

**Annual Report
Council on General Education
AY 2020-2021**

Meeting Schedule

The Council on General Education (CGE) convened twelve meetings throughout the Fall and Spring semesters. We were scheduled to meet every other Thursday afternoon during Spring and Fall semesters from September 10th, 2020 through May 6th, 2020. The final meeting was moved up to April 22nd, 2020 as the May meeting fell during Finals Week with the COVID-related cancellation of Spring Break. The second November meeting was postponed as it would have fallen during Thanksgiving week, and the January meeting was canceled due to a paucity of agenda items. All meetings were conducted via Zoom.

Membership on the Council on General Education for the 2020-2021 academic year included:

Andrea Alveshere (*Chair*, Social Sciences),

Lori Baker-Sperry (Multicultural),

Lia Petracovici (Math/Natural Sciences),

Sherry Lindquist (Humanities/Fine Arts),

Craig Tollini (*Secretary*, Social Sciences),

Yong Tang (Humanities/Fine Arts),

Seyfi Turkelli (Fall only due to spring sabbatical, Math/Natural Sciences),

Tonya Little (*Vice Chair*, Basic Skills/Public Speaking),

Wanmo Koo (At-large),

Robert Kelly (At-large).

Ex-officio members for the past academic year included: Mark Mossman (Office of the Provost), Michelle Yager (University Advising), and James Schmidt (Dean's Council).

Da'Veonna Campbell served throughout the 2020-21 academic year as Student Government Association representative.

The Faculty Senate charge regarding the constituency of the General Education Council states "the Council shall consist of sixteen members, including one undergraduate student selected by the Student Government Associations." With twelve elected members, three ex-officio members, and one student representative active throughout the year, the Council on General Education fulfills its charge for membership. Two positions, in Basic Skills/Writing* and Human Well-Being, were vacant throughout the 2020-2021 academic year, and we were not assigned a Spring semester sabbatical replacement for Dr. Turkelli, leaving the elected membership at 10 members in Fall 2020 and nine members in Spring 2021.

At its last meeting of the 2020-2021 academic year, CGE held elections for its officers and welcomed the following members appointed by Faculty Senate for 2021-2022:

Election of New Officers for 2021-2022 (April 22nd, 2021):

Chair: Robert Kelly (LEJA)

Vice Chair: Andrea Alveshere (Sociology & Anthropology)

Secretary: Sherri Lindquist (Art & Design)

Appointment of New Members beginning 2021-2022:

| | | |
|------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| Febe Pamonag | History | (**) |
| Magdelyn Helwig | English | (**) |
| Robert Intrieri | Psychology | (Social Sciences) |
| Adam Lewis | Theatre and Dance | (Humanities/Fine Arts) |
| Barbara Lawhorn* | English | (Basic Skills/Writing) |

*Apparently Dr. Lawhorn was elected in October 2020, but CGE was not informed until late Spring 2021 when the appointment letters for Fall 2021 were received.

**Area of appointment is unclear. Both letters state that they are replacing previously vacant positions. With the receipt of Dr. Lawhorn's appointment letter, the only known vacant position is in Human Well-Being. The Multicultural category is also newly vacant, with the end of Lori Baker-Sperry's term in Spring 2021. Clarification from the Senate regarding these positions would be greatly appreciated.

Summary of Activities

The year began with the election of Tonya Little as the new Vice Chair, and election of Craig Tollini as the new Secretary, as the people elected in Spring 2020 had actually been at the end of their terms. To avoid similar issues in the future, and to ensure continuity of information as Chairs rotate off the Council, Dr. Alveshere requested from Faculty Senate the year each member's term ends, and began including this in parentheses next to their names at the top of each agenda. We discussed the retirement of Faculty Senate Office Manager Annette Hamm, the various ways she had assisted the council, and the ongoing transition as other people take on some of those tasks.

All members were provided an opportunity to review and discuss the CGE 2019-2020 CGE *Annual Report*. One item of particular interest was the implementation of dual-enrollment Gen Ed courses, and discussion included wondering how a faculty member might be made aware that they have high school students enrolled in their course, and whether such knowledge might influence decisions about the content or delivery.

