

Academic Affairs Committee, 31 March 2008

In attendance: Frank Chorba, Karen Camarda, Patricia Renn-Scanlan, Jorge Nobo, Pat Munzer, Bill Roach, Tom Prasch, David Pownell

Minutes of the meeting of the meeting of 3 March 2008 were approved.

Returning to the discussion of Tom Prasch's proposal for revised general-education skills, the committee took up Karen Camarda's proposed revision of the write-up of mathematical and scientific reasoning. With some minor revisions in committee, the following alternative wording was developed and approved:

“Students must be able to reason mathematically, and be able to interpret and analyze numerical data. Students must also understand the scientific method, and be able to distinguish between scientific and non-scientific theories. Within this framework, students should be able, employing the standard methods and procedures of the science being studied, to devise hypotheses, construct experiments to test these hypotheses, and interpret the results of experiments. Standardized testing can provide an assessment method for mathematical reasoning; performance on other written work can provide a mechanism for assessing a student's understanding of the scientific method and experimental design.”

After some discussion of timelines, the need to ensure adequate comment, and appropriate recipients, it was moved that the proposed revision of general-education skills (incorporating Jorge Nobo's suggestions for “critical, analytic, normative, and interpretive reasoning” and Camarda's revision of “mathematical and scientific reasoning”) be forwarded to deans for circulation to divisions, curriculum committees, and other interested parties for comment, to be returned to Prasch as secretary of the committee by 2 May. The document forwarded for comment appears as Appendix 1.

Prasch and Nobo commented that the request for feedback on the VPAA's proposed course numbering system had as of yet produced very little response, with comment only by the Department of History and the Social Sciences Division received so far.

The committee then took up Pat Munzer's proposal to establish a General Education Ad Hoc Committee. That proposal reads:

“**Request:** The Academic Affairs Committee request permission from the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate to create an ad-hoc committee on General Education which will report to the Academic Affairs Committee.

“**Rationale:** Numerous ideas for changing the University-wide general education requirements are being discussed in separate groups. Some of the proposed changes can have an unintended negative consequence on subsets of the WU student population: distance education students, transfer students, students pursuing associate degrees, and programs accredited by an outside agency. In order to provide for more thorough and

thoughtful consideration of this complex issue, the Academic Affairs Committee requests permission from the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate to establish a committee to do just that.

“The ad-hoc committee would be charged with obtaining all relevant information, discussing any ramifications of proposed changes, and developing recommendations as part of its Final Report to be submitted to the ACC by April 1, 2009, with written interim reports September 1, 2008 and December 1, 2008. This committee will report to the ACC committee and would attend at least one ACC meeting every month to give a verbal update as to where the committee is.

“**Committee Makeup:** Recommended makeup of the fifteen-member Committee:

“6 from College of Arts and Sciences
2 from School of Business
2 from School of Applied Studies
2 from School of Nursing
2 from Dean of Enrollment (possible someone from admissions and registrar)
1 from Student Senate.”

Munzer introduced the proposal by arguing that a subcommittee was necessary because of the amount of other work the Academic Affairs Committee was responsible for, because of the need for a committee specifically focused on General Education, and because of the need to include Admissions in the discussion because of the possible impact of changes on transfer students and others.

Nobo opposed the proposal, insisting that General Education was part of the charge of action for the Academic Affairs Committee. He suggested as an alternative getting specialized input where needed.

Bill Roach proposed scheduling hearings rather than requiring the long-term commitment of more committee work. Separate meetings could deal with specific constituencies, and should take place before any action is proposed so that the committee understands the constraints.

The proposal to request an ad-hoc committee was not enacted. It was decided instead to invite particular interested groups to specific meetings of the committee, beginning with Al Dickes and anyone he chose to bring from Admissions for the next scheduled meeting. The committee would continue to bring in representatives from other units and with particular concerns (about, for example, transfer students, distance education, and associate programs) in later meetings.

The committee then turned to Prash’s proposal to establish criteria for upper-level general education. Prash introduced the proposal by noting the pressures that were likely to lead to increasing numbers of upper-level general education courses, including the needs of transfer students, the raised 45-hour upper-level requirement, and the trend

toward developmental models of general education. He suggested it was important to establish clear criteria for what would make an upper-level course “general education” rather than specific education within a discipline.

Munzer asked that it be made clear with any proposal that this did not change general-education requirements or necessitate any particular student taking upper-level general-education courses. Prasch concurred, saying the proposal aimed only to address criteria for counting proposed courses as general education.

Frank Chorba defended the traditional understanding of general education as taking place in the first couple years of a college career, and suggested that trends in the other direction might be passing fads. Chorba suggested that higher course numbers usually meant that courses were intended for majors, had more specific and sophisticated content, and often had prerequisites.

Prasch insisted that a course could be both sophisticated and suited for general education. He used the example of an English course in Shakespeare (and Nobo suggested a parallel in a philosophy course on Plato) as having enough significantly broad cultural currency to be considered general education. Prasch also insisted that upper-level general education was coming; the question here was how to manage it. The proposal simply provided a mechanism for evaluating such proposed upper-level courses.

Munzer noted that an additional push for upper-level general education was coming from the demands of students in the 2+2 program and in demand for other online courses.

Nobo noted that many upper-level courses have prerequisites; Prasch noted that the proposal would not change that.

The committee approved a motion to approve the proposal (appendix 2) for circulation to deans with instructions to send on to divisions, curriculum committees, and other interested parties for comment, to be returned to Prasch as secretary of the committee by May 2. Following Munzer’s suggestion, it would be noted with the circulation of the proposal that it merely established criteria, and did not change courses required for general education. It was agreed that the proposal would be sent separately from the proposal on general-education skills.

