

**GENERAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
October 21, 2009
Olin 304**

Members Present: Kristin Douglas, Tom Bengtson, Anne Earel, Randall Hall, Allison Haskill, Dan Lee, Joe McDowell, Lisa Seidlitz, Margaret Farrar, and Fred Whiteside; **Members Absent:** Allen Bertsche (foreign term), Karin Youngberg; Josh Morgan; Ashley Booth (new student representative)

The meeting came to order at 5:03 PM.

AGENDA ITEM I – APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion- Dan Lee, **Second-** Randall Hall **APPROVED**

“To approve the General Education Committee meeting minutes of October 14, 2009.”

Discussion: Concerns were raised by Dan Lee about wording of the minutes, particularly in italicized sections (e.g., “...yelled..”, Bible verses, etc.).

AGENDA ITEM II – OLD BUSINESS

“G” suffix clarification discussion. TABLED.

This matter was tabled after extensive discussion involving the following points:

This discussion stemmed from recent concerns of faculty who appear to be confused about what constitutes a “G” suffix. Last year, the faculty senate narrowly approved wording submitted by Gen Ed that, in essence, describes “G” courses as having content that relates to non-US areas. However, there appears to be some confusion among faculty members about what the actual intent of the “G” suffix is (i.e., should courses with content relating to western Europe hold a “G” suffix, etc.)? Thus, the possibility of adding new wording to clarify G borders was presented. The words “dominant influence of Europe and North America” were borrowed from peer institutions’ documents regarding diversity requirements that potentially could clarify the current “non-US” wording for “G” requirements.

Even though many committee members and faculty members may believe that European content courses are not what are intended to receive a “G” suffix, according to the current wording in the “G” policy, such courses could be approved for a “G” suffix.

Some members questioned whether gen ed can properly address the “G” clarification issue this year in the face of upcoming and ongoing discussions about assessment of the program and redefining LCs/integrative learning. In response to such concerns, Kristin explained that she and Margaret routinely have questions from faculty about “G” proposals and that because the issue has been tabled for several weeks, we should define a future direction for the issue. It also was pointed out that if we were to change “G” requirements wording, we potentially could cause confusion for courses that presently carry a “G” suffix.

Tom reminded that in faculty senate discussions last year, it was brought up that we should not assume that our students are familiar with Europe.

Several members expressed concern that adopting such a wording change (“dominant influence outside of Europe and North America”) would constitute a major change from the current policy and would require faculty senate approval.

Margaret urged the committee members to consider the source of the current confusion. Where is the source of breakdown between what the committee intended with the wording that was passed last year and what has actually happened with “G” proposals?

Anne, who was a member of last year’s “G” clarification subcommittee for gen ed, explained that the approved version was a compromise and that there was much discussion about the challenges in identifying Western vs. Non-western influences (e.g., would courses about Turkey or Native Americans be considered “G”-worthy?). She further explained that the committee and subcommittee debated numerous concerns about establishing arbitrary borders. Ultimately, it was the committee’s decision that the best choice was to confine “D” to courses dealing with diversity issues within the US and to reserve “G” courses for those courses that pertain to locales outside of the US.

Joe raised the point that in addition to considering course content’s locale, that applicants still need to demonstrate how diversity is addressed in their courses.

Tom questioned if the “G”/“D” distinction may be a function of historical timing. Others replied that in their minds, time was not a factor in distinguishing between the two types of diversity courses.

Randall questioned whether by using “US” vs. “non-US” as a metric for defining “G” and “not G” are we being ethnocentric? Is it perhaps ill-advised to use the US as the centerpoint of determining “G” or “D”-ness when what we are trying to accomplish with these courses is a deeper appreciation of diversity?

Fred and Dan reminded the committee that GEWG and last year’s committee members had discussed the possibility of collapsing “G” and “D” into one single diversity requirement.

Kristin wondered what the feedback to instructors should be for those who are confused by the current G wording. Margaret wondered if there could be an expedited process for those who currently are on the books for having “G” courses. Tom pointed out that the paperwork necessary to apply for a “G” suffix is really not too challenging or complicated.

Kristin and other committee members suggested that perhaps this discussion should be tabled until the curriculum reform committee has a chance to develop a report. Additional, major curricular changes may be recommended and if that is the case, perhaps now may not be the best time to suggest a new direction for “G” courses.

Margaret pointed out that if we were to propose changing wording from our current policy, we need to proceed with caution and be absolutely certain that what we propose is really what we intend. We may further confuse faculty if we request a change to a document that was changed and approved only one year ago.

AGENDA ITEM III – NEW BUSINESS

A. Evergreen II Proposal

Refer to Kristin’s email regarding EPC’s feedback from the current draft.

Discussion:

One question is if we should abandon the use of the term “LC.” EPC has expressed concerns that some of our flexible options are not what other institutions commonly refer to as “LCs.”

Tom pointed out that we did what we were charged to do by broadening our previous definition of LCs.

Dan recommended keeping LC language because so many faculty members at the retreat expressed a desire to retain the traditional LC component of our gen ed program and a change may frustrate some faculty members.

Margaret and Kristin reminded the committee members that at upcoming forums, we should expect some resistance to the changes and that we should speak up about how our discussions have progressed through this process.

Dan thought that the service learning options may be a place where changes could be made, though he favors keeping this as an option for the time being.

Joe thought that the service learning options as presented were acceptable and that they guaranteed multiple perspectives and community building.

Kristin explained that we can use our current document as a talking points conversation starter and that if any one piece of the proposal (e.g., service learning options) meets resistance, we can revise as needed.

Tom and others saw this as a two choice scenario: 1) offer an integrative learning option similar to what we have attempted the past several years, one that we logistically have not been able to meet; or 2) broaden our initial model to include a variety of offerings that we conceivably can achieve.

Regarding EPC's question about "critical mass" for establishing community in these courses, Fred wondered if it would make sense to have a general guideline (e.g., 10, as in the current draft), with the addition of an option of "what the college deems appropriate" to address exceptions to the norm (e.g., summer school offerings that typically include fewer than 10 students but otherwise may have elements of what we would consider to be an LC). Others pointed out that in our previous discussions, there was a general sentiment that numbers are important to us in defining a community. Perhaps this is something where there really is a critical mass? Dan and Margaret suggested a compromise; that for courses with fewer than 10 students, the instructor may need to make a case in a proposal for how community will be fostered (similar to the process we may ask majors to do). Perhaps a petition model could be helpful to address these concerns on a case by case basis.

B. Update from Academic Affairs

Margaret reported that she met with the curriculum task force recently and that they are eager to work closely with gen ed as they move forward. She also reminded us of the gen ed related conversations this Friday at 4:00 in the Wilson Center and also next Thursday at 11:30 in the Olin Auditorium.

The meeting adjourned at 6:03 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Alli Haskill