

August 15, 2016

TO: FACULTY SENATE

FROM: COUNCIL ON GENERAL EDUCATION
Submitted by Marjorie Allison, Chair

RE: ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE 2015-2016 ACADEMIC YEAR

Membership on the Council for the past academic year included: Marjorie Allison, Panakkattu Babu, Krista Bowers Sharpe, Erik Brooks, Jongnam Choi, Gary Daytner (part of Spring 2016), Rumen Dimitrov, Keva Hibbert, Kathleen O'Donnell-Brown, Darcy Plymire, Shavez Rosenthal (SGA Representative), Joanne Sellen (Fall 2015 and start of 2016), Jeannie Woods, David Zanolla.

Gary Daytner served as a replacement for Joanne Sellen (Spring 2016).

Ex officio members for the past academic year included: Nancy Parsons (Provost's Office), Michelle Yager (University Advising), and Kyle Mayborn (Dean's Council).

Darcy Plymire was elected chair for the 2016-2017 academic year, with Vice-Chair and Secretary to be determined at the beginning of Fall 2016.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

Assessment: During the 2015-2016 academic year, the Council continued to focus much of its attention on the importance of general education assessment and how to improve reporting on the *impact* and use of assessment data by departments when implementing course enhancements. Throughout the year, the Council discussed ways in which to improve compliance in turning in reports and also ways to engage faculty within departments in the process of using the information gathered during assessment for the improvement of courses.

Webpage: In the fall of 2015, the Council discussed ways to improve communication about General Education with the University Community. To that end, the Council developed a list of action items which it hopes to implement in 2016-2017, including an improved webpage for the Council.

Associate Degree Transfer Question: Faculty Senate requested that the Council send it a recommendation on a question about whether or not to continue to require transfer

students to fulfill WIU's general education requirements, as they now stand, if the students have completed the Associate of Science degree at a community college. The Council debated the idea, heard from other faculty members, and made a recommendation.

Course Requests for Inclusion in General Education: The Council received six requests for course inclusion in General Education. Four of the requests were approved by the Council and sent on to successful adoption by the Senate. One request was approved by the Council and withdrawn prior to consideration by the Senate. One was not approved by the Council as the result of a tie vote.

Transfer Requests: The Council processed thirty-seven domestic transfer requests and one international request.

Mood of General Education on Campus: With the stresses of the past academic year, it is no surprise that General Education has become, once again, a pressure point for the University community. The Council spent much time throughout the year discussing issues of what General Education "should" look like in a time of dropping enrollments and a perceived increase in pressure to compete for and enroll majors to meet mandated threshold levels.

GENERAL EDUCATION ASSESSMENT, GUIDELINES, and REQUIREMENTS

The assessment of General Education courses is an ongoing area of concentration for the Council. Since assessment is a multifaceted issue that demands attention to a wide range of data, the Council created a sub-committee (Rumen Dimitrov, Darcy Plymire, Keva Steadman, and David Zanolla, who replaced Oswald Warner on the subcommittee this year) of Council members to provide an in-depth review of assessment data. The subcommittee spent their time in the last two years reading the collected assessment data provided to the Associate Provost. Their analysis and report can be found on the attached document. Their area of concentration was on the impact that assessment is having on actual teaching and the departments' approaches to improvement of student learning. As the sub-committee notes, departments are adopting various stances on how best to improve courses, from changing course levels in History to changing how assessment is done in order to improve what kind of information is obtained.

As the previous chair of CGE stated last year: "CGE continues to adopt the position that general education assessment data should remain in the hands of the departments with the expectation that this will encourage ownership of that data and improve concrete reporting on the impact that assessment has on student learning.... CGE is persistent in taking a pro-active stance regarding the education of WIU faculty regarding general education." In the fall of 2015, the chair of CGE presented information at New Faculty Orientation to help incoming faculty to learn what WIU expects in General Education courses. Further, the Council spent time in the past year determining how to improve the CGE website. As time allows, the Council may want to reach out and have more public discussions with the University community about assessment and about the role of General Education.

WEBPAGE

As mentioned above, individual members of the Council and the Council at large explored ways to improve the CGE webpage to better support faculty efforts in General Education across the University. To that end, as the outgoing chair of CGE, I will be meeting with Annette Hamm late summer/early fall 2016 to convey the Council's wishes about the webpage. Broken links will be eliminated; new materials (especially concerning the teaching of writing) will be added. The Council will continue to solicit sample syllabi and writing assignments to post as examples. This last part has been difficult as faculty have been reluctant to volunteer their work for examples.

ASSOCIATE DEGREE TRANSFER QUESTION

Upon a request by EXCO of Faculty Senate, CGE took up the question of whether or not to continue to require transfer students to fulfill WIU's general education requirements as they now stand if the students have completed the Associate of Science degree at a community college. This question was promoted by a statewide discussion about how associate degrees should transfer to four-year programs. Our recommendation was overwhelmingly in support of continuing to require the General Education classes as we do at this point. We did not recommend waiving the 2 General Education classes in question at this time. All CGE members present voted to continue the current system. The student representative abstained. For a complete discussion of this issue, please see the attached report.

