Grand Valley State University

*General Education Committee*

Minutes of 10-24-11

**PRESENT:** Kirk Anderson, Jim Bell, Jason Crouthamel, Alisha Davis, Chris Dobson, Emily Frigo, Roger Gilles, Gabriele Gottlieb, Gary Greer, Paul Jorgensen, Penney Nichols-Whitehead Keith Rhodes, Paul Sicilian, David Vessey, Judy Whipps

**ALSO PRESENT:** C. “Griff” Griffin, Director of General Education, Krista McFarland, General Education Office Coordinator

**ABSENT:** Deb Bambini, Susan Carson, Ruth Stevens

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| Agenda Items | Discussion | Action / Decisions |
| **Approval of**  **Oct 17 Minutes** |  | Review moved to 10/31/11. |
| **Agenda** |  | Approved. |
| **Study Abroad** | Mark Schaub and Rebecca Hambleton from the Padnos International Center attended the meeting to discuss the possibility of the Study Abroad experience fulfilling the upper-level Issues category, similar to the current Themes process.    Mark gave an overview of the current Study Abroad program. Annually, over 700 students a year study aboard for a high-impact learning opportunity. The General Education Foundations courses lend themselves to the study abroad experience and the upper-level GE component is an ideal way for students to do a semester abroad. GE helps them to succeed at semester abroad, and more importantly is the co-curricular and international context. Some of the skills that GEC, and others measuring in the field, are talking about for the upper-level component are a good curricular spot for Study Abroad.  Becca added that there has been a lot of success with Study Abroad as a part of the current Theme structure and students are excited about doing in the upper-level.   * In most cases, students are taking 12-16 credits for a semester abroad. * Current number 100 semester abroad, 30 doing year abroad. Not huge numbers, but if not theme place for that it will go down.   A committee member thought that the overall Study Abroad experience is great, but with a new GE curriculum do you see it meeting the skills goals? Mark responded that the skills goals do match. Study abroad is not an “Issue” but the skills are being met and students are getting the skills (referenced a comprehensive report from Georgia), just not as an equal fit as an Issue.  The committee member followed up with the example of problem solving with multidisciplinary approaches. How do you see these specific skills issues fitting? Mark responded that the issue of problem solving is addressed in a curricular sense. Students have to chase down course approves whether in GE, or their major or minor. They do curricular work that other students don’t have to. It might seem insignificant, but the sum total of their process is significant. Students are designing their own intellectual problems and by developing their own curriculum and proposal before working with Becca. That is an intellectual problem they solve for themselves.  A committee member added that from the student prospective, study broad is the most educational thing can do and is life changing. She thinks GE should make it work in the program and that students could find courses that could be applied to Issues. Integration happens with the place they are taking the curriculum and this is an interesting way to do integration. Collaboration can also be done. Problem solving is hard to say ensure that they got it, but you can think about problem based learning with others. It does seem that when students are in another environment they still have to think about social issues to solve. Problem solving might be in retrospect.  Mark added that every student has to deal with what means to be an American. That is a big challenge for students to get their heads around. It will be difficult for students to address any goals in retrospect. This would be an issue for students because they won’t take study abroad unless it will court towards their degree.  Becca added that students are learning to integrate in new environment and learn all kinds of things. They are getting exposure to these skills on a day-to-day basis and part of their experience is an exposure to a variety of issues.  A committee member commented on two issues she saw with study abroad. The thinks that the experience of study abroad is great, but if GE defines skills goals as classroom setting and pulling from different disciplines. She agreed that students solve problems, but not in the same way that GEC has in mind. GEC is defining as academic skills goals. Do you think study abroad could still achieve? If we are asking for academic accountability that than GEC has to upload within the program.  A committee member agreed and said he was divided about whether or not study abroad should be included with GE upper-level component. He was not sure how study abroad could mesh with the Issues goals. The easy solution would be to say that it doesn’t match and it is a superior experience. What do you think the impact would be if study abroad fills one of the two issues courses.  Mark responded that the skills are being met, but agrees that the courses the students are taking are not GVSU GE context so they can’t be equal; they have to be thought of as different. The faculty from these international schools are still teaching context that is challenging students in ways that we can’t. He is hesitant for study abroad only being a partial fulfillment of the GE upper-level component. It needs to be seen as a substitute or alternate path; more like a GE capstone experience. It still draws on previous range of GE courses and used in a holistic way in an intellectual environment. To say that it only partially meets the upper-level is not the right idea. It still supports the goals, but entirely different thing. It’s the idea that here on GVSU campus students get through the Issues, but for the 3% of students doing study abroad this is an upper-level GE capstone that challenges you in multiple ways.  