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General Studies

9-1-2022

September 2022 General Studies Council Minutes

University of Nebraska at Kearney General Studies Council

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General Studies Council
September 1, 2022 @ 3:30 pm
Warner Conference Room
**** Approved Via Email ****

Present: Sri Seshadri, Sheri Harms, Tim Obermier, Nita Unruh, Toni Hill, Rebecca Umland, Melissa Wuellner, Jeremy Dillon, Joan Blauwkamp, Joel Berrier, Rochelle Reeves, Greg Brown, Mark Ellis, Amy Rundstrom, Beth Hinga, Jessie Bialas, Joel Cardenas

Guests: Derek Boeckner, Dr. Majocha

Absent: Noelle Bohaty, Lisa Neal, Micchelle McKelvey

I. Call to order:

- **Approve Agenda:** Umland/Berrier moved to approve the agenda. **Motion carried**
- Minutes from May 5, 2022 meeting (approved via email)
- Welcome new members to GSC: Tim Obermier (replacing Jeong Hoon Choi from CBT), Toni Hill (replacing Doug Tillman from COE), and Melissa Wuellner (replacing Jeff Wells from CAS, in the Natural Sciences division rather than Humanities).
- SVCAA Dr. Kristen Majocha (New Business item moved up in consideration of Dr. Majocha's time.)
 - Dr. Majocha introduced herself and thanked the Council for the work its members have done to create the new LOPERs General Studies program. She mentioned how important general studies is to the Higher Learning Commission visit and expressed approval of the reduction in hours and streamlined assessment process in the new program and does not expect to direct the council to make any changes to the 30-hour General Studies program. She meets regularly with Director Brown, and Dean Mark Ellis will continue as her liaison to the Council.

II. Old Business (Open Items):

- Course proposals (review for final approval): Nothing pending
 - Brown stated that some departments appear to be working on new course proposals, e.g., Geography, for the next meeting's agenda.
 - Blauwkamp asked Brown to send out a call to campus for new LOPR 126 courses and remind everyone of the changes to the First Year

Seminar structure that were approved last spring (team taught across at least two disciplines, one 3-credit hour course rather than co-requisite 1+1+1 sections). Some colleges will require Educational Policy Committee(s) also approve new seminars.

- Further reflections on last year's APR (ongoing):
 - The APR review team recommended (Assessment, Recommendation 1, p. 7) that the Council “consider automating the collection of assessment data using existing campus tools to alleviate faculty workload.” This idea was discussed favorably at the May 2022 Council meeting.

Blauwkamp proposed a pilot program to test the feasibility of using Canvas to automatically collect assessment data for the General Studies program, rather than instructors needing to fill out the Excel spreadsheets. As most of the Council members are teaching GS courses this semester, the Council members themselves or selected departments could participate in the pilot. There was discussion about whether Canvas could be used for courses or departments that prefer to report holistic data (such as an assignment group or final grades) rather than data from a particular assignment. Hinga noted that UNO and UNL do their general studies assessments differently, so it might not be as simple as “if they can do it [use Canvas to collect the data], we can too.” Canvas administrators, we assume, would need to build in the learning outcomes and rubrics for each LOPER category to allow instructors to associate an outcome with an assignment or component of their Canvas grades. Brown stated he will ask Don Ray what would need to be built into Canvas to make this work and ask him to come to the next meeting to demonstrate for the Council and answer questions.

- Director Brown reminded the Council of the changes to Campus Communications (Recommendation 2, p. 9) that we agreed to at the last meeting. Meeting minutes for the past two years are now posted on the General Studies webpage, on the General Studies for Faculty Canvas organization, and the Library's ‘open spaces.’ Minutes are also included in the Faculty Senate packets. New minutes will be distributed on Canvas, ‘open spaces’, and the website promptly after they are approved.
- The APR review team recommended that the Council reconsider “whether the [First Year Seminar, LOPER 1] course should be a skills-based course to connect students to campus resources that help them successfully transition to college, or an interdisciplinary exploration of big issues.” The review team did not think the course could do both effectively (First Year Experience Course, Recommendations 1-2, p. 8).