At the September 24th meeting, Lori Baker Sperry updated the council on plans for the Higher Learning Commission's Spring 2021 re-accreditation visit and the role that the Subcommittee on Assessment in General Education (SAGE) members would play in the report preparations and, possibly, during the visit itself. The following slate of nominees was prepared and approved at the October 22nd meeting:

Lori Baker-Sperry, Chair; Andrea Alveshere; Robert Kelly; Mark Mossman, Ex-Officio; Jim Schmidt, Ex-Officio; SGA Representative Da'Veonna Campbell; Craig Tollini, alternate member
Beginning at the October 8th meeting, the council began discussion of potentially crafting a statement (tailored to students) that helps students understand why they should take General Education courses. In addition, there was interest in continuing discussion of online teaching

strategies and special considerations for General Education courses. Throughout the academic year, our Student Government Representative provided invaluable insights by sharing her student perspective on these issues.

At the November 5th meeting, the CGE membership drafted and unanimously approved a recommendation (Appendix A) from the council for considerations in upcoming revisions to the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) Strategic Plan. The statement was submitted to the Faculty Senate for consideration and was endorsed by the Senate at their December 1st meeting.

Also at the November 5th meeting, CGE deliberated on a request to include Illinois Community Colleges Associate of Science degree in the Compact Agreement. A small committee, convened by the Offices of the President and Provost to review transfer student business practices, had requested feedback from the Faculty Senate Executive Council who, in turn, requested input from CGE because of the impact on General Education. The request focused on allowing students with this degree to be considered as completing all General Education requirements, though they completed one fewer course in both the humanities and social sciences than required at WIU. Members were asked to provide feedback. Some members expressed concerns that approving this request may serve as a slippery slope for future requests and that the request conveys the message that some parts of General Education (humanities and social sciences) are not as important as others. It was also mentioned that these students still took courses in the humanities and social sciences, and there was an acknowledgement of the supportive arguments provided in the document included in the request, particularly that the change would reduce confusion for students and put WIU on par with other regional Illinois universities. There was also the question of how many students might be impacted by this request.

At the December 3rd meeting, the council received an update on preparations and a timeline for CGE involvement in the HLC reaffirmation and accreditation process. The Subcommittee on Assessment in General Education planned to meet to review Assessment reports during the winter break. Tentative plans were also discussed for recruiting faculty contributions to a “General Education promotional campaign” that might involve creating a web page and/or other content to help students better understand the value of General Education courses toward achieving their long-term career (and non-career) goals.

Discussion of strategies for the “General Education Promotional Campaign” continued at the February 4th meeting, with long-term goals to (1) provide information about the different areas of General Education; (2) obtain “testimonials” from students, alumni, and/or faculty regarding how they used material, skills, etc. from General Education courses in other courses, their careers, etc.; and/or (3) obtain “testimonials” from employers regarding how the material, skills, etc. in General Education courses are preferred or required in the people they hire and promote. A more immediate project was also undertaken with the goal of creating a short, informational video on Gen Ed for the new “Registration 101” class that was set to launch as a pre-registration requirement for all incoming freshmen on March 29th. CGE members did work together to create the proposed video, which was reviewed and unanimously approved by the

council at the March 18th meeting. The video can be accessed here (a subsequently close-captioned version is included in the Registration 101 course): <https://youtu.be/AZxGqP8lYDg>.

Also at the February 4th meeting, initial discussion was held regarding the possibility of providing CGE recommendations to departments to improve/streamline/comply with Gen Ed Assessment requirements. While reviewing the departmental assessment reports, some SAGE members observed that there appear to be a few departments with faculty members who either do not complete the assessment or think an exception should be made for them. These departments were informed their courses may be withdrawn from the General Education catalog if faculty members continue to not participate in assessment. CGE was asked to determine if the Council had any recommendations for these departments, so they can meet the requirement for assessment. Possible recommendations proposed included: (1) providing faculty with the approved document for any General Education course they teach before the start of the semester, so faculty are aware of the goals, instruments, and revision process while they are designing the course; (2) reiterating to departments and faculty that they can revise the assessment plans to better suit their needs (e.g., selecting a different goal that better matches the focus of the course or changing the format of the reporting so faculty can more easily determine areas for improvement); and (3) providing departments and faculty with examples of assessment tools and reporting formats, so departments and faculty are aware of the options and flexibility within the assessment program. The ultimate goal was for the Council to approve a document with these recommendations to send to Faculty Senate. This is an initiative that was not completed during this academic year, but may be revisited in the 2021-2022 meetings.

