

General Education Committee

Western Connecticut State University

Annual Report 2008-2009

Members: Daryle Brown (PS), Ron Drozdenko (Ansell), Robin Flanagan (At-Large, Chair), Veronica Kenausis (Library, Webmaster), Patty O'Neill (First Year Coordinator), Chuck Rocca (A&S), Alba Skar(A&S), Linda Vaden-Goad (Dean), Kerry Walker (VPA), Alan Anderson (CUCAS rep), Matt Buchta (Student Rep).

Meeting Times: The committee met on the first or second Friday of the month: on September 5, 2008, October 3, 2008, November 14 2008, December 5, 2008, February 6, 2009, March 13, 2009, May 1, 2009. The April 3 meeting was canceled because there were no agenda items.

During the 2008-2009 academic year the committee focused on two main tasks in addition to the usual designation of new courses as qualifying for general education credit: trying to get the first year program to full capacity, as previously approved through faculty governance, and beginning the process of assessing the general education program, as suggested by NEASC.

First Year Program: the first year program, now completing its second year and approaching its third year, was designed and approved to be at full capacity for the incoming first year students, meaning that all incoming freshmen would be enrolled in three first year courses during their first 30 credits. Despite university-wide approval for a program centered on faculty teaching to their strengths, based on extensive empirical research, and at the lowest cost to the university, the program is still in need of substantially more support from faculty and administration. Faculty seem reluctant to teach their courses to first year students and the administration just doesn't seem to be able to invest many resources in the program. We want to remind the university community that the program was designed by one of President Schmotter's Values and Visions subcommittees based on an extensive review of empirical literature, and has gone through every stage of faculty governance. We want to remind the university community that the program utilizes existing general education courses that have been slightly retooled (smaller class size, more feedback) to give first year students a more solid foundation. This would mean, faculty, better prepared students in your upper level courses, as well as, administrators, better retention of our first year students and the substantial savings to the university that accompany this. Going into the third year of the program, we are still only able to offer first year courses to approximately one third of the first year class. So, this is still at the pilot stage and we won't know the effect of the full program for some time yet. Results of the pilot have been quite promising in terms of retention, but we are anxious to get the full program going. Please help the committee find more faculty and more resources for this valuable program.

Assessing the General Education curriculum: the committee is taking a two-pronged approach to this task. As a committee, we decided that the curriculum should be assessed, eventually, using samples of student work done as part of regular coursework. We studied an assessment program like this already in place at Oklahoma State University, and met (virtually) with the full-time coordinator of that

assessment program. This assessment program involves the sampling of student projects from current senior coursework. Faculty would be given a small stipend to assess the (anonymous) projects over the summer using a common rubric. Results could be used to improve the general education curriculum, and may be useful to department curriculum decisions as well. This is the first prong of our approach, and it will need substantial support and patience from the entire university community. In the meantime, we have been working with Jerry Wilcox to assess the general education curriculum using an existing, nationally normed assessment tool: the MAPP. This instrument assesses writing, math, critical thinking, scientific reasoning, and is administered to first year students and seniors. We administered the MAPP to first year students during Fall, 2008, and seniors during Spring, 2009. Watch for results of this assessment soon.

This committee continues to be filled with incredible, dedicated, creative faculty and students, willing to meet early Friday mornings to improve the curriculum for all WCSU students. I continue to be amazed by the committee members and encourage all members of the university community to attend the monthly meetings. The new chair (Chuck Rocca) has already taken the bold step of making the meetings more accessible to everyone by moving the meeting time for the 2009-2010 academic year to Friday afternoon. Please join them, or watch their work on the committee's website (<http://www.wcsu.edu/committees/gened/committee.asp>)

Submitted 5/12/09 by Robin Flanagan, Chair of the General Education Committee 2008-2009.