

Meeting Notes

Item	Description
Name/Title	General Education Review Committee
Date	March 13, 2014
Time	3:15-4:00
Location	200 McKenny
Members Attending	Chris Foreman (co-chair), Ron Fulkert (for Konnie Kustron), Christopher Gardiner, Susan Haynes (for Zenia Bahorski), Peggy Liggitt, Gerald Newberry, Mary Rearick, Bob Winning, Michael Tew
Absent	Daryl Barton, John Koolage (co-chair)
Guests	Ann Blakeslee, Margaret Crouch, Marty Shichtman

Meeting with members of General Education Reform Committee

Chris Foreman asked the Reform Committee members what was their intent in building in this periodic review in addition to regular assessment. Marty Shichtman stated that the committee believed that any kind of intellectual apparatus must be looked at periodically given that the program operates within changes at both the university and higher education levels. The committee recognized that, over time, it would be necessary to look at what was considered important and try to determine how to make things better.

Ann Blakeslee stated that the Reform Committee never viewed General Education as a static program, but rather at something that would be dynamic. Members asked themselves what students would need to know when they graduate and understood that, as the world progresses and disciplines and fields change and grow, that would need to be reviewed.

Margaret Crouch remarked that there had been no review of the previous general education requirements for at least the previous fifteen years and there were multiple aspects to consider in creating the program. For example, General Education classes had been housed in the departments that taught them and the committee wanted it to be clear that General Education was an independent and intentional program designed with specific purposes in mind. Both students and faculty should be aware of why these courses were included in the program. In addition, the transfer part of the program had to work. The committee considered the whole framework, not just the classes, and wanted the program in its entirety, and all that it was intended to do, to be reviewed.

Susan Haynes asked, given that when the program was set up there was an idea of what students should know when they graduated, how does the Review Committee understand what students were intended to learn back then and what outcomes should be now?

Marty Shichtman stated that the Reform Committee had an extensive document in which it tried to voice the intentionality of the program. One of the things that committee recognized is that General Education is, almost by definition, incomplete. Students are never going to know what you need them to know. Compromises are made as you try to

realize what is possible within the realm of credit hours, offerings, and possibilities given that students need to graduate within a finite period of time. The Reform Committee had to struggle with considerations of what is possible, knowing that you can't do it all. The result was what it believed this university could do at its best, within certain kinds of limitations.

In response to the question of what learning outcomes should be now, Chris Foreman pointed out that the Review Committee is looking at various methods of information gathering, including benchmarking, considering national trends and expectations, and examining other General Education programs. Chris Gardiner emphasized that the charge of this committee is to consider all of these things from the top level only. The Assessment Committee looks at the detailed perspective. Margaret Crouch mentioned that student outcomes were detailed in the minutes of the Reform Committee.

Chris Gardiner asked for the Reform Committee members' personal opinions on how things have worked out so far compared with how they thought it might be. Margaret Crouch stated that the Reform Committee had been promised by the provost at the time that student credit hours would not be a determining factor. However, there have been major upper administration changes leading to a situation where this is not the case. With the focus on credit hour production, many departments are having part-time instructors teach the majority of their General Education classes. This has had huge implications for the intentionality of the program.

Marty Shichtman stated that the Reform Committee anticipated that with departments not being penalized with regard to credit hour production, they would have the opportunity to offer important courses taught by faculty. However, the unanticipated focus on credit hours has instead led to departments not only offering more and more courses, but creating more and more prefixes. The Reform Committee built in the requirement that students could not take courses within the same discipline in the same prefix. Departments have generated new prefixes to get around this. Margaret Crouch added that the Reform Committee was able to eliminate from the catalog the requirement of the major or minor departments for specific General Education courses for their students (which were usually within their own departments); however, this is still happening in practice. This goes directly against the spirit of General Education, which is a broad education not focused solely on a major or a minor.

Ann Blakeslee added that the Reform Committee placed a lot of emphasis on the nature of General Education and translated this into the program. For example, no prerequisites were allowed on any of the courses. Looking back, the committee was ahead of the curve in terms of learning outcomes. The AAC&U came up with a set of outcomes later that were almost identical. In addition, outcomes were not generated in isolation but took into account faculty input from across campus. This was very much a faculty driven process.

