Grand Valley State University

*NOTES: General Education Committee*

Minutes of 3/10/2014

**PRESENT**: Kirk Anderson; Karen Burritt; Emily Frigo; Melba Hoffer; Brian Kipp; Jose Lara; Jagadeesh Nandigam; Alex Nikitin; Laudo Ogura; Martina Reinhold; Keith Rhodes, Chair; Scott St. Louis; David Vessey

**ALSO PRESENT:** C. “Griff” Griffin, Director, General Education; Jeanne Whitsel, General Education Office Coordinator

**NOT PRESENT:** Susan Carson; Roger Gilles; Gary Greer\*; Paola Leon

**ON SABBATICAL**: Paul Sicilian

\* Participating in all work despite conflict with meetings

| Agenda Items | Discussion | Member |
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| **Approval of Agenda** | Corrected agenda approved. | Approved per consensus |
| **Approval of 2/24/2014 minutes** |  | Approved per consensus |
| **Curriculum items for consideration, with group assignments for efficiency** | **7357: New Course – MES 202** (Anderson, Lara, Reinhold, St. Louis)  Returning US Diversity proposal  Member was happy with content goals, but didn’t know how instructor would evaluate oral communication using essays and class discussion. A substantive paper and presentation are needed. Instructor says he will measure but doesn’t say how – he doesn’t use a rubric. The Teach and Measure portions were not specific to Written Communication goal. His presentation was fragmented and needed editing. It’s better that they be specific and incomplete than vice-versa. We haven’t been requiring them to be more specific outside of Issues courses, but need to start.  Content goals – instructor lists short essays, but that isn’t mentioned in the Written Communication part. At first members had an idea of what he was doing, but as it went on he became less specific. Should this come back to the committee or only to the Chair? If it doesn’t come back in good shape, he’ll have to use great deal of discretion in his response.    We expect instructors to require oral presentations for the Oral Communication goal, or to provide us with a compelling explanation of what they’re going to do – do they have a special way to manage class discussion that really does permit using and assessing the skills? Instructor says they have expert groups that break out, with the members distributed among other groups to teach them. It’s an interesting concept, but the description would need more development.  If instructors are concerned about using too much class time for presentations, even a brief one would give a good idea of how the student is doing.  The following four Honors courses were discussed as a whole, with a few comments specific to each but these generally applied throughout.  **8183: HNR 256 East Asia I (Historical Perspectives) – Fall** (Burritt, Hoffer, Nandigam)  Problem Solving, Written Communication  **8184: HNR 257 East Asia II (Philosophy and Literature) – Fall** (Carson, Nikitin, Ogura)  Ethical Reasoning, Information Literacy  **8185: HNR 276 East Asia III (Arts) – Winter** (Frigo, Gilles, Greer)  Oral Communication; Written Communication  **8186: HNR 277 East Asia IV (World Perspectives) – Winter** (Kipp, Leon, Vessey)  Collaboration; Critical and Creative Thinking  HNR 256:  There is a lot of repetition, with the same response given for content and skills goals – instructor tried to craft one statement and copy and paste it for all goals. “Measures” says what students and instructor will do, but we can’t see what they’re doing for each content goal. It’s okay to use one statement if it covers all four – did it? In some cases, no. For the instruction to “Construct a clear statement...,” it says the student will learn the skill but it doesn’t say how the skill will be taught. The Chair is inclined to let it go, and see what happens in the assessment phase; maybe then it will be clear what the instructor has done. It seems we have done enough with Honors, and we have made progress, maybe it will be best to let them take it from here.  HNR 276:  Similar contents, same problems, not worth it to send back. We wish the rubric would match the documentation.  HNR 277:  Similar issues with the content goals, and every paragraph ended with the same statement.  For Collaboration, students are doing research and writing papers – how to measure that through paper evaluations? How does that work? That may not be the best way to evaluate group collaboration.  The Honors approach is that they don’t differentiate between goals, they combine them in teaching. So maybe we should wait to see how the evaluations come out. Maybe they will make sense. But if the report doesn’t show how they arrived at their numbers, we’ll have to be stronger and insist that they use our rubrics as stated. We’re concerned because we need to be sure Honors is meeting General Education goals. If assessments come out well, it’s all good.  Even if we let this go for now, we should record that this isn’t a model that other Honors courses should use because it isn’t clear to us how the assessments will be done, and in assessment we will be looking to see how these things are being done. How do you follow a guide when there isn’t a guide? It’s worth asking now – is this really collaboration? We will advise them that we’ve made our concerns known, and we don’t want others doing it this way. We also don’t want future committees to wonder why we let these things go. Some members will still be here and will remember what happened, but new members won’t have the history to reference. The Chair will add to the comment field that we still don’t think these are helpful guides to teaching this goal, but we will look to the assessment to see what has actually been done.  