General Education Committee Meeting

Minutes

Ventress Hall

2 p.m. on Thursday, December 8, 2016

Present: Lee Cohen (Co-Chair), Noel Wilkin (Co-Chair), Maurice Eftink, Rich Forgette, Katie Busby, Kate Kellum, Stephen Monroe, Jon Moen, Deborah Mower, James Reid, Kayla Harville, Bob Cummings, Ginny Chavis, Jason Ritchie, Nancy Wiggers, Mindy Sutton, Danielle Ammeter, John Chappell (ASB Representative)

Absent: Hunter Myers (ASB Representative)

1. Update from SACS-COC Annual Meeting (Noel, Maurice, Katie, and Kate)

QEP will remain a requirement. Can now be focused on student learning outcomes and/or student success goals. Quite likely that we will be required to report in detail on how general education assessment data is being used to improve teaching and learning. Similar to requirements currently around program assessment.

2. Report of Data Collection Related to General Education Assessment (Kate)

Most units responsible for this data collection are on schedule. Dean Cohen plans to offer reminders. Kate continues to provide support to all involved.

3. Discussion of General Education Curriculum–Time to Revitalize? (Everyone)

The committee engaged in a robust, 40-minute discussion about successes and challenges related to general education, focusing on ways that we might improve in the coming years. Summary of comments is below.

Maurice Eftink: Right now, we have a high-quality smorgasbord approach to general education. How could we be more intentional? For example, how could we create clear linkages between general education courses?

Jason Ritchie: Interdisciplinary courses might play a role. Examples include the interdisciplinary science course and the interdisciplinary arts course.

Stephen Monroe: Our gen ed outcomes are clear and focused. We could improve upon our application of those outcomes, more clearly stating where those outcomes are being taught in the curriculum. The members of this committee know a lot about this, but do our students know?

John Chappell (ASB Representative): As students, we don't really know much about general education. We don't really think of it as a program. Often, students simply want to get through it to fulfill the requirements. We don't think about connections between classes very often, at least not until we get into our majors.

Maurice Eftink: Teachers also don't often think about the connections between particular courses and general education. They don't usually have a clear understanding of what "general education" means at our university. We need to better define and publicize our terms and goals—for students and teachers.

Bob Cummings: Also, students don't feel empowered to chart their own pathways through the general education curriculum. They don't have choices, so much as requirements. This makes it hard for students to take control of their own learning.

Lee Cohen: We could find some ways to increase student awareness around general education. We need to better define our terms for ourselves and for students. What do we mean by general education and why do we think it so important? We know that it is important, but are we delivering that message in a specific and compelling way? Revitalizing our message could be one goal.

Bob Cummings: And let's stay focused on rigor. As we delineate the program and goals of general education, we need to make sure that students are challenged by the curriculum. Let's keep an eye out for grade inflation, just as we keep an eye on exceedingly high DFW rates.

Maurice Eftink: There is a gap between how well employers think we're doing and how well we think we're doing. Workforce readiness has to be a consideration, and we need to understand the desired outcomes from all perspectives. We can't simply remain satisfied with our own definitions. We also need to think about where general education lives. It should not simply be the 30 hours at the bottom of the curriculum. Needs to be continuous and longitudinally embedded—and we need to think of it in this holistic way.

Noel Wilkin: If we decide to make changes, we need to empower faculty and departments. No need to be overly prescriptive. Keep flexibility even as we

reform. Ask departments how they already contribute to general education outcomes. We can document many of those contributions, but not all.

Rich Forgette: Yes, we can continue our mapping project. Ask departments to reflect on how their courses connect to general education. Use this information to think about how and why we teach our outcomes, not simply whether or not we teach our outcomes. Also, we need to have a destination in mind before we use our map. It helps to know where we are going and to make decisions from there. One possibility: giving all students a capstone or signature experience near the end of their studies, in order to create a destination. Would be a good first step toward creating a better sense of order.

Stephen Monroe: Yes, then students could build toward that capstone or signature event. General education might become not something to hurry through but something that builds toward a worthwhile, final experience. Would need to be constructed to work in concert with the majors. Flexible enough to be integrated and not disruptive.

James Reid: And also would address issues of equity. We want all students to have such capstone experiences, not only students in Croft or Honors.

Bob Cummings: E-Portfolios would be a useful tool for capstone or signature projects. A scaffolding that would enable the construction of learning.

Maurice Eftink: Likes this because it would add substance to general education. It would also give us more control over the experience. Enable us to better guide our students through the map.

Kate Kellum: And we could improve upon the way in which general education courses are approved to be general education courses. Move from catchall buckets of courses to curated selections.

Patti O'Sullivan: The School of Pharmacy has done a wonderful job of creating curricular maps for their programs. Teachers have to think about how their courses connect to the bigger picture.

Noel Wilkin: In Pharmacy, we started with desired outcomes or abilities and worked in teams to create maps that included every course and activity. It was a faculty-led process that might work well on a larger scale, for general education.

After this excellent discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 2:58 p.m.