

CCATF GenEd Conversations
6 February 2024

Topic: Student learning needs

Location: Zoom

Max participants at any one time: 16

Total people attending: 18

Notes:

Why are faculty attending today?

- Cluster 2 committee member.
- Dept of Phil and Rel, areas 1&2
- Madison Foundations
- Director in CVPA, interested in student learning
- Natural world domain, and Faculty Senate
- Dept rep to nature world, GEC
- Arts & Humanities
- Madison foundations, BUS 160 team
- Advising in Health Sciences
- Nursing, rely on GenEd for competencies
- Libraries, GEC, instructional design

Who are our students? Today and tomorrow? What do they/what will they know?

- Need a lot of guidance to do research in all classes. How do will evaluate info and build arguments.
- Students say that want to know how to be un-biased. It might be a content area worth investing in.
- Community service learning seems to be a wanted learning experience. When students are exposed to it here, it's a positive learning experience.
- Students seem to limited to the cultural present.
- Anxiety around teamwork and public speaking.
- Social hesitation related to putting oneself forward. We're likely to see this continue for a while due to effects of COVID of students who were in middle school during COVID.
- Struggles with writing.
- Lack of ability to self-manage, for some students.

What are some student strengths?

- Motivated to volunteer if they think it will do good. Might be good if GenEd can connect with this.
- Willingness to venture into new technology. Willingness to merge traditional learning with tech-assisted approaches.
- Ability to self-manage, for some students. Others, much less so.

- More attuned to mental health and willingness to talk about it.
- Awareness of social justice issues. This awareness can also inhibit discussion because they are fearful on offending someone.
- Students, even in large courses, can and do contribute to the community. E.g., large GenEd course planting trees around Harrisonburg.

What do our students want from a university education?

- Getting a job. We might do a better job showing them how a liberal arts & sciences curriculum can help with that.
- Desire for career training can overshadow other concerns.
- Internships, jobs, exposure. Experiences they can gain to all them to succeed in the next steps of life.

What should our students want from a university education?

- Great liberal arts and science curriculum, plus specific job training, if they're pursuing that.

Challenges for students re: GenEd?

- Scheduling and getting into classes.
- First-year students can have a difficult time getting into Madison Foundations courses.
- More options in socio-cultural area has helped.
- See some courses as things they need to "get out of the way."

How can we be better at linking GenEd to critical learning needs?

- I personally can be better at that.
- Most courses are 100 and 200 level courses. This implies they should be easy and done early in the college career. Is there a way to have the curriculum run through the four years?
- Wonder if students are getting mixed signals re Madison Foundations. We say you should take them early and we say you can take them any time.
- If we had seats, we ideally would want those Foundations courses taken early.

How are students talking about their GenEd courses? Any value?

- Students can often see the value only in hindsight.
- Almost one of the biggest wins is when a student says "you said this would be valuable and I found out it was."
- I ask students to make the connections at the beginning and end of the course. Most of them can make a connection by the end of the course.
- Employers know the value of a humanistic education but they often don't have the language to communicate those values. I feel like I'm translating how employers to value this type of education.
- Nursing profession has a long list of qualities and skills of graduates. GenEd could contribute to those skills, but the course descriptions don't reference those

skills/qualities. Maybe would should have explicit learning outcomes that link to qualities/skills in demand.

How should students integrate GenEd learning outcomes into their majors?

- Because our areas are so siloed, I have no idea how students taking our courses take that knowledge to other areas.
- Communications area of GenEd does seem to provide skills that transfer.
- It's not uncommon in my courses that students say, "in my ___ course, we talked about..." in order to bring insights to the discussion.
- Asking students to move back and forth between disciplines, spaces, communities, produces a kind of sensibility that is hard to reproduce in other ways.
- GenEd is our common core curriculum, so perhaps we should reinforce that message as it being an educational platform for everyone.

What are your questions?

- Appreciate the work we're doing. It's difficult.
- From students, "everyone should take a class in": race, climate change, "information literacy" and "critical thinking, especially re: scientific understanding of ___."

END OF NOTES