

Report of the Committee on General Education to the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee October 16, 2020

At our first meeting, the Provost charged the committee with its task, and announced that Sue Pearlmutter would be her designee on COGE. COGE will meet again in October to discuss the General Education review process, as well as the state of writing instruction on campus. Please see the attached minutes of COGE's first meeting with its new chair.

In the fall of 2020, the college began a process of review of its current General Education Program, now almost ten years old. The review process has been initiated by the Provost and implemented by faculty who sit on the college's Committee on General Education. The charge is to direct a faculty-led, transparent process. For the academic year, 2020-21, COGE's task is two-fold: first, committee members will engage in information-gathering about the current General Education program from other faculty, students, and alumni. Department chairs will report to COGE on what faculty share about the current Gen Ed program. From there, COGE will design and implement a faculty-wide survey by the late fall of 2020. Afterwards, faculty discussions will take place in the spring term of 2021 regarding survey results and how best to move forward. COGE will also invite student and alumni feedback into the review process.

COGE has been encouraged to follow NECHE guidelines when reviewing our current program as well as in consideration of any possible changes or revisions to the current program. NECHE's accreditation requires General Education programs to be "coherent and substantive and that prepare students for the world in which they will live." General Education program should be amenable to the assessment of student learning, and should ensure "adequate breadth as well as balance regarding the arts and humanities, the sciences including mathematics, and the social sciences." According to NECHE, General Education programs must require the equivalent of 40 semester credits when part of a bachelor's degree program.

COGE has put out a request to add a discussion of General Education to departmental meeting agendas for October and November. From there, a faculty survey will be created and shared. As the committee gathers faculty input, they will also be researching the status of General Education programs around the region as well as drawing upon other expertise, including the American Association of Colleges and Universities, regarding the latest recommendations and best practices for General Education. COGE's activity will culminate in a report with recommendations to be submitted to the college by the end of the spring term, 2021.

Committee on General Education 9/21/2020
4pm--5:50pm

Meeting Minutes

In Attendance:

W. Martin, D. Espinosa, C. Falangola, J. Zornado (chair), S. Costa, K. Almeida, D. Gill, T. Ender, J. Capece, M. Michaud, B. Caouette, H. Tate, S. Pearlmutter, S. Brown (for Maureen Reddy).

Excused:

M. Baker, J. Wu, J. Fagre

Absent:

Earl Simson

The chair called the meeting to order at 4:00pm via Zoom chat.

Provost Introductions

H. Tate opened the meeting with a charge to COGE to consider the question if now is the time to explore the possibility of revising our current General Education program. She asked the COGE consider going forward at a deliberate pace that would be transparent and led by faculty. She indicated that the AAC&U might support our process either with information, or consultants. Academic practice and accrediting requirements encourage us to reflect on current programs, and for General Education, she offered, "it's time." She went on to explain that such a project is difficult even under the best of circumstances, which underscored the need for a transparent, faculty-led process that would begin with wide faculty input on the current Gen Ed program.

COGE Member Introductions

Each member introduced themselves and discussed their connection to Gen Ed courses and programs.

Chair's Statement

The chair thanked the members for attending and reiterated the Provost's remarks. COGE would begin the process by discussing the question, in the hope that we might reach an agreement on how best to go forward with the process. Perhaps in the midst of our current crisis we might find the possibility to improve on what we do in the hopes of serving our students for the world after graduation. Brief discussion followed. The chair announced that the Zoom meeting was being recorded and that minutes would be taken in efforts towards transparency.

Discussion: Crisis and Possibility

The question of whether COGE should embark on a process that would reflect on the current Gen Ed program with an aim to improving it, re-imagining it, or simply tinkering with it to correct it. The chair raised the issue of transfer students, and the hypothesis that RIC's Gen Ed program served as a barrier to students. Discussion followed. S. Costa remarked that faculty felt unsure and nervous about possible changes to come, including changes to the General Education program, and how that might impact faculty. Discussion followed. B. Caouette remarked on the question of data and resources—already existing as well as the collection of new—that while the AAC&U is one resource, individual disciplines have many of their own resources for teaching Gen Ed, best practices, and so on. S. Pearlmuter reminded the committee that the college's ten year accreditation was due under NECHE guidelines, and while the pandemic had delayed their visit, members of an accreditation team would visit campus in early 2021. NECHE requires a 40 credit General Education program, while offering flexibility in how a program is organized. NECHE's primary concern is to see that Gen Ed programs are designed to produce "the educated person." S. Pearlmuter also remarked that should consider changes to General Education that would make it more inclusive of other departments so that they might create and offer General Education courses. D. Gill remarked that the transfer process is difficult for students and Gen Ed expectations are not made clear to them via the transfer process. J. Capece agreed that barriers to transfer students were a significant issue that needed to be addressed. Discussion followed related to Gen Ed and advising, along with how transfer students receive credit towards Gen Ed requirements. H. Tate remarked that there was a risk in going forward with plans to try and lower transfer barriers when an opportunity to reimagine Gen Ed might be missed. We should separate the issue into two separate, though related, issues: 1) the process by which we explore General Education reform, and 2) possible corrections to the current Gen Ed program related to transfers, advising, and so on. C. Falangola raised the issue of advising and academic credit for student work done previously, and that the college only has one individual responsible for this, and the process does not serve students well at all. H. Tate agreed that our process for transfer students did not honor the student's work done. We discussed the need for communication with Lucy Saunders among other campus resources, including maybe Sara Reilly, RIC's transfer admissions person along with ways to improve working with potential transfer students. "Credit loss" students experience when transferring is significant. D. Espinosa remarked that the transfer problems having to do with Gen Ed were urgent and would be neglected if we prioritized Gen Ed reform, which he described as a multi-year project even in the best of times. Discussion followed. H. Tate reiterated that she believed fixing the systemic issues with Gen Ed would work directly against pursuing a "big picture" assessment of RIC's Gen Ed needs. K. Almeida suggested that we should find out if the current Gen Ed program is meeting its own stated goals for students. Discussion of resources followed, including existing assessment reports completed by COGE last year and before, along with the need for more information gathering. Discussion followed. H. Tate encouraged COGE to take the pulse of Gen Ed at RIC.

Plans Going Forward

The chair asked if the committee was ready to offer suggestions for a way forward. He suggested a survey might be sent to faculty. S. Costa suggested we reach out to faculty via departmental chairs to begin gathering information about key concerns and issues that might

inform a survey. Discussion followed. It was agreed that COGE should develop relationships with department chairs, seek feedback from faculty, from students, and administer a survey as a way to pursue the process of a faculty-led, transparent dialogue about Gen Ed and the possible reform efforts that might grow out of the process. The committee should also ask for feedback from students and alums. Meanwhile, the committee will also research current “best practices” related to the AAC&U’s work on General Education as a way to frame and inform our discussions going forward.

The meeting concluded at 5:50pm.

Respectfully submitted,

J. Zornado
Chair, COGE