

Curriculum and Instruction Committee (Academic Senate)
Meeting Minutes
December 14, 2016, 1:30PM
FAB 1339

The Committee received reports and presentations from the GERC Sub-Committees that represent the “First Year Experience” component of the general education reform process. In particular, the “First Year Core” includes signature courses, student communities, and foundational courses.

The meeting began with a brief description from Tom Fischer about the organization and work of the sub-committees and an overview of committee members.

Signature Courses, Anne Duggan and Jeff Potoff

Priorities:

- The committee has opened up the description to enable interdisciplinary possibilities (or possibilities from all/many disciplines). As a result, the committee is revising the description.
- As part of that conversation, the committee has asked “What does it mean to be ‘distinctively Wayne State?’”. The answer to this question had several layers. It referred to:
 - A grounding in the local community of Detroit while also being open to the various ways in which our local community is connected to/part of global communities and processes.
 - Active learning: connections between course content and the community around us.
 - Student-driven learning

Next Step: The committee is now working on specific learning objectives that should be a part of all of these courses.

- These objectives would represent a core for all courses, but individual courses might also have additional learning outcomes that reflect the subject matter, course design, and disciplinary perspective.
- The committee’s task in establishing learning outcomes is to balance the need for standardization (in order to aid assessment and evaluation) with flexibility that makes it possible for faculty to create innovative and exciting courses that responding to opportunities and student needs/realities.

Challenges: The committee has been thinking through several possible ways to address a central challenge of linking signature courses to writing core courses. Those possibilities include:

- Facilitating match-making through some sort of “market” of available or proposed courses, which would enable faculty to connect and work together.
- Offering both linked and unlinked options, which students could choose between
- Allowing some courses to possibly count for both a signature course (particularly for those courses which include writing as a central component to their discipline) and a writing core course.

While the committee has not settled on any of these and continues to investigate these and other options, they do so while attempting to balance both good pedagogy and realistic logistics in order to create an optimal learning environment.

Questions: CIC members asked a number of important questions, which relate both to the specific Signature Courses as well as to the Gen Ed program more broadly.

- Questions of the level, class size, and degree of grad student involvement
 - These questions are not yet decided entirely
 - The committee imagines that these would be 1000/2000-level courses
 - The form that the courses would take might vary – the committee imagines a spectrum of different types of course design
 - Who would teach these? How do we get tenure-track faculty to teach these? How can we balance the need to have tenure-track faculty teaching the bulk of these courses with the needs of departments and colleges? This seems to vary significantly by department/college.
- Need to create specific guidelines to enable curriculum to change within BOG statutes – among other things, can we write the possibility of team-teaching (which is currently very difficult) into the BOG statutes?
- How do transfer students fit into this? What kinds of cost implications might this have for students?
- How would we nominate courses? Who would nominate them? For how long would courses be approved? How to balance stability with the need to encourage creativity, innovation, and keeping courses fresh?
 - Nominated courses would be evaluated according to GEOC guidelines. As a result, learning objectives being created by the committee will help the GEOC in creating a framework of criteria to assess courses.
 - Courses will need to go through departments, but we still need to ensure innovation
 - Part of the guidelines for these courses might include the duration and frequency of course offerings for proposed/nominated courses (e.g. once per year for 3 years).

Foundational Courses, Jeff Pruchnic

Priorities:

- Foundational Courses include basic/intermediate composition and oral communications.
- Curricular goals include: communication, composition, and information literacy skills; inquiry and analysis; foundations for lifelong learning; research/application; public/civic discourse

Challenges:

- What does “lifelong learning” mean?
 - Learning how to learn
 - Habits of mind and skills
- How do we create a model of university education that is more than job training?
 - This is directly related to the question of lifelong learning

Student Communities, Monica Brockmeyer and James Fortune

Priorities:

- The work of this committee is different than the others. It draws together lots of things already happening in the university and overlaps with a number of university resources, systems, and structures. As a result, there is much broader representation on this committee, including people from around the University, not just faculty.

- In a recent meeting of the American Association of Colleges and Universities, conversations about gen ed highlighted the importance of components of general education that explicitly support student transition into college and explain the purpose of general education. These conversations were informed by a number of recent studies that show that it is important for students to establish a sense of belonging in order to thrive in college. In other words, these are national-level priorities that are shared by colleges and universities across the country and supported by research.
- The committee has 4 big goals: belonging, acculturation to academic community, acculturation to WSU/Detroit, academic support, and study skills
- The committee is also attempting to respond to students' misunderstanding of the intended purposes of general education → being clearer about what we are doing in general education and why we're doing it.
- Conveying the importance of problem-solving to students both inside and outside of the classroom, helping them figure out how to plan and make their way through the university system and later through other kinds of institutions
- Student communities are seeking to address the question: what do students need to know about college that is not explicitly talked about in classes?
- Student communities are about creating a sense of belonging – students stay where they feel connected
- Student communities are about making opportunities that are delivered well to pockets of the University (such as in the Athletics Department) available to everyone.
- Student communities are about highlighting the importance of the global in what can too easily be localized at WSU/Detroit

Questions:

- Many of the questions from CIC members addressed questions of implementation – these are technical and administrative challenges that other committees don't have and the sub-committee acknowledged that it needed to think more about those. Implementation models are the work of the sub-committee in 2017. Those questions include:
 - How do we make sure that this is something meaningful and not something that is just written off?
 - How do we negotiate real cost constraints?
 - How do you manage oversight of these communities? Who will lead them? Who will those people report to? Particularly if student communities are led by or involve peer mentors, how will those peer mentors be chosen? Who will they be? How will they be compensated for their work?
 - To what degree does this idea of a student community shift the perception in some area schools (and to some degree within Wayne itself) that WSU is a consolation prize for college students who can't get in elsewhere?
 - We need to provide students with resources that enable them to deal with real challenges that students face. But how do we do that while making sure that we include the entire range of students – a wider range at Wayne that perhaps at many other schools—without alienating any of them but still being useful?
 - What role does marketing play in gen ed reform? CIC members highlighted the importance of getting marketing involved from the beginning to get a good strategy.

- What role might graduate students play in student communities? Particularly since they might be closer in experience to many undergrads (in age, in life experience, etc.) – What kind of potential is there in a sort of academic Big Brother, Big Sister model for the program?

The meeting ended with a conversation about how important it is that we revisit the very language of “gen ed” or “general education”. CIC members and GERC members agreed that these courses are not “general”, they are “core”. So, instead of “gen ed” we collectively resolved to think about these courses as part of a “university core” or “core curriculum”.