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## Curriculum minutes 11/07/2011

Curriculum Committee

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**UMM CURRICULUM COMMITTEE  
2011-12 MEETING #6 Minutes  
November 7, 2011, 2:00 p.m., BCR**

Present: Bart Finzel (chair), Janet Ericksen, Hazen Fairbanks, Sara Haugen, Heather James, Leslie Meek, Peh Ng, Paula O'Loughlin, Ian Patterson, Gwen Rudney, Jeri Squier, Tisha Turk

Absent: Joe Alia, Bryce Blankenfeld, Carol Cook, Clare Dingley, Caitlin Drayna

Visiting: Nancy Helsper

*In these minutes: Course Approvals and General Education Review*

**INTRODUCTORY REMARKS**

Finzel reported that he had followed up on suggestions made at the last meeting that he should contact disciplines that had done the more recent program reviews to invite them to give a brief presentation on their experience and progress to the Curriculum Committee. At least one will do so during spring semester. He also had asked for suggestions on how future reviews might be done and was given a couple of suggestions.

Regarding general education, two sets of notes from student meetings were submitted after the agenda went out, so they will be distributed to the committee after this meeting. We will try to incorporate those ideas in our discussion next time.

Some people have expressed a need for an open forum on general education for staff members. Staff members were represented on the General Education Review Committee last spring, and instructional staff participated in division meetings, so staff have not been excluded in the discussions. Haugen stated that so many staff work in co-curricular areas that are tied to the learning outcomes and would have opinions to share on that aspect of general education. Finzel replied that this discussion is more narrowly focused on the curricular aspect of general education. Squier stated that staff in her office work directly with the curriculum. Helsper stated that the Advising Office also works closely with the Gen Ed curriculum. James added that the Library staff members support all elements of the curriculum and would provide input, if asked. Finzel stated that he would put out a call for general education discussion among staff. Squier suggested he send an email with questions that can be answered via email.

**1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

MOTION (Patterson/James) to approve the October 24, 2011 minutes with one minor correction. Motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

**2. COURSE APPROVALS**

MOTION (Ericksen/Patterson) to approve two new History courses:

HIST 3360-American Experience in World War II (HIST; 4 cr)

HIST 3463-America's National Landmarks (HIST; 4 cr)

Discussion: Meek explained that these courses are offered by a new tenure-track faculty member and a new faculty hire on a multi-year contract. These proposals speak to their expertise and provide new 3xxx-level courses, expanding the course offerings in History. In the first case, students are interested in and have asked for courses like this. It also allows the faculty member to broaden his scope. The second course is similar to an IC course that was popular and well-received. Offering these courses does not impede the opportunity for students to get their degree. HIST 3360 will replace an IC course, and HIST 3463 is taught by a new instructor who has flexibility in her course load and can teach an IC course.

Motion passed (10-0-0)

MOTION (Ericksen/Patterson) to approve the revised Psychology course:

PSY 2411-Introduction to Lifespan Developmental Psychology (SS; 4 cr)

Discussion: Meek explained that when this course was originally formulated, the instructor did not want people who had taken certain electives to get credit for them as well as for this course. The catalog stated: "no cr for students who are concurrently enrolled in or have received cr for Psy 3401, Psy 3402, Psy 3403." Psychology decided that the course content is different enough to allow students to get credit for any of the elective courses and this course; the course description has been revised, removing the statement. This change will make it easier for advisers and students.

Motion passed (10-0-0)

Finzel noted that next week's Curriculum Committee meeting is the last meeting when courses can be approved to make it on the November 30 Campus Assembly agenda.

### **3. GENERAL EDUCATION REVIEW (DIVISION MEETING NOTES)**

Finzel stated that he had identified several recurrent themes that were present in the comments made at the Division meetings on the Gen Ed program. The goal of today's discussion would be to identify the most common themes—not to evaluate or assess proposals.

Meek stated that she had picked out the following common themes: 1) not every course should have a Gen Ed designator; 2) Writing is needed; 3) A performance category should include athletic as well as artistic; 4) Foreign Languages should be a two-year requirement; and 5) Multiple designators should be offered on courses. Ericksen added that the presentation or packaging of the Gen Eds needs improvement. James added that the Global Village requirement needs clarity. Patterson added that one theme that came up at several of the meetings was that there is a general sense of confusion when weaving through the web of GERs. Finzel noted that this might fall under the packaging theme. O'Loughlin stated that there was a common concern about depth outside the area of the major. Also, some comments touched on how IC contributes to the Gen Ed. Rudney

stated that the themes she saw emerging were: 1) Writing; 2) Depth, 3) Packaging; 4) Foreign Language; 5) Diversity at home as well as abroad; and 6) Fitness and Wellness.

