

General Education Committee Minutes

November 7, 2011

Meeting was called to order at 2:00pm

Members Present: Barbara Curbow, Eva Czarnecka, Sid Dobrin, Melissa Johnson, John Krigbaum, Mark Meisel, Lynn O'Sickey, Brenda Smith, Bethany Taylor, Robert Thomson, Theresa Vernetson, and Gregory Zuest

Co-Chairs: Bernard Mair and David Julian

Executive Secretary: Ann Goodson

1. Dr. Mair opened the meeting.
2. **Minutes** from the October 7th meeting were approved with the following corrections:
 - a. Melissa Johnson will be included as being present at the meeting.
3. **Common Humanities Course-(The Good Life):**

Dr. Mair started the discussion on approving the interdisciplinary humanities course as a required humanities course for all incoming freshmen. He reviewed the development of the course starting in 2008 and the various approvals that it had obtained. It was initially approved for H designation as a special topics course in 2009, then it was approved as a regular course in 2010 by the UCC, and again for the H and E2 designations by this committee.

He stated that transfer students would not be required to take the course. The state regulation requires UF to award Gen Ed credit for any course that the students come in with through an acceleration process. However that does not prevent us from requiring an additional Gen Ed course. That means that although they may have acquired 36 credits of gen ed they would still have to take this 3 hours humanities course if it is approved. So that would impose an additional requirement on the students that they currently do not have to meet.

The committee then discussed many issues as they considered the proposal of making the Good Life course mandatory for all UF students (entering as freshmen).

1. The effect of this proposal on the general education requirements

In response to several questions, Dr. Mair stated that we would still have the same requirement of 9 credits of humanities and that 3 of those would be satisfied by the Good Life course. Students could still obtain gen ed credit from AP/IB exams but only 33 of those could count towards the gen ed requirement. Transfer students that have an AA degree from a Florida college would be exempt from taking the course, but out of state transfers would not be exempt.

2. Should there be a deadline for completion of the course?

Dr. Thomson asked the above question. The committee felt that it would be appropriate for students to complete the course by the end of their second year as it would create problems with enrollments if they delayed too long. They discussed the fact that there is some confusion as to what is meant by the “year” of a student as they bring in so many credits. Students could be classified as sophomores in their first year. It was decided that students be required to complete the course by Universal Tracking Term 4. If the student did not do so, an academic hold should be placed on the student’s record so they would have to see an adviser who would register them for the course the next semester.

3. Effect of the new Spring/Summer Enrollment Model

Dr. Mair stated that students would be enrolled in this new plan for the first time in Spring 2013. There was some discussion about the feasibility of offering the course in the summer sessions. It was felt that even if the course could not be offered in a Summer A or B session, it could certainly be offered in Summer C. Dr. Mair stated that these students (a) would most certainly be here the entire summer so would be able to take a Summer C course; and (b) would be held to the same tracking requirements as regular students. So we would be able to apply the same tracking requirements.

4. Evaluation of the course

Dr. Mair summarized the results of the meetings that the committee had with the instructors and teaching assistants and referred to the summaries of those meetings that were sent to the committee. He felt that they were all positive and that he was impressed with the TA’s who participated. He acknowledged there was a suggestion to meet with students also but that instead of scheduling another meeting, the TA’s were asked to provide information on how students felt about the course.

Dr. Thomson asked if the student evaluations would be available for the committee to review. Mair replied that they can be viewed but was not sure if it would really make a big difference in the evaluation of the course for several reasons. He felt that the scores on the evaluations were quite normal, in the region of 4 and above for the instructors. Although comments from the evaluations may provide some insight, the course and the instructors would most likely not remain the same, so it was not clear if any conclusions could be drawn from a close study of those comments. Maintaining consistency is a challenge in any gen ed approved course. Any course that will be approved will be changed so he felt that it was more important to re-assess the course on a regular basis in order for it to continue in the same status. He suggested that the committee could require some sort of recertification process on a regular basis every three years for the course to be certified to be the common course.

5. Online Version

Thomson asked if there would be a special syllabus for online teaching of this course. Mair stated that the syllabus would remain the same whether it is online or face to face

classes and that the small group discussion sections would still be offered for online sections. Another question asked was if students could take an online class on or off campus. Mair stated that the current thinking plan is only to offer online sections if classroom space is not available on campus to accommodate enrollment and that students could take it from any location.