The meeting was adjourned.

Appendix 1

Revised skill sets for general education

Background: Faculty surveys suggest significant dissatisfaction with the existing nine designated general-education skills, with particular discontent about the “listen sensitively” and “interpret and assess human values” skills. In addition, it has been suggested (but not empirically demonstrated) that students can complete general-

education requirements without fulfilling all nine skills. And in addition, as the university moves toward more rigorous standards of assessment, that the existing nine skills lack any clear definitions has become problematic.

Proposal: In revising skills, the aim is to provide a simplified and clear system with measurable student-learning outcomes to facilitate assessment. The proposed alternative consists of five groups of skills; any general-education course should fulfill the requirements of at least two (although many will cover more); courses within selected divisions or departments, as noted below, necessarily must fulfill at least one of the listed skills to ensure comprehensive coverage of all for any student completing general-education requirements.

1) Processing information

Processing information entails understanding and demonstrating comprehension of written texts, oral communications, visual information, and/or mediated presentations (film, websites, etc.) that combine several of the above. When presented with such materials, the student must be able to demonstrate an understanding of the basic argument of the materials, their core content, their intended audience, and their evident biases or subjective perspectives (or, to put it more neutrally perhaps, students must be able to identify the point of view of the material).

It can safely be assumed that all general-education courses will fulfill this goal.

2) Communicative skills

Communicative skills involve the ability of the student to communicate clearly his or her ideas in written and/or oral form, and embrace as well the expression of creativity by students in the visual, written, or performing arts. In written and/or oral communication, students must demonstrate the ability to shape a central thesis, to organize an argument, to cite references properly, and to follow the rules of basic grammar and usage. In creative projects, students must be able to demonstrate the ways in which their creative work expresses ideas, an understanding of the form(s) employed, and an ability to employ the basic rules of their chosen expressive form(s).

Again, most or all general-education courses will likely fulfill this goal. It could be made a required element in any course approved for general education in the humanities and social sciences.

3) Mathematical and scientific reasoning

Students must be able to reason mathematically, and be able to interpret and analyze numerical data. Students must also understand the scientific method, and be able to distinguish between scientific and non-scientific theories. Within this framework, students should be able, employing the standard methods and procedures of the science being studied, to devise hypotheses, construct experiments to test these hypotheses, and

interpret the results of experiments. Standardized testing can provide an assessment method for mathematical reasoning; performance on other written work can provide a mechanism for assessing a student's understanding of the scientific method and experimental design.

All general-education courses in the natural sciences and mathematics must fulfill the appropriate portion of this goal; that students must take courses in both mathematics and natural science to fulfill degree requirements ensures that the entirety of this goal will be comprehended in any student's progress toward a degree.

4) Critical, analytic, normative, and interpretive reasoning.

Students must demonstrate a variety of interconnected reasoning skills in the construction and critique of both factual and value judgments. They must know how to establish or corroborate factual claims and to analyze and assess the soundness of deductive arguments and the strength of inductive arguments built on those claims. They must know how to analyze and assess arguments establishing or using normative principles in ethics, aesthetics, jurisprudence, statesmanship, and other normative or value-laden human concerns. They must know how to assess the form, and interpret the content, of the creative expression of ideas in art, architecture, literature, music, and performing arts.

Reasoning in these terms can be assessed by evaluating how well students, in their written or oral presentations, assess the information presented to them or construct their own arguments, positions, or theses.

All general education courses in the humanities and social sciences should include this aim.

5) Global citizenship

Students should understand, in political, historical, economic, and cultural terms, the nature and structure of the United States; its place both within a global community of nations and in the context of a globalized economic, political, and cultural sphere; and their own role as citizens within this national and international framework.

Establishing global citizenship as a general-education skill recognizes the growing importance of both a citizenship component in general education and a sense of the need to train students to perform in a world increasingly shaped by processes of globalization. Courses in United States and world history, anthropology and sociology, political science, geography, and economics contribute components to this understanding of global citizenship, and can be required to address such components to be counted toward general education. Requiring students, either in general-education courses or in courses in their chosen major, to have courses in at least three of these fields should ensure relatively comprehensive understanding of this aim (and is not unlike the present requirement in the natural sciences that general education requires coursework in at least two disciplines).

Appendix 2:

Criteria for upper-level general education

Background: There is increasing pressure for upper-level general education for at least two reasons: first, in the realm of ideas about how best to pursue general education, that pressure comes from the notion that general education ought to be pursued throughout an undergraduate career, often culminating in some sort of capstone, rather than be concentrated in out-of-major coursework in the first years (and this idea is consistent, clearly, with the direction of the WTE here at Washburn); second, and more narrowly, at least according to Nancy Tate, the new requirement for upper-level credit (45 hours) has increased pressure for general-education upper-level credits, and, as presently constituted, the General Education Committee is looking with more favor on such proposals (of course, this is just what Nancy Tate said, and perhaps it needs verification). At present, general-education options at the 300 or 400 level are very limited: one English course, one Philosophy course, half a dozen Art courses (all art history), a couple Modern Languages, one theatre, and none in the natural or social sciences. The problem is how to designate upper-level general-education courses, without just saying that any course counts (which seems to me to abandon the idea of general education, as opposed to specific disciplinary education, entirely).

Proposal: To be accepted as a general-education course, an upper-level course must, in the view of the General Education Committee, fulfill one of the following requirements:

1. It must have a strong interdisciplinary component, bridging the methods and approaches of multiple disciplines.
2. It must have a broadly foundational content, covering material of wide interest in the liberal arts.

No more than 50% of the upper-level courses listed in the catalog for any one discipline may be considered as fulfilling general-education requirements.