At the February 18th meeting, the council reviewed the Subcommittee on Assessment in General Education (SAGE) report on the 2019-2020 departmental assessment documents, and unanimously voted to approve sending the Impact Matrix forward to the Faculty Senate as an addendum to the 2020-2021 Annual Report (Appendix B, Excel workbook). There was also continued discussion of concerns and perspectives relating to assessment in general and General Education assessment more specifically. Concerns included the difficulty in measuring a complex concept like student learning, measuring qualitative data quantitatively, the validity and reliability of assessment results, faculty not having the expertise to create valid and reliable measures, not being able to combine or compare the results from different sections because of differences in the measures (i.e., “comparing apples and oranges”), a lack of buy-in regarding assessment, and a lack of discussions about assessment in programs. Perspectives included assessment being required, being standardized or discipline/section-specific, having either the same goals as or different goals from grading, and providing a way for faculty to communicate that their program is working to administrators and entities outside of WIU. Additional recommendations included taking any steps that increase transparency, helping faculty connect assessment to the curriculum, encouraging programs to discuss assessment and the assessment reports, and meeting with programs to hear their concerns, provide information about assessment, help build an “assessment culture,” and design an assessment plan that works better for the program and/or individual faculty.

At the March 4th meeting, after consideration of a course change request, discussion of ways to improve Gen Ed assessment continued. This resulted in the creation of a Google Drive folder into which council members could share articles and other resources that might be of assistance in developing recommendations for WIU programs. A number of such resources were submitted by CGE members during the remaining months of the semester and will remain available to the council in the coming year.

After consideration of a core competency change at the March 18th meeting, discussion returned to strategies for improving Gen Ed assessment. There were a couple of additional recommendations: (1) creating videos for new faculty teaching General Education courses and creating videos on other topics currently addressed in written documents, because faculty may be more willing to watch and more engaged by videos than documents; (2) drafting a statement about the purpose and use of assessment. It was noted that there are already documents that address these topics, which can be revised. Making sure these documents are accessible to faculty was suggested as a priority.

At the April 8th meeting, Michelle Yager gave a guided tour of the new Registration 101 online class, featuring the CGE-produced video. At this point the class had been live for about a week and seemed to be going smoothly for the incoming freshmen. The council also finalized and voted to approve the text of emails to be sent, one to faculty, and one to department chairs, requesting their participation in creating Gen Ed promotional videos targeted toward students in their programs. These emails were forwarded to the Faculty Senate Chair for approval, and were forwarded to faculty and chairs in August 2021. The council had initially hoped to receive submissions by mid-September, but would welcome later submissions, as well.

After election of officers for the 2021-2022 academic year, the remainder of the April 22nd meeting was spent considering a suggestion, brought forward by two council members, to allow certain 300-level courses to count for non-Multicultural Gen Ed credit. The suggestion is to provide students with the option to have 300-level courses count for General Education credit for areas outside of Multicultural Studies (MC). If the purpose of General Education is to help students develop skills related to discussing difficult issues, conducting research, constructing arguments, and finding and analyzing appropriate sources, 300-level courses are likely to better fulfill that purpose, compared to 100- and 200-level courses. There are 300-level courses that could arguably be General Education courses, and Lori Baker-Sperry described how one 300-level General Education course would be taught differently if it no longer counted in the MC area. Members noted that at least some upper-division students do not appear to have mastered the skills mentioned above, and having additional options for students may address this issue. A complementary or alternative suggestion was to have workshops or other pedagogical events for faculty members. These events would focus on the purpose of General Education and the skills students should obtain via General Education courses. Having these events may increase the likelihood that students gain those skills.

It was noted that, when the MC area of General Education was initiated, 300-level courses were exempted from the policy that General Education courses are 100- or 200-level. This exemption occurred because there were not enough 100- and 200-level courses in the MC area at that

time. There continued to be a lack of 100- and 200-level courses, in part due to the elimination of programs (Women's Studies, African American Studies, etc.) and loss of faculty who taught 100- and 200-level courses in the MC area. Given this exemption, there was an alternative suggestion to determine how the existing 300-level courses could be transferred to the 100- or 200-level. There was a related suggestion for faculty to consider if other 300-level courses could be altered to the 100- or 200-level and then be incorporated into General Education. On a related note, there seemed to be perceived value in having consistency in General Education, regarding which types of courses were included and excluded. Students can already have individual substitutions in their degree program, and it was suggested that students be made more aware of this option. Two interconnected issues with having 300-level courses in the General Education program is the articulation agreement focuses on 100- and 200-level courses and General Education is defined (both within and outside of WIU) as focused on introductory courses. Both the MC area and the Human Well-Being area are not part of the articulation agreement. It was noted that the purpose of General Education may need to be reconsidered before the initial suggestion could be implemented. Another issue was determining the criteria to determine which 300-level courses could be considered, with one suggestion being courses that have at most one prerequisite. It was also mentioned departments may work to have as many courses be included in General Education as possible because doing so will most likely increase student credit hours. As a result, departments might remove prerequisites so more courses meet the criterion mentioned above.