In some cases instructors aren’t sure how the items will fit into the category. In these cases we want to say, “if you can present a great different idea, that’s fine, take ownership, but until then you have to use our assessment system.” We need to point out it’s the university’s assessment system, not the General Education department’s. Don’t say it will meet goals if it won’t, if the goals haven’t been taught under this plan.  The decision was made to approve all four Honors courses – 256, 257, 276, and 277 - with reservations, noting a general sense of the reservation so when it comes back we can reference these concerns.  General Education will keep proposals in case a member wants to see one when it comes back from amendment so they can compare to see what changes were made. If one wishes to see the original, they can email Jeanne Whitsel at [whitseje@gvsu.edu](mailto:whitseje@gvsu.edu) and she will send it to them. | S. St. Louis moved to amend, J. Lara second, motion carried 12 -0  M. Hoffer moved to approve under reservation. A. Nikitin second, motion carried 12-0 |
| **Discussing larger issues that have arisen from CAR responses and suggesting revisions to response letters and action for future assessments.** | What are we learning from CAR responses? This discussion will help the Chair figure out what to do with various responses.  The current system being followed:   * When there’s not much to praise but little gain in being negative, we just offer thanks. When there isn’t much in the report, the Chair combines bullet points. Sometimes he combines categories, other times he just leaves them out. If a report is thorough, he leaves it in and says “Thanks, this is great.” If there’s nothing good to report, he leaves it out. * We don’t go overboard with taking blame; it’s their system too. They share responsibility for it. * We tread carefully with conformity, focusing on how it might be helpful. We value independence in teaching methods, and different methods can lead to similar ends – we don’t all have to do everything alike – but they might be able to help each other.   What else have we learned? Are there other concerns or compromises they feel they’ve made? What have we learned that isn’t in these reports – any unexpressed negatives?  Member doesn’t see how a rubric can be used on something that isn’t open ended, such as multiple choice questions. Did the student get the right answer - is that the measurement? Some people indicate they use this, but how can that be used to measure a rubric? If they know the answers to the questions, does that say they earned a 3? Could they be considering degrees of rightness, designing a test in which some answers may also be true, as in something that might be worth partial credit, but there is one *best* answer? Should we ask them to provide the questions in that case?    There seems to be confusion or difficulty in reporting progress to students regarding General Education goals. Should we require them to do so, maybe provide a form for them to give to students? Some seem confused or reluctant to do this. Why does this seem so hard? Do they think grades are feedback, and they don’t need to be specific regarding a rubric since grades are not based on it? One instructor handed out rubrics, but most students left them behind at the end of class. This isn’t being taken seriously. Maybe there’s a sense that everything has to be changed and it would take too much extra work to incorporate our rubrics with their own. What do we tell people to make it easier to tell students how they’re doing as a General Education student? It’s an extra thing that takes time, but it doesn’t have to be a big deal or that hard.  We said it’s fine to have one’s own goals for skills, we just want students to know that the General Education program wants to know how they’re achieving goals in a general way. Professors don’t know how to express that to students. Many instructors seemed surprised by the requirement.  One professor was concerned about the Collaboration rubric, saying there was no difference between scores 3 and 4. Should we collapse the scale from 4 levels to 3? The instructor said there were too many students to assess – can they cap courses that need assessment? Or, only assess a select number of students in each class?  We would consider a small number of randomly selected students per class if we could get them from multiple sections and the instructors completed the entire rubric. It can be better for instructors to discuss them as a group. It appears they are working individually, because only one section is being assessed at a time. Would we be better served by smaller numbers of students per section, but including more sections? - Only if more faculty (sections) are involved and all subobjectives are met according to the rubrics. We do want all professors to assess how they’re doing things. We may have to say, for example, there are 3 of you - adjuncts, visiting, and full professors – and if your department wants to, it can give us five students from each of you, or if there are two of you then we’ll need half of the students in our sample group from each of you. Then the department has the ability to decide whether it’s legitimate for adjuncts to participate. But then instructors might protest having to go through the whole process for only a handful of students.  