semester, at the very latest. The feasibility of that happening is unlikely. What preliminary work can be done this spring to make that happen? One idea is to avoid reaching a least common denominator agreement, because if an idea is the least objectionable it is also likely to be the least interesting. One possibility would be to come up with three or four models that the committee feels comfortable presenting as options.

Franco stated that he liked the idea, but as a matter of best practice, he would like to see a comparison of Gen Ed programs that is apples to apples. We should look at what our Gen Ed program is, and what other institutions like us are doing, as we develop our models. That is a good assignment for this committee and is accomplishable this semester. Ericksen agreed that we could task people with looking at particular campuses and coming back with a comparison of what we have and what others are doing. On the other hand, those are starting points, and we don’t want to imitate what others are doing. Nelson stated that it would not be unreasonable to look at other models and come up with our own. Ericksen added that there are real issues to deal with. One is that our Gen Ed is tied to so many measurements, for example when a

discipline puts in a tenure-track faculty request it's tied to enrollment and enrollment is tied to our GERs. How many are taking a lab because they are interested in it or because they feel obligated to take it solely to satisfy the GER? Aronson noted that it's a matter of the chicken and the egg. Comparisons might presuppose we love our Gen Eds. Maybe we don't. Our Campus Student Learning Outcomes (CSLOs) tell us what we want students to come away with. Should we base our Gen Eds on that? Ericksen noted that Langley's document identifies signature features. Scovil replied that WLA is a signature feature. Franco added that, as previous students have stated, they feel like the Gen Eds are just about checking the boxes. Ng stated that looking at new models won't necessarily prevent students from feeling that way. Aronson added we could throw out all Gen Eds and instead have categories and students would have to justify that a course fits a category. Ericksen stated that would still be checking a box. She would like to see a signature feature in our Gen Ed program that we can communicate better to students and external audiences. Boever noted that when she portrays our Gen Ed program to first-year students, she tries to explain the meaning and value in what we ask them to do, but it's not obvious.

Kildegaard stated that this spreadsheet on institutions doesn't talk about what the checklists are. They still have them, and they are probably as difficult to explain as ours are. They have marketing language and they have some stories to tell about uniting themes across the curriculum, but at the end of the day, they will have a checklist. What kind of story are we drafting on top of it?

Rudney stated that she is a fan of the distributive model and wonders if we could go back to the olden days where we had to take courses from this division and that area. We could make sure students get everywhere and take a UMM approach to say who we are and what we are valuing, then explain that part and require leadership, and other key things. We can talk about different models that might work at UMM and why.

Gross stated that, as a historian, he would like to look at how the current model was designed. The last comprehensive review and change to our Gen Ed program was done in 1996. Pieces of it have been reviewed since then. Ericksen added that there was a Global Village Task Force a few years ago that fizzled out.

Crabtree stated that over the years the problem has become not so much having a checklist as having so many boxes to check. Ericksen added that we could reduce the number of boxes and increase the options under each item. Crabtree asked if there are courses or disciplines that would suffer if the number of boxes decreased. Ericksen asked if the purpose of Gen Ed is to be distributed across disciplines. There is a value in taking courses students are not naturally drawn to.

Ng stated that if someone is not affiliated with UMM and asks her to talk about signatures, she would say there are three parts to our Gen Eds: 1) a first year seminar (IC), 2) skills for the liberal arts, and 3) expanding perspectives. Those are key things. There's a forest with messy trees in each category. Ericksen noted that Gustavus Adolphus has the Three Crowns Curriculum. That's a nice tag line. DePauw University has The Gold Commitment, and Carleton College has the Argument and Inquiry Seminar. They've taken a name and made it very distinctive. Can we come up with a name that sounds so special that students will come *wanting* rather than *having* to fulfill their Gen Eds.

Korn stated that she has often thought that the Twin Cities leadership certificate is something we could easily do at Morris so everyone could finish with a leadership minor. It would have added value. Ericksen noted that it wouldn't have to be leadership. Nelson stated that this seems really linked to our CLSOs. Franco asked whether the Gen Eds are tied to our mission. Dean answered that all of the CLSOs are tied

to our mission. Janet replied that we are not trying to alter our mission. Franco noted that the mission is supposed to guide us, and assessment is supposed to guide us, and then are we to decide what model our Gen Eds should be? Ericksen answered that CSLOs are coming this semester. The Gen Ed proposal should relate to the new CSLOs. What can we do to set us up to either say that our Gen Ed program is fine but we want to repackage it and talk about it in a different way, or it's a mess and we want to replace it totally? Rather than ask what are the pros and cons, let's come up with some possibilities to better package our CSLOs. What can we do in the remaining meetings of this semester to allow us to move ahead in the fall?

Scovil stated that we don't have a way to market our Gen Eds now, and if we start with that as they are, if that's too difficult, then that should be evidence that there's something wrong with them. Ericksen noted that one of the things she and Langley talked about was whether he should have a student focus group with him as an outsider. He could host it to get feedback on what do students think right now is the purpose, aim, and result of Gen Ed. Nelson stated that is the purpose of the Gen Ed survey that MCSA is doing. Ericksen noted that we could have the focus group, and then a forum after the survey is complete.

Ericksen stated that at the next meeting she would like an update on the student survey, which should give the committee helpful feedback. In the meantime, we need to look at what is being done, what our options are, and think about how to communicate what we do. Korn stated that professor Bezanson created a packet for the committee two years ago which listed information about peer institutions. It would be helpful to make that information available to the committee. Ericksen stated that for this semester we've identified some possibilities. Once CSLOs are approved, we can map our existing Gen Eds to the new CSLOs. Professor Dean will present the new model for discussion in mid-March and it will go before Campus Assembly for approval in April.

Kildegaard stated that when you look at our Mission Statement, 90% of what we do is the same as others. We are really talking about the last 10%. Mission statements are supposed to be binding and are written outside the contents of any constraints. It can tie your hands if the mission statement is too particular. It has intercultural competence, civic engagement, environmental stewardship, etc. Is everybody getting that? Not everybody is getting that. Ericksen replied that we can say this is our mission, and maybe all our students aren't going to reach it, but we offer students the means and the opportunity to reach it. Ng stated that even though our mission sounds prescriptive not every single one has or should come from the curriculum. Some things come from student government or development, and some are civic engagement. She remembers having a discussion in the past about why we need another ECR Gen Ed. Students should be able to get that Gen Ed from outside the curriculum. Nelson stated that could be highlighted in our assessment model. Ericksen stated that in one of the remaining meetings she will ask Helsper to bring in data from 1000 APAS's to look at how students are satisfying their Gen Eds.

Franco stated that there is a working group working on a co-curricular engagement transcript. There are different areas the group identified outside of the classroom that are tied to offices and disciplines that can be validated by the university by stating that all the students on this roster went on this trip or had that experience. Kildegaard noted that was interesting. We are cutting the link between Gen Ed being required to carry the full load. CSLOs should be all of those and Gen Ed does not have to fulfill all of it. Franco suggested that vice chancellor Olson-Loy be invited to speak on it.

Ericksen stated that anybody can put forth a model and this committee can decide the top three or four to share with the campus next year.

Submitted by Darla Peterson