Finally, it was suggested the Council develop a statement regarding the impact of program eliminations, faculty lay-offs and departures, and hiring freezes on General Education and the academic programs that support it.

CGE did not receive any new course proposals during Fall 2020 or Spring 2021. The council did consider one request for revision to a Gen Ed course: ENG 281 (accepted without revision) and one revision to Math Core Competency requirements (accepted without revision).

General Education Course Articulation Requests

During the Fall and Spring semesters, articulation requests were managed by the Chair working directly with the appropriate subcommittee members who represent the General Education categories. As is customary, during the summer months when faculty are on leave, the requests were evaluated and processed by the Chair.

During the 2020-2021 academic year, there was initially a very high influx of articulation requests, but it soon became apparent that many were due to miscommunications about which articulation requests CGE should be reviewing (e.g., the CGE chair was forwarded requests to review some external programs' entire catalog of course offerings to determine how each course might articulate at WIU). These erroneous requests are not included in the numbers provided below.

The following two tables indicate the scope and distribution of requests, approvals, denials, and for which Gen Ed category the request pertained. The number of course articulation requests

received/accepted this past year was 6/5. This is very comparable in requests compared to last year's 6/4.

August 6, 2020--August 5, 2021 CGE Course Articulation Requests

| Fall 2020 | Spring 2021 | Summer 2021 | Total |
|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------|
| 2 approved | 1 approved | 2 approved | 5 approved |
| | | 1 declined | 1 declined |
| 2 received | 1 received | 3 received | 6 received |

*August 6, 2020--August 5, 2021 CGE Course Articulation Requests Approved
By General Education Category*

| | Fall 2020 | Spring 2021 | Summer 2021 | Total Annual |
|------------------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Humanities | 2 | | | 2 |
| Fine Arts | | .5* | | .5 |
| Social Sciences | | | 1 | 1 |
| H. Health & Well Being | | | | 0 |
| Multicultural | | .5* | 1 | 1.5 |
| Natural Sciences | | | | |
| Total approved | | | | 5 Approved |
| <i>Declined</i> | | | 1 | 1 declined |

* The Council determined that the course could articulate as either a Multicultural or Fine Arts course, depending on the student's preference.

Respectfully submitted by Andrea J. Alveshire, CGE Chair, August 26, 2021. Special thanks to CGE Secretary Craig Tollini for taking the excellent meeting minutes that form the backbone of this report.

Appendix A – CGE Statement to IBHE Strategic Plan Committee

11/5/2020

Please consider the following recommendations from the Western Illinois University (WIU) Council on General Education (CGE) regarding the IBHE Strategic Plan:

We urge that the IBHE Strategic Plan reinforce the importance of General Education curricula in providing the skills needed for successful careers. A university education should both enable students to meet the qualifications needed to land the desired entry-level position upon graduation and prepare them with the communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills that will aid in career advancement and position them for continued success in a job market, 10 or 15 years into the future, that we can't fully imagine today.

General Education is the key to producing agile, interdisciplinary thinkers who can thrive in a diverse and changing world. It is crucial that the IBHE strategic plan protect and enhance General Education in the State of Illinois. Specifically, it should limit dual-credit classes because students in these programs do not have the same access to expert teacher-researchers who provide unique insights and opportunities. It should promote access to a broad range of disciplines throughout Illinois rather than eliminating programs and opportunities in the name of short-sighted budget considerations. Regional universities are vital to fulfilling the mission of higher education—especially in providing access, encouraging diversity, and serving first-generation and non-traditional students. Regional universities should be equipped to provide the full complement of majors offered by our flagship institutions.

The cultural, economic, and overall quality of life for Illinois' citizens, residents and guests is improved by the robust and well-rounded education of future generations of African American studies scholars, anthropologists, archaeologists, art historians, English and foreign language scholars, geographers, gender studies scholars, geologists, historians, mathematicians, philosophers, physicists, political scientists, sociologists, and scholars in other fields that seek to more deeply understand the human condition and the world we share. This will equitably promote the strategic advantage of all regions of the State of Illinois in increasingly competitive national and global economies.

In supporting and strengthening General Education, the IBHE Strategic plan should encourage and maximize the growth, talents, and potential of all Illinois citizens.

Sincerely,
The Fall 2020 Members of the
WIU Council on General Education