

General Studies Roundtable – Phase II
February 23, 2007

1. Opening Thought/Question: Why do we keep going over things that we've already gone over? We are revisiting issues, such as the composition of the core, that at least some participants had believed were settled.

Explanations: The same members are not in attendance at every meeting.

Voice and transparency are important features of the process. Dialogue should not be prematurely shut down.

We should not assume that the absence of immediate opposition to an idea necessary equals assent. Members need time to reflect on what is being said/done.

The group then discussed the governance process and the ratification “gates” through which the revised program proposal must pass. While some faculty members outside the roundtable have offered individual reactions to some aspects of the proposal, other faculty appear more apathetic. Two possible explanations for lack of spirited discussion over the roundtable's work: Skepticism that anything will change and/or fear that things will change significantly. Cross-disciplinary aspects of the proposal, left poorly developed, may complicate approvals. Though the governance process allows for re-working and re-submission of the proposal in case of a setback, it is important that the initial proposal, including individual course descriptions, be accompanied by a detailed rationale and perhaps even a sample curriculum. It will be a big job to communicate the group's thinking and the process that resulted in the revised proposal. Roundtable members will probably meet with small groups of faculty; in the more immediate future, co-facilitator Scott Darveau will participate in a series of interviews to appear in *The Columns*.

Questions that faculty are almost certain to ask in regard to the revised proposal:

Will GS courses be developed by and housed in particular departments? Does disciplinary = departmental?

Or could proposals for GS courses that fulfill a requirement come from anyone with a germane interest in that area? How might that faculty's expertise be determined—graduate coursework? Teaching experience? Research/publication in that area? Who would assess the performance of faculty teaching outside their “assigned” area?

Does the Phase I document include standards for GS courses in the revised program?

The group agreed that the General Studies Council will provide the checks and balances in terms of faculty qualifications and/or accreditation criteria. The GSC may find itself reviewing numerous courses in a block rather than piecemeal. This phase of the process may be time-consuming.

2. Moving On

General consensus that a portal course (PC) looks good; a capstone course still needs further thought.

Discussion then turned to the PC. Director of General Studies Daren Snider reminded the group that the addition of a 3-hr. portal course results in a core of 18 hours, perhaps an unwieldy number. A number of questions arose regarding the PC, which is intended to show students why a liberal education is important for an educated person and why this education is as important as the major/minor. Members suggested that perhaps some of the aspects of First Year (FY) courses could be integrated into the PC.

Questions remaining:

- Could the PC be incorporated into required FY courses?
- Could aspects of the PC be incorporated into the other core courses?
- How will the PC relate to the capstone? One possibility:
PC: Tell 'em what you're going to tell 'em.
Middle section of the GS program: Tell 'em.
Capstone course: Tell 'em what you told 'em.
- Do we need 3 hrs. of this type of PC? Could the number of hours be reduced?
- Can/Should the content of the PC be based on the instructor's academic discipline?
- Who would teach a 3-hr. PC?
- Can the skills/patterns of thought emphasized in a PC be incorporated into other GS courses?
- When would the PC be required? Early in the student's academic program?

- Will the PCs, or the GS program itself, emphasize a common theme?

3. Closing Thoughts

The term “citizenship” is a contested concept. Are roundtable members working from a common definition?

Should the core be further reduced, perhaps to 12 hrs? Could classes now in the core become options in the middle section? Reminder: Phase II is bound by the Phase I missions statement and list of student outcomes, which are not optional.

The proposed wellness course will differ from the existing PE 160: Healthful Living. The group’s understanding is that the wellness course will be complemented by 2 0.5 credit hour classes devoted to physical activity.

The roundtable again emphasized its conviction that the new GS program not replicate high-school courses.

Next Meeting: March 2, 2:30 in #142A of the Nebraskan. We might want to consider the questions listed in these notes. The roundtable could have a large break before the next meeting. Members may want to work in small groups, perhaps triads, to more fully develop those parts of the revised program on which we’ve achieved consensus.

Martha Kruse, co-facilitator