

University General Education Council
September 22, 2021, 3:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Present: K. Witemeyer, J. Smith, M. Straughn, R. Brown, K. Jang, C. Flanders, M. Atkinson, J. Jones, L. Sharp-Penya, R. Rama, R. Ashlock, D. Flanagan, S. Sanders, J. Prather, S. Talley

Absent:

Ex-officio: S. Macaluso, C. Riley, E. Gumm (B. Smith, L. May were absent)

Guests: D. Counts, J. Camp

The meeting began at 3:32 p.m.

- Call to order by J. Smith
- Prayer by J. Smith
- Minutes from 9/8/21

Motion to approve minutes by R. Brown; seconded by J. Jones; all in favor; motion passes.

Action Item

1. Revised General Education Proposal

J. Smith – I would like to start with identifying the things we need to decide as a council and vote on then begin our discussion process.

We need to address four things:

1. general requirements for bachelor's degrees
2. general requirements for associate's degrees
3. additional requirements that are specialized by degree (BA, BBA, etc.)
4. explication of student learning outcomes

We have been working under our current iteration for the last ten years. We have had feedback from students and faculty about revisions that would be beneficial. As we looked at our assessment data last time, we saw that we lost some of the connections between requirements and outcomes.

The proposal includes requirements for a 54-hour general education. The sections that include menus are populated by sample courses recommended by the committee. However, when we vote, we are voting to approve the menu's existence, not the courses

listed. We will later define criteria and have departments submit courses for approval on the list.

J. Prather – So we will vote on each course being populated in the menus? J. Smith – Yes. We are looking at implementing the new general education in the fall of 2023 so we have time to review degree plans and populate menus.

R. Brown – Will the courses need to address specific outcomes for the menus? J. Smith – We want to show the ties to the outcomes that we have. The committee has shown the connection to the outcomes. We would approve the assessment plan after the proposal is approved. R. Brown – If we are trying to assess specific items, it seems that broad arrays of courses like "upper level Bible" would make that difficult.

M. Straughn – Do we have the right number of hours and requirements? Can the outcomes be met with a different number of courses? Since it is the content not the number of hours that meets the outcomes.

R. Brown – I liked the mapping tool. It shows connections, but I'm missing the strength of connection. J. Smith – Are there particular areas in reading through the outcomes and requirements where you have some concern about numbers of hours or courses? Are we putting adequate emphasis in the right places? R. Brown – They show outcome B is the best fit to the university mission, yet it seems to have the weakest connection points in the proposed general education curriculum. Perhaps we could target an upper-level Bible sub-menu to address this specific outcome so we have some measure of control over what students take.

M. Straughn – In response to many faculty comments, many are concerned about the 15 hours of Bible. Perhaps that total is needing some adjustment. Transferability is also a factor since we have degree plans that are over 120 hours. Students value their Bible classes, but that doesn't address the number of courses/hours. It impacts all degree plans. Not just Abilene residential, but for our online campus as well. J. Prather – If you ask faculty members, would you like to have more hours in your degree, they will all say yes. But that doesn't mean the amount of hours in Bible needs to go down. J. Smith – We had 12 comments in our open chat. We have 300 faculty members, so that's only about 4% of our faculty. L. Sharp-Penya – I do think we need to remember that we are a liberal arts institution. That should influence our conversation. We also need criteria for what a good general education looks like. Who are we comparing ourselves to? R. Brown – To me, that criteria are the outcomes themselves. J. Smith – Our institutional profile is now as a comprehensive university rather than a liberal arts college. M. Straughn – It is a challenge to be all things to all people. The general education should support all the degrees, even those that aren't built on that liberal arts foundation.

J. Smith – We have ACU Dallas to consider as well with their undergraduate programs. D. Counts – I met with faculty at ACU Dallas and there was a lot of positive feedback. The majority of our students are transfer students. Some of their concerns are for having a voice regarding the criteria chosen for the menus and in the choices of courses placed on the menus. We affirm that transfer policies need to be looked at again. The majority

of our students come from three institutions or more. Their average age is 32. Anything we can do to simplify the process for them is imperative. M. Straughn – Do you have examples of how to simplify the process? Are you looking for simplification inside the gen ed curriculum or just transfer policy in general? D. Counts – Both. Texas Common Core is an issue as well. I can get more details from Scott Self who works with general education. J. Smith – We do now have a Core Complete policy to aid with transfers. They will have their university requirements met with the exception of Bible and literature for only about 15 additional hours.

