General Education Council Annual Report

According to Senate Resolution 35-2, the mandate of the General Education Council (GEC) is to “promote excellence in general education at UIS by facilitating development approval, and evaluation of courses; developing policies and rules for implementation of the curriculum; and recommending to the Undergraduate Council and the Campus Senate policy changes of the general education curriculum.”

The Campus Senate Bylaws require that the General Education Council submit a report about its activities to the Undergraduate Council and the Campus Senate each year. This report concerns the activities of Academic Year 2009-10 and contains a proposal for changes to the general education curriculum that will be distributed to the campus community in September 2010.

During AY2009-10, Heather Dell chaired GEC in the fall and Bev Rivera stepped in as a one-semester replacement to chair GEC in the spring, when Dr. Dell went on sabbatical.

GEC engaged in the following activities:

- Reviewed 34 courses, approving 23 and tabling 9 for additional work with faculty or for revision of course approval criteria. No courses were denied.
- Reviewed numerous petitions from students to use transfer credit in ECCE categories.
- Hosted faculty retreat on Comparative Societies (September 2009).
- Decided to post schedule of meetings, agenda, and minutes of GEC meetings for public viewing. For the time being, those items are in the process of being posted on the Academic Planning website (www.uis.edu/academicplanning/). Campus Senate website will also have dates of meetings by semester.
- Revised math course approval criteria to distinguish between math skills and applied math courses. Those criteria are in draft stages. During AY2010-11, GEC members will be discussing drafts with Math Department and with departments interested in having courses approved under the applied math criteria.
- Discussed 300 and 400-level courses with general education attributes. Most of these courses are “legacies” from the old general education lists (pre-2006). Decision was made to remove 400-level courses from the general education list over the next academic year, but to retain for now the 300-level courses so that students with 60+ hours of transfer credit can continue to take courses at the upper division level.
- Reviewed Campus Senate Resolution 34-15 (the resolution that created the General Education Curriculum, approved in spring 2005) for smaller corrections and changes that need to be made as we move forward with substantive changes to the curriculum.
- Discussed possibilities for including foreign languages in the general education and ECCE curriculum. Proposal submitted by Dr. Peter Shapinsky was reviewed. Dr. Mayra Bonet was invited to GEC to discuss possibilities. GEC will receive revised suggestions from Dr. Bonet fall 2010.
• Discussed policy regarding approval of courses created by adjuncts. Adjunct-created courses must be sponsored by academic departments and departmental approval is required prior to Curriculum Committee approval or, if course is already in Banner, prior to being sent to GEC for approval.

• Discussed reductions in the number of hours in freshman composition courses (ENG101 and ENG102), from 4 hours to 3 hours. Proposals were not yet available in AY2009-10, but they have now been approved in the CLAS Curriculum Committee and will be discussed at the September 27, 2010 GEC meeting.

• Proposal for changes to the General Education Curriculum (outlined in the memo below).

Proposal for Changes to the General Education Curriculum

During the 2009-10 academic year, the General Education Council has reviewed a number of proposed changes to course approval criteria and to the General Education Curriculum itself. GEC undertook a thorough revision of the Comparative Societies Course Approval Criteria, and made changes to those criteria in response to three forces:

• National discussions hosted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities regarding global competencies for undergraduate learners;

• Feedback from faculty teaching Comparative Societies courses at a retreat sponsored by the GEC in September 2009;

• The need for more flexible criteria that encourage faculty to submit more syllabi for approval.

To view the new course approval criteria for Comparative Societies, please go to http://www.uis.edu/academicplanning/curriculum/LowerDivisionGeneralEducation.html. The General Education Council anticipated the need to review the language of course categories based on suggestions from faculty, our growing knowledge of how to make the language more transparent, and our accumulated experience regarding the curricular strengths of the faculty. This past year we worked to make the language of the Comparative Societies category more transparent and flexible. We are particularly committed to making it welcoming across disciplines. Central to reaching these goals has been the very engaged work Comparative Societies faculty did with us in a retreat to reshape the language to better mirror what has been effective in the classroom.

For the past several years, the Council also has had extensive discussions about the need for a freshman seminar that will contribute to retaining first year students by teaching college skills and helping them to more fully join and contribute to the UIS community. The Council recommends that instead of two Comparative Societies courses, that students take one freshman seminar and one Comparative Societies course.