Finzel stated that another common theme was a desire for different GERs for different students (e.g., majors, transfers, life experience), resulting in a more tailored Gen Ed. Ericksen noted that people have mentioned that it works on other campuses, but at Morris, faculty do the advising and it would be much harder to advise students. Finzel replied that, as he read it, if a major is in science, then the Gen Ed would not require two science classes. It would be a way of shrinking the number of requirements because some majors fulfill them. Haugen noted that years ago we offered a program that allowed non-traditional students with life experiences to work with an adviser to relate those experiences to college credit. Meek stated that those are called prior learning internships and are used primarily to focus on the major, not on Gen Ed.

Ericksen asked what the complications would be of having multiple Gen Ed designators. Squier answered that APAS would run into problems tracking the degree program. The current system doesn't have the option to allow students to choose one of two possible GERS, so they would have to manually put the chosen designators on each course. Turk suggested that a drop down box would help. Squier didn't think that APAS could read it.

O'Loughlin stated that she found it interesting that while there was a theme that suggested our Gen Ed program is a structural labyrinth, at the same time there is the contradictory desire to add more to it. Based on the comments we've received, it looks like people want some change. Finzel agreed, but added that he would like the committee to come up with a focused list of changes. The problems with Writing, the lack of depth, the complexity of the labyrinth of Gen Ed are items clearly on this list, although the complexity may be part of the packaging aspect. The registrar provided him with an historical record of GERs as they have existed on this campus. In 1960, nine courses were required of Gen Ed, three in each division. Though that is not a terribly different course count, it is a simpler model packaged differently than our current model.

Helsper noted that another theme was whether we should require the environment GER. Finzel commented that we do have an environment option in Global Village. Ng stated that Global Village is trying to tackle current issues. There are some cores we ought to have as a liberal arts institution, like Writing and Foreign Language, but the more flexible categories like Global Village could be changed.

Finzel stated that we need to address Writing. We also need to address the Global Village category requirements, and lack of depth (allowing 3xxx-level courses outside the division of the major). Turk stated that it would be straightforward to require a number of 2xxx- or 3xxx-level courses outside the division of the major. Patterson replied that in some majors you have to take additional classes to get to that level, for example, if you want to take organic chemistry outside the major, the prerequisite is two semesters of general chemistry. To get to the depth of organic chemistry is difficult for majors that aren't in the sciences. The credit loads become difficult to handle. That could only be achieved if we narrowed down the other Gen Ed requirements, allowing students to be more focused and go in depth. Finzel commented that he didn't sense from the

comments that a desire to sacrifice breadth for depth was universal. A lot of people said that the current breadth is an asset.

O'Loughlin stated that writing is clearly a much stronger overall sentiment. James added that writing itself could provide depth if you include writing for majors, scientific writing, writing for research, etc. Finzel recalled that we once had classes with a W designator that included a writing in the major component. There were not a sufficient number of those classes offered so the class size was fairly large for the kinds of writing required. Workload was so heavy that people brought fewer courses forward.

Rudney stated that another strong opinion was that we need to have the Gen Eds be more doable, limiting the number enough so transfer students can meet them. How can we get the Gen Eds done, and do them well, when we keep adding to them? Finzel commented that writing might not be an additional course. Now most students take it. It would become a universal requirement, with the addition of adding an alternative writing class for those with advanced skills. Turk noted that some students want instruction on writing in the disciplines, and some have talked about needing more explicit instruction on writing in their major. Patterson stated that, on the flip side, as a double major, he took College Writing as a freshman, and those skills are transferable. He wasn't taught a formula for writing. He was taught the conceptualization of it. As much as it would be nice to know how to crank out a good science paper, no specific course can do that. It's just a matter of doing it. Turk replied that is the way we want College Writing to work. It should be portable, flexible, and meet a lot of different needs. But a lot of students want it to be more tailored to their major than it is. She has heard complaints from students that college writing didn't teach them to do the kind of writing needed in their major. It would be easier to make a distinction that students want more training in a particular genre of writing, and it could be available, but that's not what college writing is.

O'Loughlin stated that when the Gen Ed Review Committee looked at other schools last year, they found that a lot of schools require a second writing course. Turk replied that a lot of places have a two-semester sequence, and some have an optional second semester. Her sense is that at places with a two-semester requirement, students can place out of one of the two semesters. Ng stated that one concern about College Writing is that many students who test out of College Writing never actually took College Writing here at UMM, so they don't know what the College Writing expectation is. Turk added that she sees students who are working on senior projects who haven't taken a writing course since high school.

