General Education Council Annual Report 2011-2012

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.

During AY2011-12, Heather Dell chaired GEC.

I am pleased that the Council engages its members such that most have offered to renew their membership for another several years. I thank my colleagues for their very fine work in active debate, sense of humor and sustained community: Harshavardhan Bapat, Richard Baskall, Amanda Binder, Donna Buswell, Karen Moranski, Don Morris, John Martin, Richard Gilman-Opalsky, Tung Nguyen, Deb Ply, Peter Shapinsky, Steve Schnebly, and Pinky Wassenberg.

GEC accomplished the following:

- From September 12, 2011 through March 20 of this year, we reviewed 49 courses, approving 31 and tabling 9 for additional work with faculty or for revision of course approval criteria. Three courses were withdrawn. No courses were denied. We have seven more courses to review, bringing out total this year to 56 versus the unusually low 19 reviewed last year. I have now recommended that we clearly convey when we see syllabi that will take extensive work to address the course category.

- The two course categories where we find courses are most likely to need revision as US Communities and Global Awareness. To clarify some of the recurring challenges:
  - US Communities addresses diversity in the US, particularly focusing on understudied or undervalued groups, rather than a focus on the US as a whole or a topic that has a modest number of case studies about undervalued groups. This diversity should be clear in the course description, title, schedule and readings. We had hoped to rework the US Communities category language a bit to make this emphasis even more accessible, but did not have time.
  - For Global Awareness, faculty members are encouraged to explain what global themes they are addressing in the course description and the weekly schedule. Second, one of the challenges we face in internationalizing the curriculum is the historically Eurocentric approaches of the Social Sciences and Humanities in which many of us have been trained. As such, broadening the frameworks and geographic coverage we offer continues to be a struggle. In the academy in general, we are seeing a shift in teaching and scholarship beyond the traditional nation state towards transnational or global approaches.

- Set a process for a division of labor between the Council and the Associate Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Education regarding student petitions. Those petitions that request transfer credit for courses that meet IAI lower division categories can be approved or denied by the Associate Vice Chancellor, without consulting the Council. For those decisions that are less obvious, particularly for our signature interdisciplinary courses that “brand” UIS such as Comparative Societies courses and Engaged Citizen Common Experience courses, the Council will decide. This year, the Associate Vice Chancellor consulted with the chair on several petitions, reviewed many herself, with only one student petition going to the full council which was approved.

- The call for Freshman Seminar applications brought in very engaging proposals from CLAS, PAA, and EHS. We would welcome contributions from CBM. We ended up with enough seats to meet enrollment projections for Fall 2012 but continue to welcome new proposals for Fall 2013. This year, course proposals were accepted, but will be reviewed for final approval after faculty members complete the curricular development workshops this spring.
Workshops addressed the following topics: syllabus development, what you need to know to help our freshman succeed, designing assignments that build freshman skills, active learning and engagement pedagogies, and final preparation of syllabi.

- For two years, we have worked with departments that offer a statistics course to offer their majors the opportunity to have this course serve as the second general education math requirement. Most departments have decided that student need two math courses in preparation for their course on statistics.

- The Speakers Series Subcommittee from July 15, 2011 and March 15, 2012, approved 20 events and declined one. We have actively collaborated with student organizations, Student Affairs, as well as faculty from all colleges. Many of the applicants were asked to revise and resubmit to more fully address the language of the Speakers Series. We are finding we have more applications than slots. As such, early applications are particularly welcome. We thank Kimberly Craig for her exceptional work.

- The provost requested that we meet with Dr. Samuel Schuman to identify the strengths of general education at UIS and consider any improvements (date). Dr. Schuman’s report commended UIS on our internationalized curriculum, but suggested that more study abroad opportunities were needed. In addition, he evaluated our general education and Engaged Citizenship Common Experience course work as on the higher end of general education hours, but within the norm. The Undergraduate Council has received our response, which we expect will be more widely shared soon.

- We have reviewed the Engaged Citizen Common Experience Assessment Plan and expect to take it up next year. A Comparative Societies course category assessment rubric is being finalized this spring for use in the fall. We had expected to be further along on these, but found that Freshman Seminar preparations, the number of courses coming through, and Dr. Schuman’s visit have taken our attention.

**Plans for Next Year**

I am stepping down as chair, and as such, below is my best guess of what the new chair and Council members might wish to accomplish.

- Continue to work to make the forms and processes more user friendly, with forms that can be filled out on the computer, with drop down menus and room for annotative explanations, and electronic signatures.

- Clarify the language of US Communities Category Criteria by working with those who teach in this category. If time, accomplish the same process of clarification of the Global Awareness Category Criteria.

- Continue assessment of General Education and ECCE courses by category and across categories. We could complete an assessment of artifacts in the Spring of the Comparative Societies courses when most will be taught, will evaluate it as a model, and will proceed from there.