

General Education Council Report to the Faculty Senate

October, 2011

Submitted by Conrad Shumaker, Director of General Education

Activities in 2010-2011:

Proposals:

The GEC resubmitted the proposal to restructure the World Cultural Traditions requirement, which was sent back to the Council by the Council of Deans. We are still waiting for the deans to take action, which will presumably happen at their October meeting.

One other proposal was submitted: a course from the Writing Department on "Language, Culture, and Society," to be offered as an option in the Behavioral and Social Sciences area. This proposal was tabled at the May meeting so we could investigate possible overlap with other offerings in that area; it was passed at the September meeting and is now awaiting action by the Council of Deans.

Assessment:

Assessment was a major focus for the Council. The original general education course proposals were converted to electronic form so the Assessment Subcommittee could have access to the assessment plans included in those proposals. The subcommittee then developed a system and a rubric which enabled it to evaluate the assessment efforts related to 14 courses, looking at how those courses are currently being assessed in relation to the original plans and to the outcomes of the GE program. The result was a report, given to the relevant chairs and the provost, detailing assessment information and making recommendations for improving assessment strategies (see attachment). The Council will be evaluating the assessment efforts related to a similar number of courses each semester this year, and we will also be getting back to the departments we evaluated last year to see how they are responding to the recommendations in the report.

In addition (as mentioned in the assessment report), the Council submitted to the provost a timeline for assessment of the general education program (see attachment), which includes such things as focus groups, the ETS Proficiency Profile, and a general education assessment budget. Some of those items (focus groups, released time for GEC members to work on assessment and goals and objectives, and a M&O budget) were recommended for funding at the SPARC meeting in July, but we have not gotten the final word on whether funding will actually be forthcoming for all the recommended items.

A three-member team from the GEC attended the American Association of Colleges and Universities' conference on assessment in March of 2012. Among other things, we had a meeting with an AAC&U expert on assessment, who confirmed our belief that our work on GE assessment is on the right track.

Goals and Objectives:

The Goals and Objectives Subcommittee continued working on a restatement of General Education goals and objectives. The subcommittee has virtually finished with the area goals and objectives and has begun looking at the skills goals and objectives. We will also begin drafting a restatement of the Attitudes and Values goals and objectives, since those are particularly vague in the current version.

Other Issues and Accomplishments:

In response to a request from the College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, the GEC considered the issue of online laboratory experiences in Biology, Chemistry, and Physics classes. The result was a resolution stating that "the General Education Council fully shares the College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics' concern about online laboratories and supports the college's recommendation that any science course with a laboratory component proposed to be accepted as transfer credit must include a majority of hands-on, real time laboratory experiences for the student."

Jim Deitrick and Conrad Shumaker taught a "confluence course" which brought together students in World Literature and World Religion classes to discuss questions from the different perspectives of the two disciplines. We hope that continuing to explore such approaches to interdisciplinary teaching might serve as models for other faculty members so that we can help students see disciplinary relationships among their general education classes.

There is now a "What's New in General Education" link on the General Education web page. The recent GEC minutes and the assessment report have been posted there, and we hope to have other items of interest to faculty and students available.

Plans for 2011-12 and Beyond:

The GEC will continue to work on evaluation of assessment and on clarifying goals and objectives. The Director and at least one other member of the GEC will be attending the HLC Assessment Academy in May-June 2012, and we hope to send a team to the AAC&U conference on assessment in February 2012.

In the area of goals and objectives, we want to place particular emphasis on defining the distinctive character of our general education program (and thus an undergraduate degree from UCA) and on communicating that to students, parents, and faculty members.

The GEC anticipates that it will take part in the discussion of UCA's response to the state legislature's Act 747, which does not affect general education directly but could involve a reappraisal of the way in which the university allots its required hours. The faculty senate Committee on Committees has been asked to consider establishing an ad hoc faculty committee to make recommendations about our long-term response to the act, and the GEC looks forward to participating in that discussion.

The GEC will continue to encourage and support faculty members, departments, and colleges in developing ways to bring together the general education disciplines in an effort to show students the

relationship between branches of knowledge and the ways different perspectives can be brought to bear on important questions and problems.