

Council on General Education Minutes
October 6, 2020
10-11:00 a.m., Zoom Meeting

Presiding: Chris Worland

Present: Brian Aitken, Mary Elaine Califf, Rebekka Darner, Katie Fisher, Stella Liao, Sally Parry, Liz Sattler, Gabby Thompson, Georgia Tsouvala, Gary Weilbacher, Tina Williams, Amy Wood, and Chris Worland

Guests:
Malinda Aiello, Program Director, Illinois Articulation Initiative

Worland called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m.

Action Items:

1. Approval of September 8, 2020 Minutes

Worland asked if there were any corrections to the September 8, 2020 minutes as submitted. There were no corrections. The minutes were accepted as submitted.

2. IDS 109 Transfer Student Seminar (course revision)

The course revision was proposed by Jamillah Gilbert, University College.

Worland asked Aitken to confirm if the revision request was to move the course up to a higher level and if he could provide any additional information regarding the request. Aitken informed the Council the course had been around for around 8-10 years. It had first started as IDS 189.14 and had transitioned to IDS 109 several years ago. The course helps new transfer students integrate to Illinois State by introducing them to the resources available to all students, but specifically, to transfer students.

According to Aitken, one of the reasons behind the request to move the course up to a higher level was to increase its appeal to students. Over 80% of the students who take the course are at sophomore standing or higher. These students are more inclined to take an upper-level course as they need senior college credit hours. In addition, the course is geared towards sophomores/juniors and promotes higher level thinking regarding course content, so it makes sense to have the course number match the course content/expectations.

Worland asked Aitken to verify the course was offered for one credit hour and met eight times per semester. Aitken verified the course was worth one credit hour. He went on to explain that in the beginning of the semester, the course meets weekly and then periodically through the rest of the semester, typically anywhere from four to eight times. Given the unique circumstances surrounding this semester, Aitken noted the course was meeting less frequently but added the intent going forward was to make eight meeting time the standard for the course.

Parry noted the course description in the proposal was too long and recommended the Council strongly suggest it be revised to fall within the 20-word requirement. Aitken asked if that requirement was still current but thought Parry's request was reasonable. Parry verified she had verified with Danielle Lindsey in the Registrar's Office and added the requirement was still listed on the course proposal form.

Califf suspected the rule was put into place to discourage faculty from submitting overly wordy descriptions which was better for the students.

While reviewing the course syllabus, Worland noted that several of the activities such as attending Festival ISU and participating in a scavenger hunt, were not feasible given current circumstances. He asked if the Council needed to ask for alternative assignments be made available in a hybrid/online format. Parry pointed out that Festival ISU was adapted to be held online this fall so students could still participate. Aitken added they have the same issue with IDS 128 and IDS 108 and noted they change the syllabus/course as appropriate. For example, Festival ISU is not offered in the spring, so an alternative assignment is substituted in for IDS 128.

Williams added that the Honors Program had a virtual scavenger hunt and had great student participation. Students played as individual instead of as a team and they were given clues online. The students then posted pictures from where the clues sent them. Williams confirmed it was a good way for students to get out of the residence hall for a while and still become more familiar with campus. She added that they had received great feedback from students regarding the experience.

Darner pointed out that post-COVID, some students will want to still earn their degree from Illinois State but who will not want to live in Normal. She asked if the University had made a decision yet whether to insist students live in town or if it would create more options for those students who did not wish to reside in town. Darner added that many times, Normal does not always convey the same sense of belonging, especially to those from underrepresented groups, that they can get from their home communities. She expressed concern about the equity involved for those students who would choose not to return to campus, and what pressure would be placed on families if students were required to return.

Parry noted the course in question was not a required course for any program. Aitken agreed with Darner's concerns and added everything the University does at this point in will change. Some of these changes will be good as it will force members of the University to not limit ourselves so much. Aitken asked if it was being suggested when reviewing courses/assignments, if the Council should make instructors develop alternative arrangements/assignments/modalities at the onset or if it would be more feasible if the instructor would come to the table and be prepared and willing to adapt if students within the course wanted to participate remotely.

