GENERAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE
231st Meeting
Thursday, September 15, 2016

MINUTES
Approved

Present: R. Hunt (EDU/ETRA/BC), E. Klonoski (Ex-officio, Acting Associate Vice Provost), J. Kot (LAS/FL--/BC), D. Macdonald (for D. Gorman [LAS/ENGL]), L. Matuszewich (LAS/PSYC), B. Montgomery (HHS/FCNS), M. Pickett (Academic Advising Center), A. Polansky (LAS/MATH), M. Quinlan (VPA/ART), D. Smith (Catalog Editor), A. Stich (EDU/LEPF), L. Zhou (BUS/FINA)

The meeting was called to order by Acting Associate Vice Provost Klonoski in the absence of a chair.

I. Introductions.

II. Elect Chair. Klonoski talked about the two major things the GEC needs to accomplish, which he’ll be working with the chair on: general education assessments and Pathway coordinator assistance. Zhou agreed to be chair. The GEC accepted this by acclamation.

III. Adoption of Agenda. Hunt made a motion, seconded by Kot, TO ADOPT THE AGENDA FOR THE SEPTEMBER 15, 2016, GEC MEETING. Klonoski asked that NIU PLUS be added to announcements. Motion passed unanimously as amended.

IV. Announcements

A. Minutes from the April 21, 2016, were approved electronically.

B. O365. Smith gave a brief demonstration of how to access documents through Sharepoint O365.

C. NIU PLUS. Klonoski reported on the NIU PLUS program. There are three parts of NIU PLUS. NIU PLUS started as curricular reform and the revision of the general education program, but has developed organizationally as well. NIU PLUS has become an overarching umbrella over three components that are integrated with each other. NIU Academic PLUS is the revised general education program that gives students the option to customize their general education curriculum into a number of Pathways and/or use approved general education courses within their majors. Engage PLUS will be launched soon. This will be overseen by the Office of Student Engagement and Experiential Learning (OSEEL). They are putting the final touches on the six categories of co-curricular experiences that students can choose from. Smith showed what those categories are from the NIU PLUS web site. Students may participate in more than one category. Jobs PLUS allows students to enhance their work experience and get professional development while they’re on the job. Klonoski added that there is a branding campaign in process to market PLUS as something that is distinctively NIU. Macdonald asked about NIU student employees and Klonoski said that there are already a number of partnerships both on and off campus. Macdonald asked how students find the engagement and employment opportunities and Klonoski explained that that information is forthcoming. He also noted that the web site is preliminary and more
information will be added as it becomes available.

V. Old Business

A. Assessment Plan. A draft of the general education assessment plan was provided to GEC members. Klonoski reported that Chris Parker, formerly from the Office of Assessment Services, has left the university, along with a couple other staff members. He added that Director of Academic Accreditation Ritu Subramony will be assisting with that office. However, the GEC still needs to be committed to focus its attention on assessment of general education. He also said that the assessment plan sent to the GEC is a draft, a starting point for discussion. Montgomery asked what needs to be reviewed. Klonoski said both the plan overall plus the document. He recommended that the GEC consider a rolling cycle of assessment, where two of the eight SLOs are evaluated each year. He added that there are rubrics available for most of the SLOs that were modified from AAC&U rubrics. Those AAC&U rubrics were piloted with strategic departments, e.g., the quantitative literacy rubric was sent to statistics and math. Now that those rubrics have been tested with a number of departments, they can be sent to faculty teaching general education courses. Klonoski added that these rubrics are optional, but can also be modified depending on the discipline. However, any rubric needs to keep similar levels of proficiency. Klonoski recommended that the GEC start by collecting data on courses that have identified written communication and critical thinking as the SLOs they are addressing. If GEC does written communication, it will help provide a more robust evaluation of writing at NIU because of the other writing assessment that is being done, for example the University Writing Project. Kot suggested that faculty teaching the courses to be assessed need to be notified in the next week or it’s too late in the semester to try to collect data. There was discussion on whether or not the rubrics are mandatory and Klonoski confirmed that it is not mandatory to use them. It was noted that for some faculty, giving them something additional they have to do could result in data not getting collected at all. Klonoski said it is the hope to try to grow a culture of collecting assessment data every semester and it was clarified that if it’s easier, faculty can do a sampling of their students. Kot noted that communication with general education faculty about data collection needs to be clear; it needs to state exactly what is required of them, by what deadline, and to whom they need to submit data. Klonoski said it is up to the GEC to write and distribute that communication, although he can assist with that. The GEC needs to work with the Office of Assessment Services to see how that office will provide support so the GEC can distribute meaningful analysis to faculty and departments. Polansky asked how assessment data will be communicated to upper administration and Klonoski said that the Office of Assessment Services can assist the GEC with that as well. Klonoski added that he has been in communication with Jason Rhode from Faculty Development on how assessment can be uploaded in Blackboard with a direct line to the Office of Assessment Services for analysis. There was a brief discussion on whether or not the rubrics, if they are in Blackboard, would be made available to students, and it was noted that the rubrics would not be a replacement for actual grading of students. It was noted that other options to Blackboard were explored, but everything that was looked at seemed like it would be one more thing faculty would have to learn. Polansky suggested that faculty need to be informed how important it is to collect assessment data on their courses. They also need to be told what will be done with the data. Macdonald said that for many of the general education courses in the Department of English there are advisory notes. She suggested that a note could be added that faculty must collect assessment data along with the other responsibilities that come with teaching a general education course. Discussion followed regarding exactly what the GEC will be asking of general education instructions. Matuszewich suggested that the new assessment process could be rolled out as a pilot; this would be a good way to get buy-in from faculty. Klonoski asked if the pilot could be for general education courses addressing written communication
or critical thinking because that includes a lot of courses. Discussion followed and the GEC decided to pilot just courses addressing written communication. Kot suggested that at the start of the spring semester there should be a letter to all instructors of general education courses, including the rubric that explains that assessment data must be collected. The letter should include the fact that instructors can use the rubric, modify it but keeping the required elements, or use something similar. She added that a deadline must also be included in the communication. The GEC discussed a deadline for submission of assessment data for the pilot for this fall and decided on December 15. There was a suggestion that a GEC e-mail box be set up for submission of data. The GEC also discussed the need for a survey to find out how faculty feel about the rubric. Matuszewich expressed concern over bias; faculty may not accurately complete a survey for fear that the results may be used for teacher effectiveness. After a discussion it was decided not to address the issue of potential bias and see how the pilot goes. It was decided to also use a Qualtrics survey for that as well as for the collection of assessment data. Matuszewich and Stich will work on the survey. Zhou, Klonoski, and Smith will work on a letter to go to the instructors for assessment for this fall semester and post to O365 for GEC feedback.

