General Education Town Hall Meetings, November 6th and 7th, 2012

11:00-12:30, SRHM 114

Faculty and staff gathered on November 6th and 7th in two General Education Town Hall meetings to discuss the General Education Program (GEP) revisions taking place on our campus. After a brief presentation of the General Education Campus Survey results, participants worked in small groups to address one of the following key questions, documenting the conversation on large sheets of paper, and then reporting back to the larger group. (Note: although students were invited, none attended).

1. What should be the intent of our GEP, given the feedback obtained from the surveys?
2. What should the structure of the GEP be: themes, outcomes, or...?
3. If we had key themes, topics, or learning outcomes that structured the GEP (e.g., global awareness, problem solving, critical thinking), how could we link these across the curriculum?

Transcripts were developed from notes taken during the session as well as verbatim recording from the materials used by participants to document their discussions.

Tuesday, November 6th

Group 1

What is General Education?

- What does a Gen Ed course need to do
- Faculty should be on same page
- Common understanding for faculty teaching Gen Ed.

Communicate to students that gen ed = tools you need for everything else; What prepares you for:

- Functioning in upper level courses
- After college
- Work place
- SL sites
- Internships
- Make decisions
- Productive Citizen

Tools:

- Subject matter
- Critical thinking
- Life skills
Communication

Long term goal setting & preparing for these goals

See the Forest beyond the trees. How do you best allocate your credits to broaden skills – experiences?

Range of experience – See outside the box, Globalization.

Track students at risk - Retention

**Structure of Gen Ed**

Critical thinking – modes – practice

- University definition of critical thinking
- Writing across the curriculum critical thinking & subject content
- Application

Prepare students for after college goals

- Career – grad school
- How to apply for jobs – resume
- college skills

Communication

- How to email professor
- How to talk to service learning site
- How to interview

University Requirement?  → **Effective Learning University Experience**

Raise the Bar - Rigor

- Students will step up to the plate, rise to the occasion

**Group 2**

Business model

Limit choices so similar experiences.

Get everyone on same page

How do we implement it → $ Lines (resources)

Aren’t we doing this in our classes already? Asking to include it but heavy roadblocks.
Group 3

(Focused on question #3: If we had key themes, topics, or learning outcomes that structured the HEP (e.g., global awareness, problem solving, critical thinking), how could we link these across the curriculum?)

Communication between gen ed and program level faculty (composition faculty collaborating/sharing info – ideas about critical thinking, etc.)

- Format for communication – department chair meetings / general meetings, share syllabus / course management system
- Share competencies / activities
- Track at-risk students getting C or lower – professor communication w/Center Academic Achievement

Common links/themes across discipline.

- Let students choose a course based on a theme that professor has expertise in.
  - A first year seminar course on 1960’s films that is writing-intensive

Gen ed curriculum linked together

- Collaboration – for example – environmental humanities professor with science professor link 2 courses.
- Faculty need to maintain ownership of course.
- Collaborative relationships between faculty smaller units of 4-workshopping/idea units
- Trail runs of one-series of courses theme-based and pilot it first
- Common competencies & assessment tools to link

Faculty buy-in important

SUMMARY of 11/6 open discussion

Need to prepare students for Post-BA

University required course – First-year seminar connected to subject matter

Gen Ed → Upper Level → Post BA (emphasize connections)

- Key competencies / skills; Need common understanding of rigor / expectations

Need Univ. definition of Critical Thinking

Educate students WHY they need General Education
Need to create a structure that makes this obvious.

**Gen Ed Courses as Scaffolding**

- Need to make it clear what students should be learning; explicitly stating this in the courses
- Make the links apparent to faculty & students

Less is more

Define Gen Ed as directed, integrated course of study

**Wednesday, November 7th**

**Group 1**

Clear set of Gen Ed outcomes and link them to major curriculum. Integrate GE learning outcomes throughout programs & use them to assess

Themes (examples – all need to be defined clearly and distinctively)

- Written Communication
- Oral Communication (both written & oral in QEP)
- Civic / Ethics responsibility
- problem solving
- Quantitative Reasoning (same as “Math literacy”? We should likely develop a better term for quantitative reasoning so that students understand what we mean.

**Group 2** – using “buckets” metaphor for themes

(Not necessarily in order of preference)

Global Awareness

- Human culture / society
- Intercultural knowledge
- Respect for human diversity

Scientific & environmental literacy

- Knowledge of physical / natural world
- Environmental Sustainability
Scientific literacy

Civic engagement

- Team work
- Cultural awareness, respect for human diversity
- Leadership

Communication

- Written & oral

Critical / Creative thinking / problem solving / quantitative reasoning

Across the curriculum

- Foundations of LL learning
- Ethical reasoning
- Technological literacy

**Group 3** (focused on question #1 - Intent of GEP)

Communicate to students that GEP is a foundation for the academic career

Foundation for life skills

Foundation for life of the mind

**Group 4** (focused on question #1 - Intent of GEP)

Development of critical thinking skills

1. Preparation to enter society as responsible, ethical, and productive civically engaged citizens (Global; Be environmental stewards)
2. Becoming lifelong learners
3. Demonstrate effective written and oral communication
4. Appreciation of diversity
5. –
6. –
7. --
(drawing of a web: Critical thinking is at the center). Web shows Gen Ed at all levels – spiraling across curriculum. Language spirals across curriculum too

Note: # are not ranked order; they are for ease of linking (interpreting) in the diagram

**Group 5**

Linking information literacy across curriculum (Research literacy)

Faculty communication

Curriculum mapping

- Logistics?
- What’s the flow? (Students & Faculty)

Overlap w/QEP

- Common understanding of competencies (crit. thinking)
- Shared GE vocabulary

**Summary:**

What is the flow? Make it clear to the students the flow of the GE courses that they take.

- There would be some overlap with the QEP here: the flow would become apparent if we had a common understanding of competencies (if the competencies were defined by the group). We need to use a shared language across courses so students see the connection in what they are learning across the courses.

- This information (the common language/understanding developed in Gen Ed) should then be shared with the faculty teaching in the majors; the language used in the majors does not need to be the same as that in Gen Ed (because it is discipline specific) but we should assist students in seeing how they map onto one another.

- These competencies/this language should “spiral” through the curriculum so that transfer students would be acquainted with it and so that students would see it again and again (though at a higher level).

**Group 6**
Don’t depend on ‘menu courses’ that ‘cover’ (but do not assess)

Need to broaden “mind”
  - Shared vocabulary can be detrimental to awareness

**Prevent mindlessness**
  - Themes need to be integrated intelligently into (all) courses across Gen Ed (& disciplines)

**Links (to upper-division)**
  - Collaborative among faculty teaching different sections of same course
  - Gen Ed links? – not discussed

Gen Ed needs to lay foundation for all disciplines. May need to state outcomes more generally (vaguely?)

**Assessment needs to be primary**
  - Basic blocks needed for discipline
  - Skillsets:
    - Effective writing
    - Reading comprehension
    - Communication
    - Ethics

We need to come back to value-laden outcomes that are difficult to measure