

MINUTES
General Education Committee
October 2, 2018
1:15-2:45pm
VL 216

Members present: Paul Delaney (Chair and Professor of English), Michelle Hardley (Secretary and Registrar), Jana Mayfield Mullen (Information Literacy Librarian), Tatiana Nazarenko (Dean of Curriculum and Educational Effectiveness), Steve Rogers (Professor of Psychology), Rachel Winslow (Director, Westmont Downtown)

Members absent:

Additional guests: Gregg Afman (Chair and Professor of Kinesiology), Caryn Reeder (Chair and Professor of Religious Studies)

I. Prayer – Jana Mullen

II. The minutes from September 18th were approved.

III. GE Committee’s Perspective on Engineering Major

Senate has been discussing the creation of an Engineering major. Part of the proposal would be that Engineering majors have their GE requirements reduced by 2 Common Inquiry courses and 2 PEA courses.

The GE Committee began discussing the issue. The concern is if this exception is made for one major, why would we not make it for all majors? Would this exception create a disparity between the Engineering students and other students? What happens if an Engineering major changes their major late and now they have additional GE classes added as requirements due to the change? What about the other high unit majors (Bachelor of Music Education, Biology, Chemistry, Kinesiology, Physics, possible Bachelor of Music students if this degree is approved)?

The committee will work over the next few weeks to gather information on the unit loads for each of our majors and on the GE programs at similar schools. Tatiana will compile a list of the high unit majors who may also want to benefit from a possible reduction in the GE. Jana and Rachel will work on an environmental scan of the GE programs at other school. Information should be available in time for our next GE Committee meeting on October 16th.

IV. GE Senior Survey Discussion

Gregg met with the committee to discuss the findings and comments from the students on the Fitness for Life course and the overall PEA requirement within the GE.

Two years ago the department revamped the course. Now they are bringing in guest speakers to do large group lectures for certain sections on their areas of expertise. Eric Nelson and David Hernandez both speak in special night lectures on issues of Mental Health and Eating Disorders respectively. The students who took this survey likely had the older version of Fitness for Life when they were First Years and Sophomores and would not have benefited from this revamp of the course.

One of the comments in the senior survey was that students felt like the course was a repeat of information they already knew. The Kinesiology department tested this by developing a 25 point pre-assessment quiz on information covered in Fitness for Life. Students scored less than 50% on the quiz.

Another comment was that physical fitness courses shouldn't be required at all. Gregg noted that college is often thought of as a place to develop the mind, but that we should not require development of the physical body as a requirement. Based on the latest obesity and diabetes data, we are living a more sedentary lifestyle and this is taking a toll on our physical health and well-being. Students should be equipped with good habits and physical skills now, which is why the physical fitness GE requirements were maintained as a requirement within the current GE program. In 2001 there was some talk of reducing the requirement from 4 units to 2. Instead the decision was made to stay at 4 units and allow students to use up to 8 units of PEA credit towards their degree requirements.

In terms of the proposed Engineering major and possible changes to the overall GE structure, committee members wondered if the Kinesiology department would be interested in their majors also completing 6 of the 8 Common Inquiries. Gregg had never considered this option and wanted some time to consider it.

For changes to the PEA GE requirements, Gregg could see dropping from 4 required courses to 3, where one was Fitness for Life, one was a leisure activity and one was a physical activity course. The question was also raised as to whether Fitness for Life could be raised from a 1 unit to a 2 unit course. No decision was reached on the possible PEA modifications as further discussion on the issue is necessary.

Caryn Reeder also met with the committee to discuss the findings and comments on the Religious Studies courses. She noted that more students had positive versus negative things to say about the courses.

Overall the findings were not surprising to the department as they have heard similar things from students before. At one point offering challenging courses was a point of pride for the department. This perspective has softened over the years.

The department is actively working to dispel the myth that students can't be successful in RS courses unless they have prior knowledge of the Bible. All of the faculty try their best to assume their students have no prior knowledge about the Bible as they are teaching, and work on appropriate pacing of the material through the course. Caryn notes that she frequently invites student to check in with her if they are not familiar with the topics or biblical figures being discussed. This helps to set the expectation that not everyone already knows everything in the course. There are still some pedagogical differences within the Religious Studies faculty that the department is aware of and is actively working on.

One additional difficulty Caryn noted was that some students have the impression that because they grew up in the church they know the Bible already and should not have to study. Religious Studies is an academic discipline, and the faculty impress this on their students at the beginning of the term. Students who understand this difference and treat their Religious Studies courses as academic courses ultimately do well in the courses.

Some students also struggle with the difference between the academic work in the class and their personal faith. Sometimes within the context of the course there is a focus on the smaller details of the Bible and a deconstruction of things they learned prior to the class, both of which can feel uncomfortable for students who felt they knew the Bible well and had a strong personal faith. Through the course students will see how to reconstruct a stronger faith in its place. The struggle for the student and the faculty member is to not place all of their focus on the small minutiae of the Bible, but on the bigger picture of developing a faith based out of solid biblical literacy.

Caryn does not believe that we can accomplish our goal as a college of having biblically literate students if we simply cut back on the workload and make the classes easier. Instead there should be a passionate professor with the proper focus on the Bible and a student actively engaging with the course in the context of their growing faith. Pedagogical innovation and passion are essential in motivating students to do the hard work and see the work as worthy.

V. CHM-004 – Chemistry, Culture and Society – Add to Common Skills: Quantitative and Analytical Reasoning

The GE Committee discussed the proposal.

The committee has approved this course for the Common Skills: Quantitative and Analytical Reasoning effective spring 2019.

Respectfully submitted,

Michelle Hardley