Finally, we have reviewed the category of ECCE elective. It was formed in part as a means of supporting six hour internships that have been a part of UIS’ longstanding commitment to experiential learning. Currently, three of those hours can be completed in the general education category of Engagement Experience and the other as an ECCE Elective. The other uses of the category are more fully explored below. That said, we have received feedback that reducing the number of general education and ECCE hours could assist in recruiting and retaining those students who need to complete higher-hour majors or double majors. As such, we request feedback on the possible elimination of the ECCE elective.
From a number of suggested changes, GEC narrowed the discussion during AY 2009-10 to two changes about which the members reached consensus:

- The substitution of a Freshman Seminar for one Comparative Societies requirement; and
- The elimination of the ECCE Elective.

Please see discussion of those two changes below.

At this point, GEC needs feedback from the campus community prior to approval. Please provide initial feedback by **October 15, 2010**, so that GEC can aggregate responses for discussions during the governance process. There are several ways for the campus community to provide feedback:

GEC encourages faculty, staff, and students to provide feedback to the members of GEC:

- Harshavardhan Bapat (Ex-officio, dean’s rep., LAS) hbapa1@uis.edu
- Donna Bussell (LAS) dbuss3@uis.edu
- Heather Dell (Chair; LAS) hdell1@uis.edu
- Jay Gilliam (PAA) jigili7@uis.edu
- Richard Gilman-Opalsky (PAA) rgilms3@uis.edu
- Don Morris (Ex-officio; CBM) dmorr2@uis.edu
- John Martin (LAS) jmart5@uis.edu
- Karen Moranski (ex-officio; Provost’s Office) kmora1@uis.edu
- Tung Nguyen (LAS) tnguy2@uis.edu
- Peter Shapinsky (LAS) pshap2@uis.edu
- Natalie Tagge (Library) ntagge2@uis.edu
- Pinky Wassenberg (ex-officio; Dean, PAA) pwass1@uis.edu

Members of the faculty may also provide feedback in departmental, divisional, or college executive committee meetings as these matters are discussed at those levels. Staff members may send comments to the Office of Undergraduate Education at uisuge@uis.edu. Those comments will be forwarded to the GEC for consideration. This fall, GEC in collaboration with the Undergraduate Council will host forums on the changes to answer questions and take further feedback.

**Draft Proposed Changes to the UIS General Education Curriculum**

**A. Comparative Societies and the Freshman Seminar**

Students who come to UIS with fewer than 30 hours of college credit are required to complete two Comparative Societies requirements. Those requirements fit into the lower division general education curriculum as humanities and social science courses, and are in some cases approved by IAI for students who plan to transfer to another institution. Students who transfer to UIS with 30 or more hours are **not** required to complete Comparative Societies requirements.

*The proposal for change is to require only one Comparative Societies course for students entering UIS as freshmen. The three hours gained by that change would be used to create a Freshman Seminar, to replace UNI101 in fall 2012.*

The proposed change to the Comparative Societies requirement is related to two important shifts that have occurred since the UIS General Education Curriculum was initiated in fall 2006:
CLAS and CPAA are having increased difficulty staffing enough specialized Comparative Societies courses to fulfill the needs of our freshman population, primarily as a result of staffing changes (loss of some faculty and competing needs within departments), despite increased enrollment caps. Given that most of the faculty teaching in Comparative Societies were hired for their international expertise and given the demand for that expertise nation-wide in higher education, it is not surprising that we have lost faculty. Student demand for Comparative Societies has become complicated by enrollment patterns. Beginning with the 2007-08 academic year, some freshmen began delaying completion of Comparative Societies courses until fall of the sophomore year, in some cases because of restrictions on spring hours due to probation restrictions. When rising sophomores began in spring 2008 registering for the fall spaces before the freshmen could begin their registration process, a backlog began that continues and grows. One-third to one-half of the freshmen each fall are unable to register for Comparative Societies and therefore unable to complete the Comparative Societies requirements in the freshman year. Without the ability to increase the number of sections of Comparative Societies courses, particularly in the fall semesters, the backlog continues. Since Comparative Societies courses were designed to provide students who are new to college with some exposure to the Engaged Citizenship learning outcomes in preparation for ECCE, students who fail to get that exposure in the freshman year may be more at risk. The current staffing and current number of sections will, however, allow us to continue to deliver one Comparative Societies course to freshmen during the first year in college provided departments continue to deliver coursework. Efforts to assess the impact of Comparative Societies on student learning are underway and will be implemented during AY2010-11, and the results of the assessments will be shared with the campus community.

