Directors of Undergraduate Studies

NOTES

Wednesday, February 10, 2021

Also see <https://clas.uiowa.edu/faculty/dus-meetings-and-related-information>; notes and other information DUS information is posted on this page.

1. Wayne Jacobson, Director of Assessment, Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost, updated the group on the annual assessment process, which is also used as part of maintaining the university’s accreditation with Higher Learning Commission (HLC). UI units offering majors must submit needed assessment materials by the end of June. Please see the attached documents for more information. Wayne Jacobson reminded the DUS that HLC several years ago moved to a model for reaccreditation requiring frequent HLC “check-ins” to see if an institution is showing ongoing attention to student learning and to teaching as defined by faculty in each department or program. Reaccreditation is no longer a 10-year project resulting in a massive report; rather, frequent and steady updates are now required. This, in fact, better reflects how most faculty update and assess their courses by observing and weighing students’ performance each semester. The next HLC review of the University of Iowa will be in Spring 2023. Of particular importance is documentation of ways that faculty use findings from assessment of a major, which can be supported by maintaining records of program changes based on assessment findings and minutes of meeting where decisions were discussed. Keeping notes on file is essential since HLC often requests to see the documentation for processes used. For example, during the last site visit in 2019 related to UI’s reaccreditation, HLC evaluators asked to see these materials and departments had to furnish them quickly. These documents might also include syllabi, assignments, documentation of assessments done, and records of curriculum committee meetings where program-level outcomes were reviewed as well as materials on websites or in the Catalog that indicate the intention to improve student learning and teaching. Another key goal of collecting this information is for UI and the College to acknowledge the dedicated work of faculty and to help support needs related to the continual improvement of teaching and learning.
2. Cornelia Lang, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education, next gave an overview of a CLAS proposal to update GE CLAS Core requirements. Two guests were introduced: David Bennett, Professor and DEO of the Department of Geographical and Sustainability Sciences and member of the GE Curriculum Committee (GECC); and Stratis Giannakouros, Director of the Office of Sustainability and Environment. Both guests were instrumental in recommending a systems-thinking approach to any new GE Sustainability requirement. The current GE requirements (as shown in the attached slides) were reviewed along with the origins of the proposal to add a Sustainability requirement, with this first recommended for approval unanimously by the Fall 2019-Spring 2020 GE Review Committee. The GE Review Committee, following CLAS GE policy, is convened around every 4-6 years to ensure that the GE CLAS Core continues to represent crucial areas of learning, skills, and “ways of knowing,” as agreed upon by faculty.

The GE Review Committee recommended the following during Fall 2019:

* A GE requirement in Sustainability should be added.
* The Diversity and Inclusion GE requirement should be completed early in a student’s career at UI; this should be emphasized in related GE materials.
* GE materials designed for students and the public should use “student” facing language to better communicate the reasons the GE requirements are important.
* The GE Review Committee recommended that additional hours should not be added to the GE requirements.
* Finally, the GE Review Committee stressed that each existing GE area was essential and that nothing should be removed from the current requirements.

This last mandate led to a proposal that the Sustainability requirement be offered with a companion GE content area chosen from one of these GE CLAS Core areas: Natural Sciences; Quantitative or Formal Reasoning; Social Sciences; Historical Perspectives; International and Global Issues; Literature, Visual, and Performing Arts; and Values and Culture, allowing students to finish the Sustainability requirement and one additional GE requirement at the same time. The many areas related to sustainability would allow any department or unit to propose a Sustainability GE course, reflecting in turn how sustainability affects every aspect of life.

Likewise, a systems-thinking pedagogical approach requires interweaving of content from a systems perspective, examining the complex resulting relations in the studied system; this approach models for students how knowledge is the outcome of multiple perspectives that work with and affect each other. Teaching students to examine the integrated complexities of systems allows sustainability to be explored through natural systems processes as well as through cultural and societal ones with questions of justice and equity at the fore. A systems-thinking approach allows students to apply important problem solving and critical thinking tools and hence belongs at the “core” of the GE CLAS Core. It thus seems appropriate that the GE Sustainability requirement should allow students to apply one course toward two GE areas. The DUS group offered several examples of courses that would align with these strategies and noted that these courses could suggest new research areas and possible team-teaching opportunities.

The Undergraduate Educational Policy and Curriculum Committee (UEPCC) and the General Education Curriculum Committee (GECC) have both unanimously recommended approval of the above GE changes.

The next step will be to hold forums so that CLAS faculty can voice their questions and talk to colleagues about the proposal (see dates and times below). The proposal will then move to the CLAS Faculty Assembly for a final recommendation this spring.

If approved, current and continuing students who enter UI before the sustainability requirement is implemented will graduate under the current CLAS GE requirements. Transfer credit and AP and other exam credit would be allowed to count toward the GE in sustainability. Particular dates or semesters for implementation depend on faculty input in the forums and on the recommendations of Faculty Assembly. Cornelia Lang requested that DUS members communicate information about this proposal to their departments, encouraging attendance at the CLAS forums. The attached slides may be shared widely.

1. DUS were then asked to share the following information with colleagues, with other updates sent through the DEO memo:

* Please attend a GE CLAS Core forum about the GE CLAS Core Sustainability Proposal. Everyone is invited.

Tuesday, February 23, 3:00-4:30 via Zoom <https://uiowa.zoom.us/j/94341430346>

Friday, March 5, 12:30-2:00 via Zoom

<https://uiowa.zoom.us/j/93508103285>

* The last day for undergraduates to drop a course with a W is expected to be May 7 (4:30 p.m.). More details coming soon.