Core Undergraduate Learning Experiences (CULE) Minutes for January 20, 2015, 9:00-10:00 am, Lark

Present: Noah Engels, RaNelle Ingalls, Andrew Mara, Larry Peterson, Seth Rasmussen, Susan Ray-Degges, Amy Rupiper Taggart, Kent Sandstrom, Carolyn Schnell, and Beth Twomey

Recorder: Kelly Hoyt

Unable to attend: Marion Harris (in France), Rajesh Kavasseri, Cynthia Naughton, Lisa Nordick, and Herbert Snyder

1. We reviewed recent presentations of the model and strategized for the First Open Forum (01/21/15) and Faculty Senate (01/26/15)

   • 01/19/15: Student Senate
     o Larry thought this meeting was very positive. He asked Noah if there was any further discussion afterwards. Noah said not that he was aware of.
     o Noah said the main question of the students was what was going to happen to 189 and that was discussed with the critical thinking piece.
     o Amy said she keeps hearing that the students really like the idea of the minor or pathways because they will make GE more meaningful to students. Larry said these will be a challenge to implement this because we will have to figure out some way to coordinate them unless a department decides that it is going to be the home of some minor (i.e. sustainable design).
   • 01/14/15: Chairs and Heads (Provost’s meeting)
     o Some chairs indicated that the idea of integrating personal and social responsibility into the major was very appealing to them. They said they did a lot of this already within the major. Some majors would like to see this woven into their majors. We would need to change our present requirement in the model that this should counter-balance the emphasis of the major.
       ▪ Amy wondered if it would be deeper or more significant learning if it was built on the basis of a deeper knowledge in your field. If you just dabble in personal and social responsibility in a field that isn’t your own, do you actually get to that understanding? It seems like if it was in your field you would have more information to employ to figure out how to engage in these areas.
     o Larry said that since community engagement/service learning could also be integrated into student’s majors.
   • 12/15/14: Professional Advisors
     o Carolyn and Larry sent notes out after this meeting.
   • 12/03/14: Chairs and Heads (Special meeting)
     o Amy and Larry sent some notes after this meeting.
   • A question that came up at a couple of the meetings was about transfer students who haven’t completed their Gen Ed yet.
     o For example, how would we handle the first year experience/critical thinking requirement? Some schools that have a first year experience course have a special section for sophomores that is just for transfer students. This is a common way to deal with this issue around the country. Another way is to look at the courses they have taken to see if any of them meet the critical thinking outcomes.
RaNelle said that the content of every transfer course is reviewed to decide how it should transfer. There might be key elements that could be pulled out of them and be considered as critical thinking.

Larry asked when courses are reviewed, how often RaNelle’s office sees the syllabi. RaNelle said not very often, they usually go by course description.

RaNelle said from some of our feeder schools (about a dozen or so that we see quite often) we could probably identify some courses that would fall into that realm.

Carolyn said a common question that she has been asked is “What is the support for this model?” Are there any funds for it? The implementation of critical thinking is a concern financially.

RaNelle asked “What is the likelihood of this not being supported because there are not funds?”

It is a very good possibility that it won’t be approved because departments may not like the idea of reallocation.

Larry said another possibility would be ways to phase certain parts of this in, but that gets harder because the center piece of this model is the new critical thinking. That’s the most difficult to think about how you’re going to pay for. So how would you phase it in?

2. Responses/revisions about science labs?
   - Amy said the concern about labs not being in the new model keeps coming up.
   - Larry said that over 60% of our students are in science or engineering fields and they will be taking labs. So this affects the other approximately 35% of students.
   - Larry indicated that one argument from the lab advocates is that the lab is an important part of getting students to think about some majors such geoscience if they’ve never been exposed to this.
     - Another argument is that students really need the hands on experience to understand science.
     - A third concern is that the new model seems to be abandoning science.
   - Seth said that in freshman level labs, they really aren’t learning much in the lab besides technique. He said that as a scientist, he doesn’t see the educational aspect in terms of teaching students what science is really like.
     - He said that most labs are not coupled with classes anymore so the argument that you have to have one to have the other is obsolete.
     - Some people are just unhappy about the reduction in the number of science credits in general. Seth has explained the shift from science to critical thinking which has helped, but some people still think it should all be science and everyone should be forced to do their critical thinking in science.
   - Larry asked Noah what his experience was having to take a lab in a non-science major.
Noah indicated that it was meaningless to him. The lab really didn’t tie anything to the course. He said they basically showed up, did the lab checklist, and tried to get out of there as fast as possible.

