MINUTES
General Education Committee
October 6, 2014
2:30-4:00pm
VL216

Members present: Stephen Contakes (Professor of Chemistry), Bruce Fisk (Professor of Religious Studies), Michelle Hardley (Secretary and Registrar), Thomas Knecht (Professor of Political Science), Tatiana Nazarenko (Chair and Dean of Curriculum and Educational Effectiveness),

Absent: Debra Quast (Director, Library and Information Services)

Others present: Riley Svikhart (WSCA President), Mark Sargent (Provost)

I. Opened with Prayer

II. The minutes of the September 22nd meeting were approved.

III. GE Annual Assessment Report
The committee discussed the report and gave a few recommendations for minor grammar changes.

IV. Understanding Society and Performing and Interpreting the Arts Assessment Discussion
Riley Svikhart joined us for the first part of the conversation. He noted that the students he interviewed don’t have many complaints about the GE program as a whole. Some students did mention that the Performing and Interpreting the Arts (PIA) section is beyond their comfort zone. The performance based grading in those classes can be difficult for students who are not artists and worry about the impact of a lower grade on their GPA. For this reason they postpone taking PA courses until their senior year.

Students appreciate the variety of departments to choose from in each GE area. This allows them to complete the GE area in a department that might be more in line with their interests.

Riley could see some overlap between the kinds of thinking within the courses he has taken that fulfill the Understanding Society (US) GE requirement. They were from two different departments (Economics and Business and Political Science) so the content was different, but he could see why they were approved to meet the same GE area. Overall he felt that students appreciate how the GE stretches them and grows them even though it is hard at times. He also mentioned that the GE
Program is not onerous for the average student but can be more challenging for those who want to double major to take extra elective classes or to participate in off campus programs. A committee member made a comment that some science majors perceive the GE as onerous.

For assessing the PIA and US areas, we discussed issues related to developing the signature assignments, how to develop the same assignment for different disciplines, and how to imbed this assignment into courses in appropriate ways.

Tatiana suggested that the groups may first want to review the certification criteria for the area and determine if the criteria still reflect what students should be learning. Then, when the certification criteria are set, work on designing a common assignment and common rubric that can be used in each individual course.

The US group discussed softening the language of methodology within category. This would allow other departments to propose courses for this area which may fit the intention of the US area even though it does not currently align with the US certification criteria. They also discussed the use of a pre-post design within each class or not having a common assignment but having a common rubric that will measure students demonstration of the learning for the GE area.

Mark joined for the last part of the meeting. His vision for these sessions is that each year we do a bit of maintenance (looking at syllabi, reviewing the certification criteria) in 2 different GE areas. These conversations should look to see how well we are meeting our objectives. We should look at overall ethos, character and vitality of what we have in each area. How rich and vital are the courses to the life of the college? How do we feel about the portfolio of classes we are offering in each area? What do we encourage these groups to maintain, to further develop and to prune? Does the area of the GE favor one department over another? The goal would be to see what advice we might have for our colleagues to enrich what they are offering. Then we should look to see how well we are accomplishing these goals within each course.

In terms of the signature assignment, Mark suggested that we think about our students natural inclinations of thought in an area and how can we push them a bit further than those initial inclinations. We could focus on what we can do in the classroom to enrich their interpretations and how can we assess that change as evidence of their learning in the GE area.

Respectfully submitted,

Michelle Hardley
Registrar