Hi Amy and Larry,

Thanks for the presentation on the new GE model today. I don’t envy you for that job!

I appreciate what the Gen Ed Committee is doing and why it is doing it. I agree that something is not working right. I am not that confident that the proposed model will do much to improve the situation. It seems that much of the concern is that if we rearrange the GE boxes and arrows, some depts are going to lose out and that will cause some stir. I wonder if the problem is not what courses students take, but how we teach the courses they do take. My guess is that most of the people that would bother to show up to one of these meetings are probably doing things alright because they care about the goals of general education. I think the biology dept is doing some cool stuff and if the new model results in fewer students taking biology, maybe that isn’t good.

Is it likely that with new boxes, depts will look to see how they can get their current curriculum to match up with the “new” requirements and end up with the same curriculum but even less actual diversity in courses and no difference in outcomes? I would expect that every department could or would currently identify how all of these questions and outcomes are met in their existing curricula – but somehow it is not working. Are we at risk of just rearranging arrows and not getting any real change?

I am not proposing we do nothing and do not believe we are doing things right. If we all taught current courses the way we should (e.g. with focus on critical thinking and communication), the current model might work fine. So I don’t think the model is the problem, I think we are the problem. If the new model encourages faculty to think differently about how we teach then we may see some progress. Teaching should be the focus but no one wants to hear they aren’t doing something right. I fear the new model may just lead to new arrows between courses and Gen Ed boxes.

I don’t mean to be pessimistic. I appreciate the enormous work that must have gone into getting things to this point. I wish I had more constructive comments but I am at a loss – unless we actually start diligently training our existing and incoming teachers how to teach (there’s an idea!). When will the primary training for being a professor not be almost solely about research? I know that you are collecting feedback so I am adding mine for you to add to the pile.

I did my best to organize my thoughts without letting this get too lengthy or take too much time – not sure if I succeeded on any of those fronts. I do support what you are trying to do. Let me know if I can help.

Sincerely,
Scott W. Pryor, Ph.D.
Associate Professor / Agricultural and Biosystems Engineering
NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY
P: 701.231.7274 / f: 701.231.1008 / www.ndsu.edu