Finzel posed the question of Turk wondering if we were to require College Writing of all students, and if we have the resources to make it happen, would it be difficult to teach? Turk replied that it would be much easier to teach when there are students in the class who set the bar high. Those people could help with small group workshops, and samples of student writing in the class could be used to recalibrate a sense of what an "A" paper looks like compared to a "B" or "C" paper. Those classes would go so much better if we had students in them that are now placing out. Ericksen asked if there might be a problem if we require all students to take a UMM writing class when some may have

already taken one through another school or through College In the Schools, and they don't want to pay for it again. Finzel replied that we could require the class or allow some substitute of a discipline- or major-based writing class.

James stated that some feedback suggested a writing requirement for everyone that might include other levels. Others said that there should be a W option in the majors. Others said that students should not be allowed to opt out of College Writing. Others wanted a two-semester requirement or multipart course with a research paper focus. That would include a writing-intensive course as well as writing in the field. It is also not uncommon to have an assessment element at the end of the writing requirement. Turk noted that a course that is writing-intensive does not just mean a lot of writing. It incorporates direct instruction in writing, and consists of assigning drafts and rewriting drafts and giving feedback in various stages. That is labor-intensive. Finzel asked if we have faculty who have those skills. Turk answered that it takes a lot of resources to educate faculty to run those courses effectively.

Patterson stated that many problems could be rectified if the problem of packaging were addressed first. For example, are the complaints from students the result of having to take a writing course because students didn't want to take it or because they didn't know the importance of taking it? Turk noted that the value becomes clear later, mostly not until they are juniors, when they look back and wish they had not tested out of College Writing.

Finzel stated that one of the common problems identified related to packaging: Gen Ed is just checking boxes. That is partly driven by the technology of our system that creates a checklist. Ericksen stated that there is not a way to get around the APAS system, but it can be countered in other ways. Squier noted that improving the descriptions of the GERs in the catalog would be a good start; they make no sense to students. O'Loughlin added that faculty don't actually talk to each other about GERs and how they work together to make more than the sum of their parts. A continuing discussion with faculty is necessary to explain them. There are faculty who wonder, for example, what the difference is between the Fine Arts and Artistic Performance. When students register they are given a short opening spiel about the GERs. Gen Ed is always presented as a box. It's the way we all look at it. It is very functional. In addition, we have to talk about the liberal arts as a whole before we talk about the parts. Turk noted that the number of courses that have designators doesn't help that. They are not told what each category is meant to do for them. Finzel asked if it would be a relatively easy thing to fix. If there is an agreement that there is no love for the current system that requires every course to have a Gen Ed, why do we do it that way? Ng answered that as a result of the 1997 Gen Ed Task Force's work, the dean changed the default to every course having a Gen Ed, unless they give a reason for not having one. An example of a good reason for not having a Gen Ed is the "History of Math" course. It is neither a HIST nor an M/SR course. Helsper added that courses were all given Gen Eds at a time when there weren't enough courses with some Gen Eds. The expectation was that there would always be enough offered.

O'Loughlin stated that competition for scarce students to get into Gen Ed courses would result in those courses having better enrollment. Squier added that some faculty would purposely not put a Gen Ed designator on courses so they would not get the enrollment. Finzel added that it was similar with the W courses. People would game the system by not putting a Gen Ed on courses, and students would flock to the remaining W courses. Helsper stated that if a course covers a number of Gen Ed areas, why should they have to choose a single Gen Ed?

Finzel asked what the committee members thought of allowing no Gen Eds higher than the 3xxx-level. Turk stated that disciplines could be asked what courses they might offer that may serve majors but also serve non-majors who are just looking for exposure. Helsper stated that the committee needs to decide whether Gen Eds should only come from outside the major or whether majors can fulfill them. Patterson noted that the chair of the general education task force during the semester conversion said that one of the mistakes made then was allowing students to take Gen Eds from people who also teach in the student's major. Finzel recalled that his own discipline was quite strategic and deliberately created classes to help majors double dip. James cautioned straying from the goals of a Gen Ed class. Some students feel geared towards their major so much that removing Gen Ed designators from courses would discourage students from taking a path they might not have known they would take. Ng agreed that rather than try to eliminate GER on courses, the discussion should be about how much balance there should be.

Patterson stated that if the essence of general education is to provide students with a broader view than just their major, they should be encouraged to take introductory courses. Simplify how things work. To have depth, 2xxx-level courses should be allowed to fill GERs. Mandate a writing requirement and an assignment in that course to understand what general education means.

Finzel stated that the discussion will continue next week. Watch for the additional notes on Gen Ed to go out with next week's agenda.

Adjourned 3:02 p.m.  
Submitted by Darla Peterson