- Seth recommended putting the lab back in the model but insist they meet specific outcomes and see how many of our current lab courses would do that.
- Seth said even if you remove all science credits from Gen Ed, it would have very little impact on the number of students taking our science courses because a majority of the students are taking the labs for their majors.
- Seth also pointed out that the people who have brought up these concerns or arguments are not the ones who are doing the lab teaching. It is not done by tenure track faculty; it’s typically done by lab coordinators and teaching staff. Only major sections are typically taught by actual faculty in those departments.
- Amy asked if there were fewer lab sections that were offered, would that free up some resources.
  - Seth said not really because science doesn’t get enough money to pay for the grad students who are teaching the labs. It would help their budget, but not really free up any resources.

3. Subcommittee Reports
   - Critical Thinking
     - Seth said they are leaning towards 3 credit course rather than 2 + 1. There are a lot of positives to making it one course rather than splitting into two.
     - One of the aspects of this course would be a shared textbook. There are a large number of critical thinking textbooks available, all of which focus on completely different things. They started compiling a short list of books that they thought fit what the committee was looking for. They are looking for a brief, but broad book and something that is inexpensive. Colleges could supplement this with a second textbook that is geared more towards their field. The sub-committee is trying to put together a core set of goals/topics for the framework of a shared curriculum.
       - Amy suggested Thinking for Yourself: Developing Critical Thinking Skills. This has been used in some of the first year writing sections. One benefit would be that we have teaching materials available already to help show how people have already used this book. Seth asked Amy to send him the info and he will bring to the committee to review.
     - Seth thinks flexibility for the colleges is going to be key to get them on board.
   - Strategic Communication
     - Committee is meeting next week and inviting Liz Crawford who specializes in Organizational Communication to the discussion.
   - Minor/Certificate, etc.
     - Noah and Larry need to meet and discuss.

4. Going Forward
   - Faculty Senate (Monday, Jan. 26)
   - Open Forum (first one is Wednesday, Jan. 21 at 1 pm in Rose Room)
If anyone has any thoughts or comments on ways to structure our message or are able to attend these upcoming items it would be beneficial.

Amy asked Noah if he could get some students to attend these meetings that could provide some positive feedback and show faculty that the students are excited about the change.

- Larry said some of the chairs commented to him that we really have the evidence in the revised benchmarking handout. That was good to hear because when Larry and Amy met with the Senate Exec Committee they were told they needed more specific evidence.
  - Larry will send out a dashboard that Paul Fisk created with the NSSE data. It’s not ready to be put out on the CULE website yet. You can look at the data year by year.

- Kent asked if we have to revamp this model where will we make the changes. He also noted that we need to be able to say how we might staff these new courses.
  - Larry said since you are cutting the number of credits (the new model cuts out 8 credits in Humanities and Social Science and 4 in Sciences) in theory, you should need fewer sections (more so in Humanities) because that’s where you’ve got 60% of students taking these courses for Gen Ed.

- Seth said he tries to emphasize to people that the new model is less discipline specific and more topic specific. We are now looking more at a core set of topics such as writing, presentation, thinking and then a flavor of disciplines on top of that. It’s not X number of credits in this discipline, x number of credits in that discipline.

- RaNelle asked where is the consideration for transfer students and how they are completing the first year critical thinking.

- Amy said that if we’ve got a lot of courses in the upper division also marked for critical thinking, if you’re a transfer student perhaps you can decide if you want to take first or upper division critical thinking.

- Kent said he thinks where we need money is in professional development. There could be some funds to support people in developing the critical thinking courses.
  - Larry said we would need money for applied communication also. There has to be space for it.

****Next meeting is Tuesday, February 17th at 9 am in Lark****