

CCATF GenEd Conversations  
28 March 2024

Topic: Students' First Year

Location: Zoom

Attendees: 16

Attendees Max: 16

Notes:

Does our current GenEd address the needs/interests of our current students?

- UNST 300 offers integrated experiences. What's lacking in GenEd might be filled through this course. Allows faculty from around campus to contribute. Something like UNST 300 could be good for first year students.
- Bridging or remediation might be needed. Maybe we are assuming students have technology skills and other skills they may not. "How to be a college student" can help develop skills sets.
- Might need additional upper-level writing.
- Students have some choice, but it's limited. When GenEds are used to meet program requirements, it challenges us to meet the need.
- Even though students have a first-year writing course, it's not enough for some students.
- Some students need remedial math but I'm not sure we're set up to provide it.
- How have student interests changed?
  - Skills needed may have not changed. Areas of interest probably have – e.g., sustainability, climate change, etc.
- Some areas don't have capacity to teach upper-level writing in the major because the number of students is too high.
- Need for good writing might be addressed by having threads that run through GenEd. Literature, writing, etc. Would take more coordination.
- Note taking is important. Learning strategies too. Students need to learn to read and take notes before coming to class.
- Repeated feedback is key to students learning these learning skills. Staffing challenges make this difficult. Scale is difficult.
- Students have interests in GenEd courses, but course availability makes it so that students take what is available, not what they would like to take.
- Newer student needs: Dealing with anxiety and mental health issues.
- Area 5 in GenEd is unique in its focus on wellness.
- Some students come to JMU and don't see themselves in the curriculum and that can add additional stress.
- First-year students can benefit from in-person courses.

- Is there anything we can do to help make Madison Foundations courses attractive to faculty? Are there ways to make these courses something more than service courses? This would enhance the experience students have in those classes.
- Are there ways for students to better understand the purpose of GenEd and how it connects to their majors?
- GenEd Council is currently working with SMAD about how to improve how we talk with students about GenEd.
- GenEd should be about outcomes students learn, not the courses they take. It's not a mini-major.
- It's sometimes a challenge to see the purpose in the skills we try to address.
- Orientation activities do have academic prep foci.
- Currently working on a pilot exploration first-year seminar with Student Affairs, Univ Studies, and QEP.
- Staffing concerns with first-year seminar. Would love to have it but it's a challenge to deliver well at our scale.

#### Any insights from Advising/advisors?

- Students do have GenEd wishlists as they work with their first-year worksheets. Students go after popular courses first (as determined by such resources as Rate My Professor). Some don't get those courses but many are satisfied with what they eventually get into.
- Many students are waiting on AP, transfer credit, dual enrollment, etc., that could change their scheduling. That's a challenge for FY students.

#### Ideally, what would we include in the FY?

- Mentoring. Survey of students revealed GenEd faculty were kind, approachable, etc. We do some things well. Reinforcement of learning over time is important.
- Consider common reading or common experiences. Create opportunities for students to create social and intellectual community. Provide some student choice through GenEd offerings.
- Ethical foundations is critical. It's Complicated has been good.
- College is going to require reading. We should demonstrate that in possible FY common reading requirement.
- Whatever we require, we should put our resources behind it.
- We don't do a lot of interdisciplinary instruction really well. A FY requirement might help us get better.
- Could certain sections of our FY GenEd courses also work as FY seminars? Sections labeled as such, perhaps having an additional credit attached?
- I'm not sure we can add credits to our current program. Repurposing credits we can do.
- I think the program can be smaller by 3-6 hours. Not sure where to cut.
- Declaring majors too early can reduce exploration via GenEd. Can we create more exploration time? Messaging these opportunities via the Exploratory major can help.

END OF NOTES