

General Education Committee

Minutes for February 26, 2003

GEC members present: Katherine Baker (Registrar representative), ex-officio, (Bruce Dalgaard (IGS), Dana Gross (NSM), Steve Reece, Chair (HUM), Robert Smith (FA), Eli Townsend (Student Voting Member), Solveig Zempel (AssocDean, IGS), ex-officio.

Guests present: Diane Leblanc, Steve McKelvey.

Chair Reece called the meeting to order at 3:35.

The Committee reviewed the minutes of the February 17th meeting. With the addition of the plan that Solveig would query members of Deans Council regarding procedures for larger scale monitoring of the GE curriculum, the minutes were approved.

Math 290 (GE 888) Mathematical Modeling at the Biosphere was approved for ORC (Interim 2004). Members of GEC discussed with Steve McKelvey (proposer of Math 290) the absence of specific written course materials focusing on oral communication skills and strategies. With the expectation that some number of appropriate materials will be added to the course readings, and with clarification that the success of the course does not depend on the continued existence of the Biosphere, GEC approved the course for ORC.

Religion 230 (GE 889) Creation/New Creation was approved for BTS-T (Semester II 2004).

Art History 260 (GE 890) The Arts of Japan was approved for ALS-A and MCS-G (Semester II 2004).

Political Science 117 (GE 293) Politics and Human Rights was confirmed for HBS (this is an Interim course that will be offered in Semester I 2003, not requiring approval from GEC). Solveig reported on Deans Council's discussion of procedures for larger scale monitoring of the GE curriculum. Many and varying opinions were expressed by members of Deans Council, ranging from the belief that GEC could/should be disbanded to the notion that more vigilant and thorough oversight is needed. A clear need emerged for more facts about the GE curriculum.

Mary Cisar and the Registrar's Office have provided some preliminary information that may be helpful in determining enrollment patterns and whether students have difficulty fulfilling all of the GE requirements. Based on her initial inspection of these reports, Solveig observed that most seniors do not seem to have problems getting their GE credits; in fact, many students complete all of their GE credits by the end of their sophomore year. More - and better - information will be available when a new computer system is installed. Until then, the figures that are released need to be regarded with some caution (e.g., the computer system doesn't even differentiate between students who have left St. Olaf and those who are still enrolled).

Discussion ensued regarding the value of the review process by GEC, even though proposals are infrequently rejected. Chair Reece observed that GEC doesn't know at present either when or why GE attributes are dropped from courses. The Committee decided that the faculty should be

asked (1) to notify GEC when GE attributes are going to be dropped from courses and (2) to provide a brief rationale for the removal of GE attributes. Faculty will also be reminded of the need to notify and consult with the Director of Writing when WRI attributes are added to a course.

The Committee concurred that GEC's role is to review specific proposals, whereas Deans Council has primary responsibility for overseeing the GE curriculum and communicating to GEC any problems that become apparent.

The Committee discussed the letter to the Chair from President Thomforde regarding the General Education curriculum within the Strategic Plan.

Chair Reece will present a draft of the Committee's response at the next GEC meeting. The response will make clear the distinction between monitoring and evaluating the GE curriculum (GEC is responsible for the former but not the latter). It will also ask for clarification of the "community concerns" mentioned in the Strategic Plan draft. Depending on the nature of the concerns, GEC may or may not be able to respond. The response to the President will also suggest deleting the word "future" from the introductory paragraph in Section 2.C. The response will note the fruitful cooperation and communication that has been achieved by having a member of Deans Council and a representative of the Registrar's Office sit on GEC. Finally, the response will ask whether the mention of "changes to GE" is intended to be specific or general (philosophical). The Committee believes that there is still support among the faculty for the philosophy of the GE curriculum.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:35.

Respectfully Submitted,
Dana Gross, Secretary pro tempore