J. Smith – Are the other areas beyond Bible where the number of hours is an issue? D. Flanagan – The big question I have is why is literature the only humanity option? J. Jones – I have the same question. L. Sharp-Penya – Me, too. J. Smith – This began as a broader category that was narrowed down during the committee's work. R. Ashlock – On the proposal team, we discussed this, and if I recall correctly, we thought about having the option for other courses to apply in future. Cole Bennett would be able to address this better. J. Smith – Humanities is one of three area that general education must include for accreditation. It must not focus on a skill like writing. It must be a study of broader arts and humanities. C. Flanders – Why don't we just call it "Literature"? J. Smith – SACS requires the heading of "Humanities". C. Flanders – Then we shouldn't limit it. M. Straughn – History can be humanities, so why is it carved out into a separate requirement? J. Smith – At ACU as a discipline, history is considered part of the humanities. We can look at criteria there. L. Sharp-Penya – Broadening the scope of humanities would help with transferability. J. Prather – Can we make a motion to expand that category? J. Smith – UGEC will be able to vote to amend any part of this proposal that you wish. S. Sanders – I would like to ask for time to get clarification on why the humanities section was crafted in the first place before we make any big changes. I'm hearing tension between transferability questions and the shared experience of a general education curriculum. I would like to argue that having one literature course required should be included, perhaps on its own and not part of a humanities menu. R. Rama – When we are talking about humanities, we are not talking about more hours but just expanding the menu. L. Sharp-Penya – We had literature as a stand-alone before. Why not have a stand-alone literature requirement? J. Smith – I will follow up with Cole Bennett about the history of the shaping of this requirement. I will send the answer to you before we meet. R. Ashlock – Having a literature class is important. I think they approached other departments, but because of seats and class size, more sections and staffing issues, there were practical reasons why departments were hesitant about being included. E. Gumm – The bulk of our students are coming from Texas schools. You can be core complete and never take a literature class. Our core complete students still have to take a literature course. Is literature a distinctive piece of our identity at ACU? That's what we need to decide. S. Sanders – Cole Bennett looked at other options for humanities, but sophomore literature was all that survived. D. Flanagan – Transferability is also an issue for students going out. State schools no longer accept Bible courses as humanities. We will need to look at that side as well.

L. Sharp-Penya – The oral communication requirement mentions that it should be a COMM prefix and an introductory public speaking course. Our intent as a department is to offer one course to fulfill that requirement. So we would propose having a number

listed and not a menu. J. Smith – The challenge is that we don't have the identified course created yet. We will want to seek greater clarity on this before the vote. L. Sharp-Penya – We don't have the staffing to offer more than one public speaking course, so we will only offer one. We will be developing COMM 120. We are worried that having an open range of numbers will create confusion for students which is why we would prefer listing a specific course. J. Jones – Having an open menu gives a department freedom to develop a new course in future.

M. Straughn – I'm concerned with the history menu being narrowed now. What is the impact on the history and political science departments carrying the additional demand? As we decrease flexibility about what students can transfer in or take, we need to be aware of the implications on departments. J. Smith – Political science is included on several of our menus currently and historical literacy largely dominated by history. We are taking a 3-hour requirement and doubling that. That does present a question from a staffing perspective. However, our job is to address the curricular component. The administrative perspective would happen elsewhere. It is very important to keep these issues in mind, however.

J. Smith – We are on the large side of general education hours. It tends to work better for our ACU Dallas degrees because students can transfer in more general education coursework and they have more elective hours to facilitate this as well.

The meeting adjourned at 4:59 p.m.

Addendum from Cole Bennett:

Dear UGEC:

Here is some background information concerning two Gen Ed proposal questions arising from the most previous UGEC meeting.

1. "Humanities" Menu.

Originally, the committee created a six-hour menu called "Humanities and Fine Arts," with three hours designated for literature (ENGL or foreign language literature) and another three hours as a choice between a second literature class OR a selected class from Art, Music, or Theater.

As that plan moved forward with our committee and the Provost's office, we decided we needed to pare back three overall hours due to many factors (many people wanted to keep an elective, for example), so our first published draft contained a three-hour Humanities and Fine Arts requirement that still kept a choice between literature and the others mentioned.

Two issues changed our minds for the revised draft: First, the chairs of those three fine arts departments demurred about such an arrangement, some explicitly hesitant to

name many courses that non-majors might take with good outcomes as general education courses (Theater had only one or two, for instance).

Second, during the second round of listening sessions, many faculty vociferously objected to the idea that a student might avoid a sophomore literature course during the general education track; that is, in a general climate where so much careful reading and writing skills are evermore being relegated to substitutionary apparatuses (AP, dual credit, etc.), these faculty were quite unwilling to allow the choice between literature and fine arts. So we nixed the latter.

We did decide to keep the "Humanities" menu title rather than make it a "Literature" title because our peer and aspirational institutions with literature gen ed requirements place them under a "Humanities" menu; we sought consistency therein.

2. Oral Communications

Concerning the oral communications requirement, the committee was quite committed to including an introductory speech class, more or less commensurate with the common Texas core class Speech 1315. We felt uncomfortable listing COMS 211 as an exemplar of that requirement as we felt it is not an introductory course.

3. History and Political Science

We felt VERY strongly that the HIST requirement should be populated only with courses with an HIST prefix. Virtually every course at ACU mentions history as relevant context to some degree; to allow "history courses from other disciplines" to count in this menu would be a terrible precedent to set.

Sincerely,

Cole Bennett