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## Curriculum minutes 09/26/2011

Curriculum Committee

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**UMM CURRICULUM COMMITTEE  
2011-12 MEETING #3 Minutes  
September 26, 2011, 2:00 p.m., BCR**

Present: Bart Finzel (chair), Joe Alia, Bryce Blankenfeld, Carol Cook, Clare Dingley, Caitlin Drayna, Janet Ericksen, Hazen Fairbanks, Sara Haugen, Heather James, Leslie Meek, Peh Ng, Paula O’Loughlin, Ian Patterson, Gwen Rudney, Jeri Squier, Tisha Turk

Visiting: Nancy Helsper, Dorothy De Jager, Stacey Aronson

*In these minutes: General Education Review Process (continued discussion)*

**1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – September 19, 2011**

MOTION (Rudney/Patterson) to approve the September 19, 2011, minutes. Motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

**2. GENERAL EDUCATION REVIEW PROCESS – Continued Discussion**

**Meeting/Forum Questions**

The meeting forum questions, drafted by Alia and Patterson, were discussed. The questions submitted were:

Two Questions to Gauge the Need to Change the General Education Curriculum:

- 1) What aspects of the Gen. Ed. Curriculum are:
  - a. Clumsy and/or difficult?
  - b. Redundant?
  - c. Essential?
  
- 2) How can problems identified in the prior question be solved and essential aspects strengthened?

Our rationale behind these questions:

The prior questions are based on the assumption that a major fundamental overhaul of the general education system is not what the campus community as a whole is interested in undertaking. By narrowing the scope to making changes within the current general education structure we feel that these questions can yield the most beneficial data for Curriculum Committee while simultaneously keeping meetings relatively focused.

Alia stated that the rationale as stated is that a major overhaul isn’t what the campus wants, based on the discussion of general education that took place at the fall faculty retreat. Cook disagreed with the conclusion. O’Loughlin agreed that the discussion was about strengths and weaknesses of the program and not about whether to engage in a fundamental overhaul. Patterson answered that he framed the discussion questions with

an idea of the sort of information this committee will find most useful. Finzel stated that the rationale could be ignored with the focus put on the questions. Ng suggested that since the two questions negate the need to change and it might be helpful to add the words “or reaffirm” after “need to change.” Ericksen wondered if the questions would provide enough information about whether people understand why we have a general education program. Rudney stated that the questions are good in that they focus the discussion. It may not be a discussion question to ask what the purposes of a general education program are and how well our program meets the goals.

Squier stated that if the general education program is targeted at students, the question has to at least be asked of the students. Hopefully, the rest of the campus community knows the purpose and value of general education, but maybe not. Turk stated that a student’s notion might be different from the understanding that a faculty or staff member might have of general education. O’Loughlin added that students may only see general education as a list of boxes to check off. There are also faculty members who could use some support and education in that area. Finzel asked where that discussion leads to action by the committee. We do need the question on whether or not it is working. One additional question should provide the committee with the answers to what is working well, what is essential, what is not working well, and what are the problems in our current program. O’Loughlin suggested we ask what the strengths and weaknesses are of our current program. Which do you feel need to be addressed, and which are endemic to the nature of general education? Question number 1 should ask for strengths and weaknesses, but not listing a, b, or c, because we are not asking them to do an online survey. We are asking for a discussion. Finzel answered that the discussion would be more useful to this committee if the questions are more focused. The redundancy question is good. It is not asking *whether* the program has redundancy, it is asking *what* is redundant.

Helsper stated that the purpose of each GER category is explained under degree requirements in our catalog. Several paragraphs explain the components and their aims. Finzel answered that we are trying to see if people have absorbed it and taken it to heart. Rudney noted that the questions eliminate the opportunity to look at a definition of general education that is different. James noted that when the committee assesses the responses, takes them to Campus Assembly, and shares them with the campus community, it might be enlightening to see how many views of general education exist.

Finzel stated that he did not sense convergence in the room. There seem to be two options: 1) Define the purpose and determine if we meet it; and 2) Assume the program is defined and determine how it can be done better. Patterson asked if we could do both. It is a larger data collection. The point of the question is to get the data in front of the committee. The answers can tell us the questions coming up. If people say the whole thing is clumsy and difficult, that answers whether you know why we have it. It can go either way. Ericksen agreed and added that regardless of what we start with it will go all over the place anyway. We will need to take what we get, sift through it, and be prepared to deal with a wide array of answers. O’Loughlin stated that the understanding is less important than the overall goals of committee. With accreditation coming up, our task is to find out if it is working or not.