A committee member agreed, but wondered if it opened the door for other programs to do something similar. The Director responded that it hasn’t opened a door and is not precedence setting. GEC has the authority to say no to other requests. It is similar to Honors; they also achieve GE in a very different way.    Mark added that there are a number of students that have extensive military experience and request Study Abroad credit, but the study abroad experience has to be tied to courses. We are not just facilitating learning experience; we also have to have academic courses for it to count.  A committee member thought that the study abroad experience is amazing and broadening and should be given GE approval. While we can’t quantify of measure the skills, but we know they are certainly there.  A committee member asked about the actual study abroad experience. She has heard that some experiences end up being small groups of American students in a protected environment. If the GE program makes an exception for study abroad, how do we assure that kind of experience would not be a substitute for the program.  Becca responded that this would not be the case for a semester abroad. Those would be programs that are very focused on a specific problem. Mark added that the concern is valid for small faculty led programs, but a semester abroad is very different. The Padnos Center feels the same way; they don’t want to spend time sending students into that type of situation. Again, it is important to acknowledge that the students are taking course from faculty at the international school they are attending.  A committee member asked for clarification – if study abroad is approved for GE, it would only be semester long programs and they would take two courses at the 300-400 level with different prefixes. If so, he would be okay with approving. Becca asked if he meant how the courses count when they transfer back to GVSU. If so that is already part of the Theme program. Most students are taking courses from different disciplines. The 300-400 level can be difficult to do. The classes are not always equal, but rather comparable. Sometimes students can’t take higher level courses because of the structure at the school or experience needed to take the upper-level course.  Mark and Becca were excused from the meeting and the committee continued to discuss the options. The Chair will be in touch with them after the committee makes a decision on study abroad.  The Chair asked the committee if they are talking about a substitute or alternate path for the upper-level GE, or if we are focused on equal equivalencies. Whatever side we end up on determines the kind of proposal we will have.  A committee member thought that the course level was important and it should be a certain academic experience abroad; not just a course lecture of life experience.  A committee member asked why the case for study abroad is not being made for World Perspectives credit. The Director responded that they do also get that credit, but 98% of students already have WP category fulfilled by then because most are juniors or seniors.  A committee member asked if there is a percentage of freshmen and sophomores that could double dip. The Director responded that if the student is just looking for foundations than the department signs off so it never comes to GE if it is a one-to-one transfer. When students do a Theme abroad it doesn’t count as a Foundation and Theme; it’s sent to the Records auditors and they know not to count it twice. We would have the same provision with Issues courses. Students still have to get department approval either way, but still can only get credit for one or the other. The Director is pretty confident about this process.    A committee member asked why we wouldn’t tell students what their choices are at the other schools since this is a unique program. The Director responded that PIC tries to be flexible. It can really depend on where a student goes to study abroad. Sometimes a student gets stuck with course availabilities and for us to add a rigorous bar make make it more difficult. Some students don’t know what courses they can take until they show up on site. Currently, GE approves 4 courses that can count. PIC already has a list of courses approved and how they transfer, but it is still up to the students to put courses together for a Theme and this takes a lot of time.  The Chair took a straw poll and the majority of committee members were in agreement to accept study abroad as an alternate and equivalent experience to the GE upper-level component. There was agreement that the committee could say they are committed to study abroad as getting GE credit, but still working out the details.  A committee member was in agreement, but thinks it important to pick out courses from other schools. The Chair noted that this would require a proposal system and evaluation of the courses to make the equivalency work which would be difficult to do.  A committee member said his concern was not whether it was a great experience, but rather should it be a substitute for GE. If there is commitment to more than one prefix and more than one course that transfers back at the 300-400 level than he would be in support.  The committee will revisit discussion on Study Abroad next week. | The majority of committee members were in agreement to accept study abroad as an alternate and equivalent experience to the GE upper-level component, but still working out the details.  The committee will revisit discussion on Study Abroad next week. |
