

Council on General Education Minutes

March 26, 2024

10:00-11:00 a.m., STV 140

Presiding: Gregory Ferrence

Present: Brian Aitken, Allison Antink Meyer, Gregory Braswell, Linda Clemmons, Gregory Ferrence, Amy Hurd, Josh Newport, Rocio Rivadeneyra (first quarter of meeting), and Chris Worland

Guests:

Malinda Aiello, Program Director, Illinois Articulation Initiative

Dr. Christopher Horvath, Chair, Department of Philosophy

Dr. Cheri Simonds, Professor, School of Communication

Ferrence called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m.

Discussion Items:

1. General Education Revision

A draft proposal was sent to Council members prior to the meeting for their review.

Ferrence introduced the co-chairs of the General Education Task Force Executive Committee, Horvath, and Simonds. They gave a presentation in which Simonds reviewed the definition of general education. She explained the core principles the Task Force followed to create a program which included being student-centered, innovative, flexible, accessible, and between 30-36 hours. Simonds and Horvath explained the new vision and the proposed 15 learning outcomes. Simonds also outlined the significant changes to the proposed program which included an increased focus on globalization, social justice, problem solving, and civic engagement. In addition, the new program would incorporate an experiential learning course, and be less discipline focused.

Worland asked about the different course categories and wondered how current courses would map to them. He added he understood implementation was a different beast but was worried if by being so flexible if there would no longer be a common course/core to help build first year foundational skills. He assumed that for the Communication Inquiry category, it would be open to other courses aside from COM 110 and noted departments would then have the opportunity to create their own communication courses.

Horvath thought COM 110 would most likely be an option in the Communication Inquiry category but agreed it would not be the only course that could meet that requirement. Simonds agreed and added if a different course(s) objectives aligned with that category's learning objectives, it could be considered for that category. Ferrence noted the course itself was the key to determining the appropriate category. Horvath added that all majors will need to think about their prerequisites and their curriculum.

Worland asked if there would be general guidelines given as to who can teach certain courses. He noted that several departments use NTTs or graduate assistants to teach writing or communication courses and asked if these courses would need to be taught by individuals with terminal degrees. Horvath responded that current practice now is not to review an individual's CV and departments make their

own decisions regarding course assignments. He added the proposal outlines the need for certain institutional resources that would be necessary going forward which includes a university writing resource center that would have specialists available.

Worland stated that teaching writing for an English course is different than teaching business writing. He wondered if there would be difficulty with overlapping category descriptions for faculty proposing courses and for the Council to review and determine eligibility for a specific category. Simonds agreed there would need to be a template created to assist proposers. She added the new proposal included a mandatory review process of courses every five years which would help with the assessment of courses fit within a specific category. Horvath noted that each category description includes a list of specific components required for that category that would help differentiate it from others.

Antink Meyer liked the proposal's vision and the descriptions associated with each category. She felt the proposal was less like checkboxes for students to mark off and more like a substantive push to help students engage as intellectuals in their majors. In addition, she appreciated the flexibility of the program. She did raise the concern of how to prevent general education from becoming majors specific and how to keep general education as a shared experience across the University.

Horvath responded there had been conversations regarding double-dipping requirements but that there was not a way to remove it entirely as some majors have a high number of required hours. Hurd added that departments would not be allowed to major block sections of general education courses, and that departments could not financially afford creating curriculums entirely within their respective majors that would limit their students to only department general education courses.

Aiello pointed out the purpose of general education is to spread the experience across the board and not limit it to a few departments. Simonds added that the mandated review process would also assist with course creep and to ensure courses have the appropriate designations. Hurd noted the current program on paper consists of 39 hours but that almost every major/program has an exception that lowers the required hours to 36. With the new proposal, this exception would be removed, and the required number of hours would be lowered which would also assist with time to degree issues, especially in those high credit hour areas such as Elementary Education.

Newport told Horvath and Simonds he for the most part, really liked the concepts. He worried about the delineation between some of the categories as there seemed to be overlap. Horvath agreed that there was some overlap among the learning objectives but that there was no overlap in the category descriptions and added courses could only fit in one category. The hope was that between the learning objectives and descriptions, faculty would have enough direction when creating proposals. Aiello added this was the same as the IAI curricular process.

Simonds noted that Executive Committee members spent quite a bit of time in drafting the category descriptions with the intent to give departments flexibility while still giving guidance. She noted the first paragraph for each is more student-facing while the next part is intended to be used more by the faculty. Worland approved of this approach and felt it was more useful and beneficial to faculty. Simonds added that faculty who teach in the respective categories were consulted in the drafting of each of the descriptions.

Worland noted that the proposed review cycle would allow department and faculty to review courses and make adjustments to better reflect changes in the world and/or industry. Simonds responded it

would also give the University a better opportunity for assessment per HLC requirements. Worland thanked Simonds and Horvath for their work on the proposal and added he really liked what the Executive Committee produced.

Ferrence thanked Horvath and Simonds for attending and answering the Council's questions. He informed Council members the proposal would be an action item for the next meeting so that members could continue discussion.

Meeting adjourned: 11:00 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Soemer Simmons