Finzel summarized that the committee appears to have a consensus that we should use these questions with the revision suggested by Ng, plus the question asking for strengths and weaknesses as well. He asked Alia and Patterson to prepare a revised version of the questions? They will be distributed by email.

### **Assessment of Student Learning Committee work on mapping Gen Ed to the Student Learning Outcomes**

Finzel welcomed Stacey Aronson, chair of the Assessment of Student Learning Committee (ASLC) to discuss with the committee the work that the ASLC did last year. The purpose of this discussion is to identify what has already been done in thinking about our general education program. Aronson stated that they were asked by the dean last year to look at the current GERs and Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) and map them in some meaningful way. A task force of the ASLC did that. The mapping doc showed gaps in the SLOs that are not being filled by the current GERs. Learning Outcomes under #4-*Capacity for Integrative Learning* were not dealt with because the ASLC interpreted those as having to do with extra- or co-curricular activities, and not courses. Ericksen stated that some of these Learning Outcomes are curricular and covered by a major.

Finzel asked where the gaps appear in the SLOs. Aronson stated that there were a few holes in the chart, especially under #3-*An Understanding of the Roles of Individuals in Society, through active involvement with diverse communities and challenges*. The ASLC was troubled by some of the terminology and went back to the Curriculum Committee for clarification, but were told by the dean that they did not want to get into specifics about definitions. There may be courses that fit those but we aren't sure. Finzel asked why there was no mapping done under 1c-*Engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring*. He asked if that means these outcomes are not met, or was the ASLC not ready to map those. Aronson answered that the ASLC found "big questions" troubling and problematic. They were not sure what that term meant. Ericksen stated that when the SLOs were made, it was understood that some would be covered by general education and some by the major.

Finzel asked what Aronson saw as the role of ASLC over the next few years. Aronson stated that the ASLC can be of assistance once they know the expectation of what assessment work will be done by the two committees, what ASLC will assess, and how. Finzel asked Aronson if she had ideas regarding how to reach that level of understanding. Aronson answered that she will have to refer back to her committee in order to answer that. Finzel stated that he was pleased with the way it has started. There are some glaring gaps in the mapping, and that is helpful information. Aronson noted that the ASLC based the mapping on general descriptions of the general education categories only. They did not look at specific courses. If they do that, some of the gaps might fill in.

O'Loughlin stated that those who were on the General Education Task Force last year or those who went to the AACU meeting should recollect that Morris is pretty normal in

that we rely on our majors to fulfill a fair number of SLOs. Rudney agreed that general education is one way to meet them and the major is one way. Even if it is in general education doesn't mean it won't also be in the major. O'Loughlin stated that we can assume the major is taking care of those not covered by general education, but we won't know until disciplines or majors answer these questions. Political Science has mapped their major. Others have not. Finzel stated that this is a good start. We will want representation early in the student's academic career that is built upon as the career goes on. Aronson stated that she did not want to presume how every major works. Helsper noted that the ASLC intended to eventually send out a survey to all disciplines to look at their courses and see how they would match. That might help point out where we are hoping to fill in the gaps.

### **Gen Ed Survey Results**

Helsper reported on the General Education Survey of seniors conducted from 2001 through April 2010. The first year's effort was done as a pilot and problems were corrected by 2002, so we now have 9 years of results for this survey. It was not done in spring 2011 because we had the visit by the Higher Learning Commission. She would like to find out if the survey is helpful and whether it should continue to be done in the future.

The average response rate for this survey is 43%. Since we stopped offering a \$5 coupon at the Bookstore for completing the survey, the completion rate dropped. In spring 2010, the response rate was 38%.