6. Operational Details

There was discussion about concerns raised by departments and faculty about operational details of the course that were expressed to various members of the committee. Dr. Thomson stated that there was a meeting of Chairs of the humanities departments in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences where they were asked for input on the proposal. It was reported that many of them did not approve of the class because of the logistical problems of figuring out who would be teaching what would be taught in the course. Most of the departments felt that they did not have the personnel to be able to teach any additional classes. The Chairs also wanted to know more details such as the budget for the course, what commitment would be required from them, and how it would operate. As a result they were giving the course a “thumbs down”. Mair stated that the deans of the 3 colleges; Liberal Arts and Sciences, Design Construction and Planning, and Fine Arts have agreed to provide the resources necessary for this class and also the Provost Office would provide additional support if necessary. There will be additional RCM budgeted funds coming as a result of the student credit hour generation. A financial model is already in place and has been providing the financial resources to keep this course going and that financial model would continue to be used to further financing of the course.

There was some discussion about the fact that there was not a lot of input on the proposal from the teaching faculty. Mair stated that the Oct. 14th meeting was set up to talk with faculty who teach the course as well as those who had taught the course but only a couple attended, and there have not been any negative responses from faculty. It was also asked if there had been any contact with faculty who never taught it but could be affected by the proposal. Mair stated that after Gen Ed approval, the proposal would go to the Curriculum Committee and Faculty Senate so faculty would have a chance to make comments about the course.

Dr. Julian stated that the committee does not consider financial resources in approving other courses so it was not appropriate to bring this up in this case. He felt that the committee should only address the course itself and its content, with the assumption that the logistics would be worked out.

There was some concern expressed about the impact the required course would have on faculty assignments. Mair stated that if the course would be required for all students it may result in some humanities courses being cancelled due to low enrollments, so there could be an opportunity to move faculty assignments to meet the demands.

Dr. Dobrin expressed concern with how the TA's were being trained to teach and assess the writing component of the course. Dr. Meisel felt that the best interest for the students would be to have them in close contact with the TA's teaching smaller

numbers of students. He was concerned that as the enrollment grew, the current small sections of at most 20 would grow to the point where it would no longer make it possible to teach good writing.

7. Formal proposal

Dr. Vernetson asked if there was a formal proposal and Mair distributed a pre-prepared proposal for the committee to review.

Thomson suggested that the proposal contain some reference to replacing the 3 required humanities credits with this course. Mair agreed to amend item 4 to include that it is a required course all freshmen and that it counts 3 credits towards the humanities gen ed requirement, subject to the stated conditions and be completed by UT 4.

The committee discussed whether or not the proposal should include the writing designation. Dr. Smith mentioned that the humanities task force felt it was very important to have a writing designation since writing is an essential component of the course. The task force started out with a 6,000 word requirement but dropped it to 2,000 due to logistical considerations. She felt that the students needed to write in order to get the full benefit from the course. Another consideration is that for some students, this could be the only writing course taken at UF. Many points were raised including that large enrollments may negatively impact the ability to properly assess the writing component, resulting in serious inconsistency in grading between sections, and the need to properly train a large number of TA's to grade the writing even if a rubric was used. As a result, the committee recommended that the writing requirement be removed from the proposal and that it only include the humanities designation.

It was moved that if the course is scaled up to be required for all freshmen, that the E2 designation be removed. It was seconded and approved by majority vote.

It was stated that removing the E2 designation is an added bonus for the instructors as it will allow them to be more creative in designing evaluation methods. The committee emphasized that the same amount of writing could be required, but just that the course would not be approved E2. The committee felt that it was a good idea to not award 2000 words but to make students write more in a class that they are required to take, because then they get that college is about learning to articulate themselves not only in spoken word but in written word as well.

The committee recommended that item 2 on the proposal be changed to the effective teaching skills of the instructor.

A discussion followed on assessment initiated by a question from Dr. Vernetson. The committee recommended to add an item that a report on assessment results be given to the Gen Ed committee annually.

Dr. Meisel made a motion to modify the proposal to include the comments, send the revised proposal along with a copy of the minutes to the members, and ask the members to submit a vote on the proposal by email after one week. The committee

approved the motion. It was felt that this was such an important decision that all members of the committee should be given an opportunity to fully participate in the decision.

Meeting adjourned at 3:09pm