People are struggling to use rubrics and to use them at scale. Courses like writing 150 already have rubrics but others won’t have ones like ours and they aren’t used to doing them.  We’re learning how to produce data. The data from the first three years data won’t be very meaningful, but in the process of generating it, we’ll learn how to make it more meaningful.  Why provide all rubric subobjectives but only collect data on the whole goal? If they’re going to collect all bits, they should give numbers for each one, not just one number for all combined. If one is well skilled at using rubrics, one number would suffice, but we don’t have that level of skill here. Sometimes the subject goal doesn’t fit the topic being taught. How does one incorporate ethics into a math course? Some instructors just ignore the ones that they can’t figure out how to teach or how to make it fit with what they’re teaching. Sub-objectives force instructors to think about how they’re going to teach these things.  We will return to this discussion and make decisions on them at a later meeting, perhaps the next-to-last one. In the meantime, consider:   * How many skill levels should there be? * How do teachers use both the General Education rubric and the discipline rubric? - Same skills can be taught in different ways. * How do we build skill in using rubrics? – How do we get people to use ours? * When do we expand to all four subobjectives? - We didn’t require this at first – everyone thought it was too much, so we backed off. But as we get better at the process, we should be able to add that back in. * What’s the best way to distribute data collection across courses? * How do we involve all sections in teaching skills? * How do we produce skillful revisions of rubrics?   Our ultimate goal is to get faculty to teach all goals, then be sure students are learning them, whether assessing or not. If they aren’t measuring it, they at least need to figure out how to teach it. Then they can figure out how to measure it. How do we make the measurements more manageable?  We need to make sure they realize our courses are GVSU courses, not just any General Education course from anywhere. Our courses have to include our content. Different syllabi may look the same but the teaching methods will be different. They also have to distinguish between a (generic) geography course and a General Education geography course.  Some are concerned that the General Education department is telling them how to teach their class. We aren’t telling them how to teach – they can teach skills however they want, but need to remember they volunteered to do this. We also need to remind them they’re teaching in the General Education program, not just their own discipline program. Just as their departments have disciplinary curriculum constraints, we have general education constraints.  Do we reduce to 3 levels? We think too many 4s mean we should adjust the rubric. How would we know this if we didn’t get the 4s? Do we need to differentiate between what’s a 3 and what’s a 4? It isn’t that the distinguishing words are purely synonyms, it’s a matter of degree – for example, how often does the student meet the collaboration criteria, most of the time or all of the time? It’s not just a different way of saying the same thing. Perhaps we should revise the rubrics. Should we get the FTLC to help? Assessment helped us with the design (wording); we can ask them if they can discriminate between the two versions. We can see what they think.  Our plan was to not change these things (goals, rubrics, process) constantly, but to reassess in three years, but there seem to be enough problems that maybe we should reconsider this. We need to be credible, giving things that can be taught. Perhaps we could use the expert panel idea with subgroups to help us create rubrics for each goal. This is a major project, and it’s too late to do it now but we but may need to consider it for next year.  We can make the change to assessing a smaller number of students from each section before then. We could ask them to do a pilot of it this winter to see how it goes. However, we’ve already told them what we want them to do, and we’ve already rolled it out in pieces. People need consistency. Let’s consider at the end of this year whether to do it next year. We’ll need to decide that within 30 days.  The options are for them to evaluate more students with fewer requirements to meet, or fewer students with more subobjectives. Should we let them choose which way to do it?  Option breakdown:  All students in one section  a) current system or  b) meet all objectives  Small number of students in each of multiple sections  a) current system  b) meet all objectives  Per-section numbers will be determined to provide the same number of students across the board. We’ll cap out the number of sections and total number of students per year to compensate for huge classes.  When will instructors give feedback? – Close to the end of the course?  If one is seriously missing information, we need to ask for it now. If they’re missing too much, we need to let them know we need more. |  |
| **Chair’s Report** | At the next meeting, we will go back to reviewing CARs and finish those up. |  |
| **Director’s Report** | We are working to update the Handbook and working with Honors. |  |
| **Adjournment** |  | 4:30 p.m. |