Dillon raised the proposal that the APR team's student representative, Tristan Larson, made at the GS Council members' meeting with the review team. Larson had suggested making LOPR 126 more focused on wellness in the transition to college. Given the widespread mental health challenges that our students are dealing with, Dillon thought this was a good idea for the Council to consider.

Several members agreed that the LOPR 126 course is trying to do too much. Umland observed that the required out-of-class activities (personal and professional development needs of first-year students) are a source of confusion for students and faculty. Unruh said that it is important for departments to choose the best faculty to teach LOPR 126, not everyone is equally skilled at connecting with first-year students. Hill indicated that a Center for Teaching Excellence would help to support faculty doing this work, and others chimed in on the benefits of professional development opportunities for faculty teaching the First Year Seminar classes, whether in person or online. Wuellner stated at the last university she worked at the first-year experience course was an introduction to college course in the student's major. There was guidance as to what the course needed to include but also flexibility. Harms noted that developing critical thinking skills was the purpose of LOPR 126 that the Council agreed on when designing the new program. Brown reminded the Council that SVC Bicak's charge was that LOPR 126 should not replicate LNSK 103. Blauwkamp indicated that, since LOPER 1 had just been implemented last year and already the Council had changed its requirements, abandoning the team-taught, problem-focused approach in favor of the wellness proposal would be problematic at this time, despite Larson's proposal having a lot to recommend it. There was general agreement that faculty should be mindful of students' mental health needs and that students generally take LOPR 126 in their first semester of college. Reeves reminded the Council that the Library has a guide with its resources for inclusion in LOPR 126 and provided the link: (<https://guides.library.unk.edu/Loper1>)

III. New Business:

- SVCAA Dr. Kristen Majocha (see above)
- Preliminary Spring 2022 assessment report
 - Brown stated the preliminary assessment report is posted on the GS Council Canvas organization and asked the members to review the report for discussion at the October meeting. Once the Council has finalized and approved the report, it will be distributed to campus. The plan is also to hold some 'debriefing' meetings with faculty about the new assessment process and this first semester's results. It will take a few semesters of data collection to determine how the program is

working, but the preliminary data show very few courses where students performed more than two standard deviations below the mean for the courses in that LOPER category. Blauwkamp asked that, in addition to the number of class sections assessed, the report also shows the number of class sections taught in each LOPER category, so we can judge the rate of compliance with assessment reporting.

Hinga observed that the reflection questions might be used to demonstrate to HLC that instructors are ‘closing the loop’ by making changes to the courses in response to what was learned from assessment data. Blauwkamp noted that instructors could also be asked to communicate examples of changes they made from last semester to this semester, as departments and programs typically do for their annual assessment reports in Weave.

Brown reminded the Council that the timeline on the pilot of ITEC 290 as an option in LOPER 3 (Oral Communications) is for the Council to make a recommendation to SVCAA Majocha by November. The comparative data for ITEC 290 from Fall 2021 and Spring 2022 and for SPCH 100 in Spring 2022 are in the preliminary report and showed no statistically significant differences across courses or semesters.

- To be completed this year: Brown indicated that Tristan Larson is expected to join the Council as the new student representative at the October meeting but was unable to attend this meeting. One of Brown’s projects for this year is to work with the student representative on a process to solicit and evaluate student nominations for faculty members to be recognized for excellence in teaching General Studies courses.
- Course proposals (new): Nothing submitted.

IV. Other:

V. **Adjournment: Berrier/Dillon moved to adjourn the meeting. Meeting adjourned @ 4:17 pm.**

Next meeting: October 6, 2022 @ 3:30 pm-Warner Conference Room, Warner Hall or via Zoom