The Freshman Seminar

The proposed Freshman Seminar would offer a number of benefits to the faculty and departments that offer them. The seminars would be an opportunity for faculty to teach their passion—potentially the equivalent of special topics courses—and offer departments an additional opportunity for early recruiting of majors and minors. While this seminar is currently called UNI101, seminars in this proposed course category will be offered under departmental course prefixes (e.g. ACC), with resulting enrollments going to the departments. Faculty from across the campus and some staff in Student Affairs could propose Freshman Seminars that would meet the academic needs of the students. Seminars might range widely in subject matter and would not be limited to humanities or social science disciplines. Faculty and staff would be offered development funds to develop syllabi and would be offered training in pedagogical strategies for improving student skills in reading, writing, and critical thinking. Freshman Seminars would generally be taught in fall semesters, although as first-time freshman enrollment in the spring increases, a section of Freshman Seminar may be needed in the spring. The seminars would be 3 credit hours and sections would be limited to 20 students per section. All freshmen would be required to take a Freshman Seminar.

UNI101 has moved from Student Affairs to Academic Affairs, and needs to be a requirement that offers substantive academic enrichment to freshmen. While fall to spring retention of freshmen is at the highest point it has ever been since the expansion of the freshman class in 2006 (approximately 94% during the 2009-10 academic year), nearly 25% of entering freshmen end up on academic probation after the fall, putting them at risk for returning for their sophomore year (probation rates have remained consistent for freshmen since Fall 2006, ranging from 20-25%). Fall-to-fall retention was at 75% for freshmen who entered in Fall 2008 (increasing from 71% for freshmen who entered in Fall 2007 and 66% for freshmen who entered in Fall 2006), but when honors students are excluded, the fall-to-fall retention rate for our traditional freshmen (who entered in 2008) is only 66.8% (the 2009-10 retention rate will not be available until after fall census). To improve our fall-to-fall retention rate for freshmen, especially our population of traditional freshmen, we need to insure that fewer freshmen end up on probation after the fall semester, which means building academic skills and providing support during the first semester.
With full support and encouragement from Dr. Tim Barnett, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, and from Dr. Clarice Ford, Associate Dean of Student Services, GEC proposes turning UNI101 into a 3-hour, required Freshman Seminar. Research on the first year of college indicates that freshman seminars can have a marked impact on grades and retention. There is general agreement among Student Affairs and Academic Affairs staff and faculty familiar with the course that the syllabus for UNI101 used in the last couple of years is not meeting the needs of the population and is not having a substantial impact on retention. Beginning in Fall 2010, a new, more academically oriented syllabus is being piloted. The course will be a 2-hour course taken for a letter grade. UNI101 is currently not a required course, although more than 90% of freshmen are being enrolled in the course during summer orientation. Working with staff in Student Affairs and faculty who teach in the freshman year, including the faculty who offer Comparative Societies courses, GEC is considering the following set of learning outcomes for Freshman Seminars. By the end of the freshman seminar, students should be able to:

- Complete college-level writing assignments that
  - demonstrates a clear purpose;
  - demonstrates an appropriate level of formality with complete thoughts and sentences;
  - responds appropriately to the needs of different audiences;
  - uses appropriate formatting and structure;
  - uses college-level conventions of usage, specialized vocabulary, and documentation.
- Exhibit skills in critical reading for inquiry, learning, and thinking.
- Exhibit skills in integrating concepts and examples from multiple sources and perhaps disciplinary perspectives.
- Exhibit some development of oral communication skills, paying attention to content and audience.
- Exhibit the practice of college-level note-taking both in class settings and from readings that can be used to perform other tasks such as studying for tests and writing critical essays.
- Locate, evaluate, organize, and use research material from electronic sources.
- Exhibit the practice of studying for and taking exams that require critical thinking and writing.
- Exhibit appropriate study habits and time management skills for success in college.
- Exhibit appropriate behavior in a classroom setting, including preparedness, attentiveness, and respect for the instructor and other students.
- Demonstrate understanding of the Academic Integrity Policy through the appropriate documentation of sources for course assignments.