B. Pathways Coordinators. Klonoski reported that there are seven Pathways available this fall and each one has a faculty coordinator. He gave a brief overview of how the general program got to its current status. Departments with courses in the old distributive studies model completed roll-over forms, selecting the placement of those courses in one of the three new knowledge domains. They also had to identify two SLOSs the course will address. Under the new structure, students take up to 12 hours in foundational studies (formerly core competencies) and 21 hours in the knowledge domains (6 hours from each plus an elective from any of the three). Beginning with this semester, students can choose to organize their knowledge domain courses in a Pathway. If they do that, students can earn a Pathway focus transcript documentation. Klonoski said he will be asking the GEC to possibly assist the Pathways coordinators. Zhou said the GEC should ask the coordinators to attend GEC meetings.

C. Publicizing pathways/student feedback. Klonoski said the GEC needs to continue to think of how to connect to students. Matuszewich asked how to tell if students are in a Pathway. Klonoski explained that all courses in the Pathways show in the degree progress report. He has worked with R&R, but they are unable to program the degree progress report for specific Pathways. Pickett confirmed that all of the Pathways courses will be listed and whatever format the Pathways are in now is how it will be moving forward. It was noted that doing a Pathway is completely optional.

D. Pathways Minor. Klonoski reported that the PLUS task force proposed a PLUS Pathways minor, where students would take 18 hours of course work in one of the Pathways, with three courses being upper-division courses. However, it would be important to present this idea to various stakeholders across campus and currently Associate Vice Provost Vernese Edghill-Walden is presenting the human diversity requirement to those same stakeholders. So, in order to avoid overloading faculty and administrators at the department and college levels, it was decided to put the PLUS Pathways minor on hold until next fall. Kot asked if the human diversity requirement will affect general education. Klonoski provided an overview of the human diversity requirement. In 1991, the state legislature passed a law that requires that students at state universities have a course in human diversity. A decision was recently made to make this a baccalaureate requirement for all students rather than a general education requirement in order to be sure all NIU students, including transfer students, would meet the requirement. Criteria were developed and courses across campus were looked at. Some courses that fulfill this requirement are also general education courses.
E. New university curriculum committee structure. Klonoski provided an overview of the new university curriculum committee structure, approved by the University Council last spring. The general intent is to streamline the curricular approval process.

VI. New Business

A. APPM revisions. Montgomery made a motion, seconded by Polansky, to APPROVE THE APPM REVISIONS AS PRESENTED. Smith explained that the changes delete any links to old forms, add links to new forms, and deletes the appendices that were references for submitting general education courses under the old program. Klonoski asked if “not” could be underlined for the application for a general education course that is not for a Pathway. Motion passed unanimously with the one revision.

B. ARTH 361 to Sustainability Pathways. Quinlan asked if this could be approved. Smith apologized that the materials weren’t included. This will be discussed further when the GEC has all the information. It was noted that there would be no delay in getting it changed for the next catalog. Zhou asked if proposals for general education courses that are going in a Pathway should be evaluated differently than one that is not and Klonoski replied that they should be evaluated differently. General education courses that participate in a Pathway need to address at least one of the large questions of the Pathway and need to have a collaborative learning component. There also needs to be evidence that the Pathway coordinator has approved that specific course for inclusion. Kot suggested that there be a folder in the O365 group that would contain miscellaneous, informative documents for the GEC. Klonoski said he already has a folder set up for the Pathways coordinators and he can invite GEC members to be able to view that. Smith added that she will add a folder to the GEC group and will add the names of the Pathways coordinators to the General Education web site.

Montgomery made a motion, seconded by Kot, to MOVE THE REMAINDER OF THE NEW BUSINESS ITEMS TO THE NEXT GEC MEETING DUE TO TIME CONSTRAINTS. Motion passed unanimously. See C-F below.

C. ENGL 117.
D. ENGL 340.
E. HIST 388.
F. Course revisions.

VII. Other Business. There was a suggestion that the GEC might benefit from having a consent agenda for routine business. This will be explored at future meetings.

VIII. Adjournment
The meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m. by acclamation.

The next meeting is scheduled for October 20, 2016.

Respectfully submitted by Donna Smith, Catalog Editor/Curriculum Coordinator