

UMW General Education Committee Minutes
February 24, 2025

Present: Antonio Barrenechea, Ian Finlayson (secretary), Alan Griffith, Suzie Kim, Brian Ogle, Angela Pitts (chair), Debra Schleef, Melissa Yakabouski.

Present for CE discussion: Sarah Dewees, Elizabeth Johnson-Young, Jeremy Larochelle.

1. The meeting was called to order at 4:01 PM.
2. The minutes from the previous meeting are approved.
3. We received a motion from Sarah and Elizabeth proposing changes to the Community Engagement designation, which falls under the Beyond the Classroom requirement.
 - a. Over the last few years of teaching CE classes, it has become clear that requiring 15 hours of community engagement for students, especially first-year ones is quite difficult. Students struggle to meet this requirement, but 10 hours would be better. Tracking the hours is also burdensome, and some faculty have removed the CE designation from their courses for this reason. Lowering the benchmark hopefully encourages more participation.
 - b. The proposal also includes removing the stipulation that the community engagement work happens specifically outside of the classroom. The experience of working with off-campus members often happens while not physically off-campus, such as email work and phone or zoom meetings, and the proposal seeks to honor this work as well.
 - c. Suzie asks about assessment. How can we assess how many hours students may report they spend on emails or other work. Jeremy responds that making connections and communicating with off-campus groups doesn't always go smoothly and that real-world experience is valuable. He says that reflection will be a big part and that we don't expect the assessment of exact numbers of email hours.
 - d. Elizabeth adds that the program seeks to trust faculty in ensuring that their students meet the expectations. Debra also adds that individual classes can elect to require more than the 10 hours if they so choose.
 - e. Alan agrees that in the modern world one does not need to travel to a specific place to be considered to be working there. He argues however, that we should help faculty understand how their students will meet the 10-hour minimum to ensure the course is meeting the CE requirements. Guidance provided to faculty on this matter would be helpful.

- f. Angela asks whether “hours” is the only way to frame the requirement. For example, the requirements for other designations can be met in a wider variety of ways. Debra responds that this was simply the most straightforward way to define it. She would be reluctant to dispense with the hour requirement altogether but notes that the limit is not exactly policed.
 - g. Jeremy adds that the understanding is that much of the work will happen off-campus, but the goal of this motion is to make the requirements less prescriptive. It gives faculty more flexibility to allow other types of work to count.
 - h. Angela asks the proposers to work on a slightly revised motion to possibly include more guidelines on assessment and notes for faculty. They will bring the motion back to us for our next meeting.
4. We discussed two student general education re-evaluation proposals.
5. Reflections on general education curriculum:
- a. It has been five years since the current general education curriculum was accepted. It may be time to look at it and see if there are changes we want to make. Following are questions we should consider in this discussion:
 - i. What are other schools doing in the sphere of general education? One topic arising currently is civility and civil discourse.
 - ii. Does the rapid rise of generative AI impact how our general education program should look?
 - iii. Do we have enough general education courses? Relatedly, what is the *perception* on whether we have enough courses?
 - iv. Are there tweaks we could make to attract students here, by making sure our general education program prepares them for the world better than competitors?
 - b. Angela will ask chairs of committees like WI/SI/DI etc. to discuss this and bring the results back to us for our March meeting.
 - c. Melissa says that she has talked about how UMW could set itself apart by continuing to look to be a leader with integrating AI into the curriculum.
 - d. Angela suggested that we could consider adding:
 - i. a learning outcome to the DI outcomes specifically about the ethical use of AI.
 - ii. an outcome for the WI category to address the costs and benefits of using generative AI as part of the writing process.
 - iii. an outcome for the SI category with respect to civility in discourse.

- e. Alan suggests that tying these topics to the general education curriculum could be limiting, since changing the gen ed is a relatively slow process. Angela counters that having it there does communicate to parents and prospective students that they will receive this as part of their education.
 - f. Suzie suggests that tweaking the learning outcomes may not make a huge impact for students. We should be sure to write them in a way that highlights what we're doing well.
 - g. Melissa shares that when talking about UMW with prospective students, they highlight the breadth of the gen. ed. program, talk about major choices, and how they can change majors over the course of their studies. She talks about how we try to sell the gen. ed. program as being a part of making students marketable after they graduate.
 - h. Debra shares some data on enrollments for some of our general education categories (some like WI/SI were not included as they have had plenty for a long time). The good news is that most of the categories all have healthy enrollments. CE (which is not required) has seen a small dip which backs up the rationale provided for the CE motion discussed above. AMW is one that could use a few more classes: we have enough to get people through but could use more options for students.
 - i. Debra asks us to consider the catalog web page describing the gen. ed. page, and whether it does a good job selling the program, or could be improved.
 - j. Alan asks whether we should put the gen. ed. question to the entire faculty. Debra says that we have not done a "mid-cycle" assessment of the program in recent memory. She doesn't want to worry faculty that a major overhaul is happening again. We could do a survey or perhaps focus group meetings.
 - k. We will deliberate on all of these questions. It might be late this year to put out a survey, but we could perhaps have an online "suggestion box". This could be disseminated through department chairs. Angela will work with Debra to make this happen.
6. Our next meeting will be held on March 24 at 4:00 PM, which is the final meeting of the academic year.
7. The meeting adjourned at 5:18 PM.