

General Education Committee Minutes: 3/5/2020

11 am – 12 noon, BISHOP 603

Present: Victor Piercey (Director), Clifton Franklund (Assessment Coordinator), Khagendra Thapa (CET), Paul Zube (FNTFO), Rachel Foulk (CAS), Jacob Pollak (COEHS), and Kathryn Wolfer (Senate Liaison).

Guests: Scott Cohen, Kristin Oplinger, Eric Warner

Absent: Angie Mishler (Academic Counselors), Monica Frees (RSS), Jimmie Joseph (COB), Mari Kermit-Canfield (FLITE), Amy Greene (EIO), Mary Beaudry (COHP).and Leonard Johnson (Academic Affairs).

1. Consent Agenda: Approved unanimously

- Minutes for 2/11/2020
- Minutes for 2/20/2020

2. Discussion: Culture – Activities and Prefix Requirements

The committee and the guests discussed a recommendation from members of the Humanities and English, Literature, and World Languages departments. The departments recommended that (a) removing the requirement that students take culture courses with at least two distinct prefixes, and (b) raising of the cap on activity courses from 5 to 6 credits or eliminating the “activity” designation altogether.

Removing the Two-Prefix Requirement

In the discussion, the rationale for removing the two-prefix requirement came from the perspective of foreign languages.

Foreign language courses are intended to be a sequence, and if students are required to take courses for culture with two prefixes, they are only going to take the first language course. They will also not take that first language course as seriously knowing that they are going to continue. As a consequence, the department is unable to offer or sustain language courses beyond 101. Students who are able to take more advanced courses due to prior academic work or experience are not often placed until classes start, and there aren't sufficient sections of the more advanced courses available. It was estimated that in a class of SPAN 101 with 28 students, there are only 3 or 4 true beginners.

An additional rationale from removing the requirement is to accommodate and encourage minors. Under the requirement, students who minor in an area such as Spanish or literature are required to take an additional general education culture course, which adds little value to their education and increases cost.

Committee members noted that the two-prefix requirement is not as flexible as the General Education Task Force recommended, and that this requirement micromanages student options. The spirit of the task force recommendations was to create a more flexible gen ed program.

It was noted that courses from a single discipline may limit the emphasis with which students work toward the Ferris Learning Outcomes, since not all courses and not all disciplines include an equal treatment. However, the two-prefix requirement does not guarantee equal emphasis on the outcomes either.

It was also noted that one advantage of the two-prefix requirement builds breadth into the program.

Activity Courses

The original rationale for changing the 5-credit limit on activities courses was that most culture courses are 3 credits, so 5 credits of activities doesn't fit well into a 9 credit requirement.

The committee discussed whether or not it even made sense to have a distinction for "activities" courses. It is unclear why, for example, studio art classes are not activities but music performance classes are. It was unclear what the definition of an activity course is.

Some facts that arose in the discussion:

- None of the activities courses count for any general education competency besides culture.
- Most or all activity courses are 1 credit.
- All but one activity course is at the 200 level, with one at the 100 level.

It was noted at the conclusion of the discussion that if both recommendations are put into effect, a student could complete the culture requirement by taking 9 credits of the same course (among those currently labeled "activity").

Before the next meeting, the Director of General Education undertook to identify the process for making changes to the general education program, such as those recommended.