



**General Education Committee
Minutes**

November 18, 2020

Present: Bernie Quetchenbach Melinda Tilton
Josh Hill Emily Arendt
Mara Pierce Jeff Willardson
Cori Day Brian Gurney
Lance Mouser Megan Thomas

Absent: Tien Chih Jason Comer*
Matt Queen* Randi O'Brien*
Leanne Gilbertson*

*excused

Guests: Anne Cole Kathleen Thatcher

Melinda Tilton called the meeting to order at 3:31 p.m. via Webex.

I. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

The minutes of October 21 were accepted as presented.

II. DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS

A. Information & Updates

Ms. Tilton spoke with Dean Christine Shearer about the GEC's work. The Dean is excited and supportive for the GEC to take control of Gen Ed, and do what's best for our students.

Ms. Tilton also met with Laura Gittings-Carlson, Director of Advising, regarding A&SC 111. She ran a similar course in Bozeman, but it included critical thinking skills, a faculty mentor, as well as a student from another discipline. Ms. Gittings-Carlson is forming a task committee to redesign A&SC 111, and they want to work with the GEC on the project. GEC members Matt Queen, Emily Arendt, and Leanne Gilbertson have already expressed interest in the committee. The committee will explore making A&SC 111 mandatory for all students, as part of Gen Ed.

Ms. Tilton met with Academic Senate Chair Jim Barron. He expressed support for the GEC to take control of Gen Ed and do what's best for our students as well. He suggests the GEC rely heavily on

Kathleen Thatcher, Director of Assessment & Accreditation, when it comes to assessment of Gen Ed, and we should also stay closely aligned with the MUS Gen Ed Core. He also suggested the GEC develop a transfer policy and that the Sciences would be on board if the GEC removed the one credit lab requirement. That one credit could then be used for A&SC 111. The GEC will have to hear from the whole Department on the lab before any decisions are made.

It was noted that A&SC 111 will be an issue for transfer students. Also, many current students have said A&SC 111 feels like a throw-away course. It was responded that the task committee will look toward making the course more vibrant and a vital piece of Gen Ed. It was noted that, to really make a revised A&SC 111 work, faculty must buy into the idea, so it must be very different from what the course has been in the past. It was further noted that many of our new, incoming freshmen need a course like the current one, so we can't tailor it too much to the needs of Gen Ed. It would be interesting to know how many students are taking A&SC 111, since it is not required now, and how they use it.

B. Gen Ed Program Outcomes & Assessment: Kathleen Thatcher

In the past, the GEC has discussed making whole-program outcomes, rather than category-focused outcomes.

Kathleen Thatcher encouraged the GEC to find out what it is the faculty want Gen Ed to accomplish as a program. When students have completed the program, what will they know and do? The current Gen Ed outcomes are much like course outcomes. Further, the Gen Ed assessment strategy has to come from the curriculum; the learning outcomes are the foundation of assessment for the program. Once the outcomes are ready, she suggests a curriculum map be created for the Gen Ed program. A map would show which courses (or course areas) achieve the outcomes, and will help faculty think about Gen Ed as a program. The assessment tool would not be based on every single place on the map where an outcome is met, but rather a sampling of those places.

It was noted that the committee is interested in program outcomes, rather than category-specific outcomes, but how do we keep program outcomes from becoming too vague? One suggestion was to have large, somewhat vague, categories of outcomes, that are then explained by more specific outcomes. A rubric that explains more vague outcomes might also be useful. It was further noted that the categories in Gen Ed can remain for organization, but our outcomes and assessment do not need to be based on them. It was cited that our issue is not really how Gen Ed is organized, but rather how Gen Ed is presented *in Gen Ed classrooms*. The A&SC 111 folks do want to make the purpose of Gen Ed part of their course.

Another concern with creating program outcomes is faculty buy-in. While the GEC may share a vision of what Gen Ed is, the faculty at large do not.

It was suggested that we likely have what we need in our current outcomes, but they need to be condensed.

C. Messaging

Emily Arendt stated that we need clarity for our goals, and we need to be able to articulate to all faculty why it is worth tinkering with Gen Ed. With that in mind, the GEC members were surveyed to help decide which of the following is most important:

1. In our gen ed offerings and/or categories, should we focus more on foundational skills as opposed to knowledge? For example, we could include a diversity/equity/inclusion element.
2. Should we package general education to make it less overwhelming and more appealing/relevant to our students, especially first-generation students? How can we deliver clear, consistent messaging to students, faculty, Advising, and other MSUB staff about the value of the courses and skills taught?
3. In an increasingly competitive higher education market, could our general education program reflect unique offerings and the identity of our institution to recruit and retain students?
4. Can we make our offerings more student-centered? Are we providing students with the knowledge and skills they will need to be successful in today's rapidly changing workforce?
5. Is it a good idea to adopt a more unified, integrative concept in which students synthesize information, in which they enter and exit General Education, such as a first-year seminar and a capstone?
6. How can we structure general education so that we can do meaningful assessment? General Education as it is currently formulated has proven difficult to assess, especially to the degree suggested by NWCCU. Some of these options for revamping the Gen Ed curriculum—such as programmatic outcomes and entry- and exit-point courses—may provide a more straight-forward path to meeting assessment goals.
7. Do we need to focus more on sequencing and cohesion, i.e., designating certain courses as “foundational” and implementing recommendations on what courses students take in their freshmen (and maybe sophomore) year?

The question was raised as to whether we should establish a limit to the number of courses in Gen Ed. It was responded that the GEC should focus on quality of courses, not quantity. However, declining enrollments in higher ed make it difficult to offer all the listed courses. The GEC can't be concerned with enrollments, unless the number of courses grows so high it impinges on the faculty's ability to offer those courses.

The meeting adjourned at 4:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Rita J. Rabe Meduna.