Michael Tew asked to what extent the Reform Committee tried to discourage double dipping between major and General Education programs. While departments may not have specified which General Education course to take, it became obvious to students

which courses to take that would also satisfy major requirements. Marty Shichtman answered that the committee anticipated that students might choose a major because of interest sparked by their General Education class choice and then choose another course that satisfied both programs based on that interest. What they did not anticipate was that departments would spin off other prefixes to enable students to take more General Education classes within that department. Margaret Crouch commented that while the committee didn't want to prevent students from pursuing courses, they did recognize the problem.

Ann Blakeslee brought up the Reform Committee's concern with Advising and the advice some students were getting to get General Education classes "out of the way" and to take "easy" classes. The committee's vision was to have students take ownership of their General Education, to make informed choices, and to have a variety of offerings that would be of interest to them from which to select.

Ron Fulkert inquired as to thoughts on the lack of computer technology and other technology courses. Margaret Crouch stated that one concern was with courses that were solely part of a department with no oversight from elsewhere, of which computer science was one. The thinking was that with General Education being a program, the program should assess and have governance over its courses. As far as the computer science course itself was concerned, at the time students seemed to know more about technology than committee members. The committee did talk to the department head of Computer Science about the possibility of having a test that all students had to take on entering EMU, similar to the requirement in place at Washtenaw Community College, to evaluate their knowledge of technology and if deficiencies existed to come up with ways of meeting these.

Marty Shichtman explained that the Reform Committee struggled at great length as to what technology means and brought in people from College of Technology and the Computer Science department to explore this. However, for the committee it never became clear what would be taught in a technology requirement. The information available on student knowledge of technology at the time supported the view that what would be taught was material students already knew. The data showed that students were comfortable with many kinds of devices and if a technology course meant learning specific kinds of software, should that be part of General Education? There was no vision of what would be in a class that everyone should have to take. Ann Blakeslee agreed that this is still not clear and remains context and discipline specific.

Ron Fulkert inquired as to the fate of the assessment of student technology skills and stated that it did make it to Faculty Senate. Marty Shichtman mentioned that the Reform Committee was told that the university would make available apparatuses to enable students to self-learn various kinds of software, but this did not materialize. Ron Fulkert asked if there was any assessment going on regarding the general idea of students having a technology base when they graduate. Chris Foreman stated that this committee could consider such an assessment, but the question remains as to what would that be. Mary Rearick commented that there are proficiencies that our students should possess given

today's online learning environment. Margaret Crouch responded that these can be met in many different ways and the question is should this be done generally or as part of a major or minor program of study.

There was discussion of the Writing Intensive requirement. Margaret Crouch mentioned that this has been very successful, with most departments stepping up to develop such a course and with data to support student outcomes. In response to the criticism of redundancy where these skills would be similar across departments, it was mentioned that there is nothing to stop interdisciplinary development of such a course, although this can be a challenge.

Chris Gardiner asked how the Reform Committee members feel about how the Learning Beyond the Classroom (LBC) requirement has worked out. Marty Shichtman stated that while the implementation is still clunky in terms of registering for events, having an apparatus that compels students to challenge themselves intellectually, in ways they might not have otherwise, is of great value. In response to the question of if there are too many LBC courses and if this detracts from the requirement, he stated that the courses that have received committee approval are worthwhile, while others have been kicked back and not approved.

Margaret Crouch explained that the Reform Committee comprised people from many different areas of the university, not just Academic Affairs. LBC was one of the ways that co-curricular activities were incorporated into the program. There were a number of different motivations in creating the LBC requirement such as getting student to identify with the intellectual community of the university, encouraging students to do research over and above that needed for their coursework, helping students become professionalized, and studying abroad.

Peggy Liggitt commented that EMU's General Education program has gained national recognition and asked the Reform Committee members to mention areas of success that may not be generally acknowledged. Marty Shichtman referred to the significance of intentionality in the areas of diversity, global awareness, and experiencing the arts.

Margaret Crouch explained that not only was the committee comprised of representatives from many constituencies, but everyone took the reform as an intellectual exercise from the beginning and was cognizant of the intentionality of the process. Members read books about how not to reform a General Education program and what a liberal arts education should be, as well as having conversations about intellectual values and issues. In the process everyone became detached from their own self-interest and was able to look at the big picture for the university.

Ann Blakeslee pointed out that the committee established an implementation structure that is still maintained and the integrity of which remains intact. In looking at other institutions, it is apparent that such structures are often compromised, and often very quickly, but this hasn't happened here.