

General Education Committee

March 10, 2008 – HUB 123

MINUTES

Present: Lourdes Aviles, Samuel D. Brickley II, Mary E. Campbell (consultant, non-voting), Robert E. Fitzpatrick, Elliott G. Gruner, John C. Krueckeberg, Evelyn M. Stiller (Chair), David Zehr (2:38 pm)
[seven voting members]

Absent: Joel D. Funk

Recorded in the order in which the agenda item was discussed. Evelyn Stiller called the meeting to order at 2:30 pm.

- I. Minutes of the February 11, 2008 meeting: approved as presented.
- II. Preapprovals:
 - a. PE 2880 Adventures in Wellness as a Wellness Connection (WECO); sunset date is 5/2012
 - b. AR 4800 Advanced Studio Seminar as an Integrative Component (INTG) (pre-2005 program)
- III. New Business:
 - a. No new proposals
- IV. Review language for Direction exemption renewal

Proposed Process for renewing a Direction in the General Education Program: Every four years Departments must review their curricula to determine that the courses used to exempt students from taking courses in one Direction are still intact. Department chairs or their designee must communicate with the General Education Committee chair certifying that the courses involved in the exemption are still part of the major. If curricular changes involve the removal or repurposing (a course changes from requirement to elective, for example) of one or more courses used in the exemption application, Departments must explain what course(s) are being used to expose students to the academic experience lost by the changed course, or lose exemption.

This is a process for *renewing the waiver of a Direction* for a major. Discussion: have a narrative that explains the change; support with syllabi of new courses; target on the change. If the program has not changed, the department has to contact the Committee that there has been no change. Deadline? Clarify/advertise the deadline, which is the first Monday in October. Develop shorter version of the form? Probably not. Who does the teaching? Have not looked at that. Tenure-track faculty not participating in general education because department has a waiver.

Final wording per the Chair (April 10th): “Process for renewing a Direction waiver in the General Education Program: Majors are allowed a waiver for Directions and the waivers sunset every four years. Every four years Departments must review their curricula to determine that the courses used to exempt students from taking courses in one Direction are still intact. Department chairs or their designee must communicate with the General Education Committee chair and certify that the courses involved in the exemption are still part of the major. If curricular changes involved the removal or repurposing (a course changes from a requirement to an elective, for example) of one or more courses used in the exemption application, Departments must explain what course(s) are being used to expose students to the academic experiences lost by the changed course and provide supporting syllabi and other clarifying information, or lose exemption. The deadline for renewing a waiver is the first Monday in October of the academic year of the major’s waiver sunset. The deadline for all waivers is October 6th, 2008.”

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V. Assessment:

- a. Concerns about Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA)
- b. In what other assessment activities should we engage?
- c. How can we engage faculty support?
- d. What if our outcomes are unsatisfactory?
- e. How can we improve Gen Ed using this assessment?

(1) “Teaching to the test”? They have developed a product to teach to the test. Impact on campus?
(2) Have them score the pilot and we look at comparison set of essays; then compare how we grade versus them. Student essays are propriety once exam is done. What happens within the scoring? How do our students perform? Safe assignment is available now on blackboard. (3) How do the results relate to our program? What we do with the results?

If these are skills we are teaching, no problem with ‘teaching to the test.’ Teaching skills versus knowledge? I thought the test was about skills. If we don’t do CLA, what will we do? Purpose of assessment? Identify value added model. We have to do some things in assessment. If CLA doesn’t do it, then we will have learned something. Could look at other student writing (not that done for CLA). Could do a multi-dimensional assessment, not pre and post-test. Develop a culture of teaching with writing. We can do more than CLA. Volunteer system of accountability versus government mandate to do assessment. Are we driving our own form of assessment or reacting to a mandate? We are under pressure from the Trustees, NEASC to do assessment. We are currently writing the five year interim NEASC report; assessing general education is one of the four things NEASC said we had to do.

What is our plan for evaluating the pilot? The point of assessment is to determine how can we improve. The embeddiness of assessment; the more embedded, the more effective. Investment of the faculty? Costs of CLA pilot? Has to come from the top. Separate assessment from judgment; be as open as possible. Put agenda item on our department meeting and then talk about this at the April General Education meeting. David can go to the Council of Chairs and e-mail the slides from the CLA teleconference.

What parts of general education are we trying to assess? Writing. Critical thinking. Some quantitative, not formal quantitative. We’re behind in terms of assessment. Never find a perfect tool. CLA is relatively painless because they do the labor versus having the faculty do additional hours.

Opposed to machine graded tests. How to evaluate the CLA results. Look at samples and at our general education; develop correlation; then design the pilot. What is the demographic?

Elliott distributed information on a Research Initiative: WRITING AT PSU.

Addition to the minutes requested by Elliott Gruner (April 11th): “Elliott Gruner voiced several reservations regarding using CLA on campus. He mentioned that he had experience with standardized testing and large-scale writing assessment at other universities. Elliot went to say that he thought CLA and similar tests are relatively simple to administer (and are, therefore, attractive) but have limited use for assessment because they (1) are a stranded occasion and not integrated with the curriculum; (2) don’t benefit student learning because they aren’t connected to any course or other learning environment; (3) don’t allow faculty involvement in design or evaluation and, in this way, aren’t building a participative community for assessment; (4) offer a writing event that does not involve a process, writerly tools, collaboration and other writing support that we normally use to teach writing and with writing; (5) use trained jury and machine-grading logics that don’t validly,

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objectively or reliably evaluate writing; and (6) don't make their questions and the student writing sampled available for objective or host examination. Elliott mentioned that because of these problems and others, two major professional organizations for English, The Modern Language Association and the Conference on College Composition and Communication, have position statements that recommend against using these types of tests, particularly for evaluating or assessing writing."

This is the beginning of the conversation of this committee on CLA. How can we use it to move forward? Continue in April.

VI. Committee Reports

- a. Curriculum Committee.
- b. Steering Committee.

VII. Next meeting: March 24. Probably will be cancelled.

The General Education Committee meets on the second and fourth Mondays of the month from 2:30 to 3:30 pm in HUB 123. The next meeting of the Committee will be **April 14th**.

The Chair declared the meeting adjourned at 3:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary E. Campbell, Scribe
Director of Curriculum Support

These minutes were approved April 14, 2008.