Parry believed the latter suggestion would be more feasible as any instructor could adapt as needed in a semester. She pointed out that each instructor would adapt differently. Williams added that when changing course modality for the Honors Program, things got sticky as not all rooms on campus are equipped with higher end Zoom equipment. In addition, there are privacy issues, and a lot of different logistical considerations to be taken into consideration that are outside of just the academic ones. Instructors teaching larger classes will have a harder time trying to prepare for alternative modalities within the same course. However, Williams noted that a possible solution to this would be to offer alternate sections, one online vs one in-person.

Darner responded that regardless of modality, if an assignment required the student to be on campus, those who are not physically here are at a disadvantage. Williams asked if the same wasn't true for in-person courses. Califf noted there is a joint exam within her department that is offered only from 8pm-10pm, which is less than ideal for commuting students. She added she has regularly made different testing arrangements for these students.

Darner agreed that the University can require students to be in class during scheduled class times. However, equity issues are created when students are required to come to campus and participate outside of regularly scheduled class time. Califf responded that most Music courses require outside attendance. Darner agreed but added students were allowed to choose the performance/activity they chose to attend. Parry added students are also informed of this at the beginning of the term and the outside attendance requirement is listed as part of the course description which is something Parry thought could be considered.

Darner believed that noting the requirement up front did not address the equity issues and was more comfortable if the instructor(s) had a plan already in place or provided alternative choices. Aitken asked then if the Council would need to revisit all the courses it had approved and noted that in the School of Theatre, students aren't given a choice between productions as there is only one to two productions offered each semester. He added the caveat that in the case of THE 152, students are told attendance at these productions is a requirement.

Darner responded that if the assignment is required outside of the regularly scheduled class time, it needs to be listed in the description. Aiken noted that more of these assignments are required outside of the classroom than the Council most likely knows about. Darner agreed and added the Council learns more as it reviews/approves classes and the situation changes if students are allowed an element of choice. Aitken agreed that timing changes everything and added as part of the new General Education review/revamp, courses will most likely need to resubmit in order to be considered under the new program. He suggested this could possibly be a new requirement.

Worland asked how the Council could set itself and future committees up so that reviews would not have to be discussed about in such detail and asked if the Council had the power to add language to the proposal submission form. Parry noted the Council had power regarding issues/guidelines as to how departments meet General Education requirements. However, changes to the form in response to course modalities and assignment variations would need to be run by and approved by the University Curriculum Committee (UCC). Califf thought there was value in taking the issue to the UCC and suggested perhaps a question could be added requesting how the course would accommodate remote learners/commuters. Parry asked that if the UCC approved the change, that it communicates the change to the College Curriculum Committees (CCC) as changes have been made without prior notification, thereby taking these committees by surprise.

Aitken added that as the approvers for IDS courses, it may be a good idea to require IDS proposals to address the equity issue. Sattler agreed that this was an important issue as her department has had issues with its on-site visits/experiences. Aitken believed the instructor for IDS 109 could easily update the course syllabus to include alternative assignments.

Worland noted three pending items: 1) send back IDS 109 for revision which includes shortening the description and adding language regarding alternative assignments/multiple modalities; 2) update the course proposal form so that faculty will explicitly consider multiple modalities; and 3) consideration at a larger scale of the use of multiple modalities in all of General Education. Worland noted this item involved a discussion campus-wide.

A motion was made by Parry to return IDS 109 to the proposer for revision which includes shortening the description and adding language regarding alternative assignments/multiple modalities. Darner seconded.

Eleven in favor, none opposed, two abstained.

The motion passed.

Aitken felt the discussion regarding updating the UCC form should wait until the next meeting so that Hurd would be able to attend and discuss as well. Califf agreed with Aitken. It will be added as a discussion/information agenda item for the next meeting.

Worland was not sure if the larger discussion regarding General Education should be with Hurd as well so that she could take it back to the General Education Task Force for discussion. Parry noted that several Council members served on the Task Force and could relay the information at the next meeting.

Tsouvala made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Williams seconded.

Meeting adjourned: 10:46 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Soemer Simmons