**Note:** Comparative Societies courses currently fill IAI humanities and social science requirements, and there might be some specialized advising for students who plan to transfer out. Those students will need to be advised that the new

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1 Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (1991). *How college affects students: Findings and insights from twenty years of research.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. They note, “The weight of the evidence suggests that a first-semester freshman seminar is positively linked with both freshman-year persistence and degree completion. This positive link persists even when academic aptitude and secondary school achievement are taken into account” (pp. 419-420). See also Joe Cuseo, The empirical case for the positive impact of the first-year seminar research on student outcomes. Retrieved from http://www.uwc.edu/administration/academic-affairs/esfy/cuseo/Empirical%20Case%20for%20the%20Positive%20Impact%20of%20the%20First-Year%20Seminar%20Research%20on%20Student%20Outcomes.doc. Cuseo, a well-regarded professor of psychology at Marymount College, publishes about the first-year experiences, assessment, and other higher education issues, often through online papers. He reviews much of the evidence for the effects of freshmen seminars on retention throughout the whole college career. There is a full bibliography of sources at the end of the essay.
Freshman Seminar will not fulfill those requirements. Freshman Seminars at other institutions do not regularly transfer to other institutions.

B. ECCE Elective

The ECCE Elective is one of the five required categories of the Engaged Citizenship Common Experience, the distinctive core required of all undergraduates at UIS. In deliberations on the curriculum by the General Education Working Group in 2004-05, faculty were concerned about the transition from the old system of University Requirements (Public Affairs Colloquia, Liberal Studies Colloquia, and Applied Studies Terms) to the new ECCE requirements. The consensus at that time was to make the number of hours required similar (so the 12 hours of University Requirements were replaced with 13 hours of ECCE requirements), and the ECCE Elective was created (with On-going Controversies courses as part of that Elective) in part to include courses that had been taught under the old system but did not fit into new ECCE categories. The ECCE Elective was also created to allow 300 contact-hour Applied Studies Term internships to find a full place in the new ECCE curriculum (8 hour ASTs became 6-hour ASTs, but the contact hours remained virtually the same because of the needs of community partners who sponsor the internships). At this point, after four years of delivering ECCE courses, all conversions from PACs and LSCs have occurred, most students whose catalog terms required University Requirements have graduated, and relatively few courses are taught under the On-going Controversies criteria.

Even during the creation of the ECCE curriculum, some faculty argued that we should reduce the number of hours required in the core. The Elective requires students to repeat a second course in one of the other categories (U.S. Communities, Global Awareness, or Engagement Experience) or take an On-going Controversies course. As a repetition of other categories, the Elective has been identified in many discussions with faculty and students as somewhat confusing and redundant. In addition, the imperative to reduce the total number of hours in General Education/ECCE has grown over the years. Eliminating the ECCE Elective would reduce the total number of hours in the curriculum by three.

There are several challenges associated with eliminating the ECCE Elective, which include:

- The necessary loss or conversion of On-going Controversies courses. Full-time faculty (only a couple) who teach in this category will need help replacing or converting these on-load courses.
- The loss of a general education category for the third-semester language classes. Discussions with Dr. Mayra Bonet, Director of Modern Languages, have ensued about ways to include language classes in other categories of general education and ECCE.
- The loss of a convenient mechanism for requiring a 6-hour internship. This is the most serious of the challenges and will require some discussion, particularly in departments that require a 6-hour internship. Three hours of the internship would continue to be accommodated in the ECCE Engagement Experience, but departments would need to determine whether to advise students to complete the other three hours inside the major or in General Electives. An additional concern is that if students begin requesting more 3-hour internships (as opposed to 6-hour), our placement partners may be disadvantaged because many of them want an intern for the full 300 hours (20 hours per week).

Feedback from departments who require or regularly encourage students to complete 6-hour internships is critical to the process. In addition, the GEC is seeking feedback from the Experiential and Service-Learning Programs faculty and staff and from the dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences to determine possible strengths and challenges of such a proposal to EXS-L and the community internship partners it serves.