There are 13 categories of requirements in the General Education Requirements. The first two questions on the survey for each category are the ones the ASLC has focused on: 1) Achievement (To what extent have you achieved the specific learning objective?); and 2) Importance (How important was this objective to your education?) Interestingly, while 86% of the students rated their achievement of CW at 3 or higher (1-5 on a 5 high scale), only 65% rated achievement of FL at 3 or above. CW, SS, HDiv, and Hum share the top rankings for both achievement and importance. O'Loughlin asked if the students were given a description of the GER from the catalog along with the question. Helsper answered that the full goal of each description from the catalog was provided.

Helsper continued to explain that she took means from each year and did an average from the entire group showing changes from 2002 to 2010 and 2006 to 2010. When she averaged all GER categories, 3.35 was the average mean for achievement, and 3.0 was the average mean for importance. The ASLC concluded that the campus could do a better job of explaining to students the purpose of the GERs.

The achievement and importance means differ for each Gen Ed category. CW shows little difference between achievement and importance means, while ArtP and FA, for instance, show significant difference. In all cases, except CW, the importance scores are lower than the achievement scores.

Several charts in the report track the means for each Gen Ed category for the achievement and importance questions. They showed FA is down significantly in both achievement and importance. FL is up in both from the last year but down from the previous year. HDiv has steadily shown a climb in importance. Env't is down from this year, and both Hist and E/CR are down in both categories last year.

The ASLC asked her to do a special study of the survey by the Division of the students' majors. Results show the percentage of scores at moderate or above for each GER category based on the Division of the major. There are some interesting stats relating to this study. Noting the M/SR achievement column, Science and Mathematics majors rate their achievement of the GER at 93% but Humanities majors rate it at 57%. Similarly, Humanities majors rate the Hum GER at 91% and Science and Mathematics majors rate it at 67%. The variation on the importance question is even greater. The average across all GER categories on achievement comes out at 70-80% for all Divisions, but varies from 53% to 71% for the importance question. Dingley stated that this reinforces the need to force students to have breadth because they would prefer to stay in their comfort zone. Ericksen stated that this data would affect the forum discussions on General Education. She asked Helsper to provide Division Chairs with an electronic copy of the survey report.

Helsper stated that last year the ASLC asked for a special study of the survey by years spent at UMM. The scores vary a lot by category and the variation doesn't seem significant on the face of it. The ASLC also asked her for a special study of the survey by the years spent at UMM. The scores vary a lot by category but the variation doesn't seem significant.

Finally, she did a special study of the responses to the FL questions by the number of FL courses taken at UMM. The percentage of scores at moderate or above for the FL category based on FL courses taken at UMM, either 0 courses, or 1-2 courses, or 3 or more courses. Looking at the average from 2003 through 2010, students with more FL courses not surprisingly rate their achievement and the importance much higher than students who did not take FL courses here.

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) survey is also worth noting. Question 11 of that survey sounds similar to our SLOs: "Educational and Personal Growth: To what extent has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas: a) acquiring a broad general education." Mean scores (1-4, on a 4 high scale) of Morris seniors averaged 3.53 over the past 5 surveys. In the most recent survey in 2010, UMM seniors scored significantly higher than COPLAC and all NSSE survey takers. The scores were not significantly different compared to BAC-LA colleges as a group.

One other relevant survey is the University of Minnesota Student Experience Survey. The University no longer asks the series of questions on "general knowledge" which included a specific question about "gaining a broad general education about different fields of knowledge." On a 4-point scale (4 high), UMM seniors had a mean score slightly above 3.0, while the other U campuses were slightly below 3.

Finzel asked De Jager how many students fulfill their FL GER outside Morris. When a student is compelled to do something others are not, that might be reflected in the results. De Jager replied that she does not track that information for transfer students. Aronson added that students take placement tests and an irritatingly high number of students take the intro class who should not be taking it. Ericksen stated that she tried to find how many students have had college writing before coming to UMM but could not pull that data. Finzel asked if it would be correct to say that 50% or 75% of entering freshmen take college writing. Turk replied that it varies from year-to-year, but generally 67% to 75% of first-year students take it. There has been some discussion about making the requirements stricter, e.g., raising the ACT English score. Everyone wants to opt out of talking college writing. Her experience is that those students regret it in their junior year when they are facing a senior seminar. If the standards were raised, there would be too many students and not enough faculty members to staff the classes.

Finzel stated that EDP grants will be tabled until the next meeting.

Adjourned 2:56 p.m.

Submitted by Darla Peterson