| **Possible Enrollment Cap for Issues Courses** | The Chair started by proposing the idea of a cap of 40 students in Issues courses, knowing that 17% of sections would have to recalibrate as they are currently above 40. This would be specifically address the goal of Collaboration. Is this a feasible number for the GE proposal?    A committee member thought that 40 still seemed difficult to manage, but realized this could be different in different fields. The Chair added that if the ideal group size is 4-6 students than we are talking about 8 groups.  A committee member commented that we should be careful in how we talk about the cap. The Chair responded that the proposal could state that we believe that the goals can best be met with courses under a certain number of students. Courses can still have less enrollment, we are just saying 40 would be on the high end. This would also be subject to approval by Provost.  A committee member had concerns about units be pushed to increase. Faculty would love to have smaller courses, but that could be difficult since the push is going the other direction. It depends on the type of class, but some larger course can manage well. The Director added that of the 17% of courses with enrollment over 40, some are also at the 100-200 level and will no longer be a part of the upper-level.  A committee member said that she would recommend smaller class sizes, but not require it. The Director had concerns with not making this a requirement now. If it is not we will see the class sizes go back up.    A committee member teaches a GE course with 80 students. They are put in groups of 6. He is able to assess, but it doesn’t allow him much of an opportunity to meet with each of the groups. This is very different that teaching the goal of collaboration. A course of 40 students doesn’t seem feasible for this and 40 would definitely be at the top end.    Motion to recommend requiring a cap size of 40 students in the GE upper-level courses; seconded. Motion passed. | Motion to recommend requiring a cap size of 40 students in the GE upper-level courses; seconded. Motion passed. |
| **Unit Survey Results: Teaching and Assessing the 3 New Goals** | ***We will discuss the results of the survey asking units to rate the ease with which they could teach the new goals of collaboration, ethical reasoning, and problem solving in each of the Foundations and Cultures GE courses.***  ***Our goal is to devise a distribution plan for teaching and assessing all eight of the goals proposed for the Foundations and Cultures categories: critical and creative thinking, written communication, oral communication, information literacy, quantitative literacy, collaboration, ethical reasoning, and problem solving.***  Handouts with the unit head responses to the goals survey and with enrollment and number of sections were distributed for review.    There are three possible options for distributing the goals (see handout).  Option 1 – guaranteed coverage that students will receive all goals  Option 2 – not guaranteed coverage, but high likelihood that students will receive all goals  Option 3 – very little sense of guarantee, the goals will be in the program but not sure how  A committee member mentioned that some units were concerned about responding with a C (unwilling or unable to teach and assess goal) because this would automatically throw out their course. The Chair responded that we will not throw out any courses; we would talk to them about their concerns and re-invite them.  The Chair added that some responses raised concern about academic freedom. This is not an issue of academic freedom, it is not about content and how the goals are taught, rather it is about whether or not the course can teach the goals.  The committee continued to discuss the variables for each of the distribution options. A committee member said that the difficult part of assigning goals by categories is that we already know some courses will be able to do it and some won’t. Coverage is important, but we have to be careful not to push. A committee member responded that we need to guarantee that students will get the goals; if we don’t assign by category some could navigate and not ever have exposure to them.    The Chair asked the committee to pause on the issue of coverage and exposure to students. Surely there is a way to know the number of sections and students and likelihood of their exposure. If so, we can confidently say what the lowest number and percent of likelihood that this would be a concern.    There was committee agreement that option 2 seems the most feasible and likely. The committee can continue to think about and trouble-shoot the options.  A committee member asked if the goals were chosen by a department would they be good for the 3 year assessment cycle. The Director responded that yes, we are just asking them to commit to the 3-year assessment cycle. The Chair added that he didn’t envision a lot of switching by departments. If they did it would be to switch to another goal in the same category, not just any goal.  The Chair will work on the final draft of the proposal this week. There may be faculty input from the campus forums on Wednesday and Thursday to take into consideration. Once a distribution plan is agreed upon that will be the final part of the Foundation part of the proposal.  There was committee agreement that option 2 seems the most feasible and likely. The committee can continue to think about and trouble-shoot the options. The Chair reminded the committee that the proposal is just a paper commitment. We can continue to have bigger conversations about these details. | There was committee agreement that option 2 distribution plan seems the most feasible and likely. The committee can continue to think about and trouble-shoot the options.  The Chair will work on the final draft of the proposal this week. |
| **Moratorium on Course-Change and New-Course Proposals** | Discussion moved to next week’s meeting. |  |
| **Adjournment** | There is a lot of draft material that the Chair will be pulling together for the proposal. Next week the committee will need to review the materials to make sure everyone is in agreement with the proposal. The intent is to have the proposal posted to the GE website by November 1st or 2nd. Encourage faculty members to respond with questions or comments on the online discussion board or by sending comments to [gened@gvsu.edu](mailto:gened@gvsu.edu)  Academic Senate will also have a forum about the proposal in early December.  Next week’s meeting will also return to the discussion of Study Abroad, review how the forums went, and to discuss the moratorium on course proposals. | The intent is to have the proposal posted to the GE website by November 1st or 2nd.  Meeting adjourned at 4:25 pm |