

General Education Policy Review Committee Open Forum

December 9, 2008 6-8pm CCC 321

GEPRC members present: Don Guay, Gary Olson, Randy Olson, Julie Schneider,
Greg Summers

Attendees: Jason D'Acchioli, Robert Nemeth, Sudevan Padmanabhan, Dona Warren

Attendees asked for a summary of the process we've followed so far. Don Guay provided the following: Convened in Feb. 2008. Drafted a mission statement for Gen Ed that was passed by Faculty Senate. Over the summer GEPRC members read materials related to Gen Ed and drafted a Gen Ed proposal with specific categories and learning outcomes and # of credits/category. Campus feedback indicated we needed to step back and provide an explanation of why we came up with that model and those categories as well as provide some overall program goals and outcomes. GEPRC will now present each step separately to the campus, gather feedback via the web and open forums, consider the feedback and make appropriate changes, present the revisions to Academic Affairs, who will either move it on to Faculty Senate for approval or send it back to GEPRC.

Q: Will new courses need to be created or will the current GDR courses fit into the new model?

A: Both. However, all courses will need to be approved by the GDR subcommittee according to the new learning outcomes.

Q: Is there someone versed in assessment and writing learning outcomes on the committee?

A: GEPRC asks for feedback from Karyn Biasca, co-chair of the Assessment subcommittee and Shari Ellertson, Policy and Planning Analyst.

Q: Will all courses directly connect to these 4 Program Outcomes? The connection needs to be transparent.

A: Yes. If done correctly, all Gen Ed courses will fall under at least one of the 4 Program Outcomes.

GEPRC Clarification: It is not appropriate to mention all Skills and Knowledges at the "Program Goals" level. Many more details will be included in the actual breakdown of individual categories. The 4 "Program Goals" are meant to be broad.

Q: What impact do individual dept. have on these outcomes?

A: If a majority of faculty feels strongly that an outcome is not appropriate or that something is missing, the GEPRC would consider that and make an adjustment. However, if only one dept. or few faculty feel that way, Academic Affairs would see those comments and the GEPRC's rationale for not heeding them. Once it gets to Faculty Senate, it is hoped that all necessary revisions will have been made. This is why feedback is so crucial at this point. Unfortunately, the committee has not rec'd much relative to the # of people this will affect. Attendees suggested that perhaps GEPRC members should come to individual dept. meetings to gather feedback.

Q: What about allowing people to post feedback anonymously?

A: GEPRC members felt that if critiques were anonymous, people could become very negative without having to take ownership of their opinions and that wouldn't be productive.

Q: What about adding to the FAQ page on the GEPRC website to dispel rumors and misconceptions about the process.

A: GEPRC members will consider this. They also mentioned that the administration has been very "hands-off" on purpose so that it does not appear that this is orchestrated from above.

Q: What about resources? What if what is proposed will require new resources to implement?

A: The Provost told the GEPRC to plan without worrying about resources, but rather, what's best for students. Attendees expressed doubt whether, in these budget times, the support will be forthcoming.

It was suggested that we post the comments from the open forum. Minutes were being taken and will be forwarded to Academic Affairs with all other email comments.

Critical thinking is missing from the "Demonstrate quantitative, communicative, and analytical skills necessary to succeed in a rapidly changing global society." Critical thinking is not the same as analytical thinking.

Natural Science knowledge/literacy is missing. Couldn't it fit in "Demonstrate broad knowledge of the world's peoples, cultures, and social institutions."?

Is there a more robust word for "Recognize" in "Recognize the importance of personal responsibility, social equity, and environmental sustainability in managing the world's resources."? Perhaps "Show a commitment to..." GEPRC members pointed out that the verb must be assessable.

Attendees asked for an explanation of the types of gen ed models. Core: all students take a prescribed set of common courses. Distribution: similar to our current GDRs.

Q: Could "communication" be taught by different majors?

A: Yes, as long as it meets the learning outcomes of the communication requirement.

Q: Could "writing" be taught by different majors?

A: Same as above.

Currently faculty are discouraged to develop interdisciplinary courses because the SCH is either split between the dept. An incentive would be to grant the SCH to both dept. collaborating on an interdisciplinary course.

Many faculty believe that certain requirements will not be abolished because of the size of the program and the number of students and/or faculty/staff it serves. GEPRC members reassured the attendees that there are no "sacred cows".

Q: How courses will be approved as gen ed?

A: GEPRC members explained that first a faculty member will have to demonstrate that his/her course meets the new gen ed criteria for a particular learning outcome; then after a TBD time frame, assessment results will have to prove that the students are meeting the learning outcomes.

Q: When will credits be assigned to Gen Ed categories?

A: Last.

Q: Why is the AAC&U pushing the LEAP-Liberal Education and America's Promise agenda and why is UW System adopting it? Are there any incentives?

A: So that UWS administration, faculty and staff can explain to non-academics in straight-forward language what a liberal education is and why it's important for the state of WI and what students gain from a liberal education.

Critical Thinking discussion with Dona Warren:

GEPRC is concerned that the term “critical thinking” is really just a buzz word. Dona Warren maintains that it is a real skill in its own right and provided a definition:

Critical thinking is the process by which we consciously and intentionally work toward

- 1) a reasoned understanding and evaluation of claims,
- 2) a reasoned understanding and evaluation of the evidence and arguments supporting claims, and
- 3) a clear formulation and an adequate defense of claims.

Critical thinking skills are specifically aimed at advancing this process.

Dona also further commented that she thinks “analytical” in the first bullet point of the GEP Learning Outcomes should be replaced with “critical thinking” to read “Demonstrate quantitative, communicative, and critical thinking skills necessary to succeed in a rapidly changing global society.” She would like to see this replacement because “analytical” is included in “critical thinking” insofar as analytical skills are exactly the skills involved in understanding claims, evidence and arguments, whereas “critical thinking” is not included in “analytic” insofar as analysis needn’t involve a reasoned assessment of the claims, evidence, or arguments analyzed. Critical thinking is essentially the two-staged process of analysis and evaluation, and the evaluation leg is too important to leave out. (To make the relationship between analysis and critical thinking a bit clearer, we could replace “understanding” in the above definition with “analysis,” if we wish, although “understanding” might be just a *bit* broader and that breadth might be a virtue.)

GEPRC members questioned whether critical thinking wasn’t already inherent in all GDR courses. Dona maintained that it is not explicit in instruction currently. It could be specifically emphasized in GDR courses, e.g. “critical thinking in the context of xxxxx”. This could set us apart from other campuses if we were able to advertise that our students become proficient in critical thinking skills and it was set apart as a separate learning outcome. It would require retooling of current courses to shift emphasis on critical thinking.

The GEPRC brought up the idea of requiring a minor. Some wondered if that is appropriate. How prescriptive should we be with students’ program choices?

One fear with a “free elective” choice in GDRs is that students will choose the disciplines they are most comfortable with and not expose themselves to new ones.