GENERAL EDUCATION TRANSFER ARTICULATION PROCESS

During 2015-2016, the Council reviewed thirty-seven domestic transfer articulation requests, up fourteen from 2014-2015. Twenty-one were approved, and the remaining sixteen were denied. The Council considered one international transfer articulation request, and it was denied.

CGE continues to request that articulation requests be accompanied by a course syllabus, or other suitable material, that will help the members of CGE to make an informed decision about the relationship of the transfer course to the General Education curriculum at WIU.

APPROVAL OF NEW GENERAL EDUCATION COURSES

During academic year 2015-2016, the Council on General Education received nine general education course requests: WS 270, WS 280, Micro 200, Eng 281, CSD 100, and EIS 202.

The Council approved four of the six above courses without contention. The Council felt that WS 270, WS 280, Micro 200 and Eng 281 all fit well within the bounds of General Education courses at WIU. There was an interesting discussion about the assessment plans put forth by Women's Studies and Biology. It was clear that the Council needs to be a bit

more proactive on guiding departments towards useful models to consider as they put through new assessment plans with courses or when they want to return to the Council to change an assessment plan. Women's Studies did an excellent job of presenting a specific assessment plan for general goals, but the Council asked that they further define the goals for each individual course. A similar question arose with Biology. Because departments do not put forth requests very often, the Council found they often do not understand exactly what the Council wants to see in terms of assessment plans. In the end, the four approved courses were approved with no hesitation or question. The votes to approve were unanimous.

In the spring of 2016, however, the Council ran into two interesting requests that became part of heated debated outside of the Council itself. Communication requested that CSD 100 be approved as a General Education course. CSD currently has no approved General Education courses. At first the Council felt the course might be too narrow and pre-professional. However, after an engaged and thoughtful discussion about the nature of the course, cultural aspects of the course, and General Education in general, the Council voted nine in favor of the request with one abstention. Clearly, the Council felt overwhelming that the course fit into General Education in the social science category. However, before the request was formally taken up by the Senate, the request was withdrawn by the Communication Department. Council members were questioned by faculty at large about the procedures the Council was following in its recommendation and its judgment in general. The Communication Department received similar questions.

Similarly, when Education requested making EIS 202 a General Education course, there was much interest and scrutiny from outside of the Council before the Council had time to discuss the merits of the request. For three lengthy meetings the Council met with representatives from Education to discuss the request. Issues such as pre-professional courses, courses taken overwhelmingly by only majors, etc., etc., were debated. In the end, the Council had a tie vote on whether or not to recommend the General Education status to the Senate. That proposal will have to be submitted once again if there is to be adoption of EIS 202 as a General Education course.

UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY MOOD SURROUNDING GENERAL EDUCATION

The annual report to the Senate by CGE does not typically include this section in the report. However, given the atmosphere on campus over the past year and the continuing stresses placed on the University by the unprecedented nature of the budget crisis and decreasing enrollments, as the outgoing chair of CGE, I feel a need for this section to make a couple of brief comments.

Departments across the campus are, of course, concerned about making their programs as attractive as possible to students. Simultaneously, departments want enrollments, of majors and nonmajors, to stay as high as possible. This stress seems to be resulting in tensions around General Education courses, who gets to teach them, how they should count

for majors, and what happens if enrollments continue to drop as we approve new requests to approve courses in the General Education curriculum.

These tensions are not completely new, but they are more extreme than in times of plenty (plenty of students, money, faculty, etc). I would encourage everyone to remain engaged in the conversations about the role of General Education on this campus. I would also urge everyone to trust his/her fellow faculty members and the members of CGE. The Council takes its responsibilities surrounding General Education very seriously. Decisions are typically made after extended, thoughtful, engaged, and often-lively discussion. We understand what is at stake in the decisions we are making. Ask Council members what they are working on, engage with them in conversation, and assume they have the best interests of our students and the University in mind.

SUMMARY and GOALS

In light of our accomplishments, as well as our desire for further improvement, the goals of GCE for the 2016-201 academic year are as follows. These three goals are from a much longer list for 2015-16 but are the most pressing at this time:

- 1) Continue to take a visible and pro-active stance regarding the education of WIU faculty regarding General Education;
- 2) Promote the collection of more useful assessment feedback data that can both encourage and drive future department-based decision-making, specifically in regard to the way assessment data is used to impact changes that improve student learning and satisfy Step 4 in the assessment process as delineated by HLC;
- 3) Insure that the General Education curriculum reflects the University's philosophy and goals.

The Council appreciates the support of the Faculty Senate during the 2015-2016 academic year and looks forward to continued support during 2016-2017.