Minutes of Essential Studies Committee October 9, 2015 at 1:00 pm

I. A meeting of the Essential Studies Committee was held on October 9, 2015 in Carnegie, Rm 102. Lori Robison presided.

In attendance: Jeff Carmichael, Kenneth Flanagan, Sukhvarsh Jerath, Karen Peterson, Donovan Widmer, Tanis Walch, Joan Hawthorne, Ryan Zerr, Christina Fargo, Eric Jauch
Absent: Elizabeth Bjerke, April Bradley, Melissa Gjellstad, Kenneth Flanagan, Krista Lynn Minnotte, David Yearwood, Daryll Joy, Jacob Geritz, Carla Spokely

II. Jerath moved to approve the minutes, seconded by Ryan. The motion carried with all in favor, except one abstention.

III. Ryan gave a brief director’s report, noting an upcoming meeting on October 27 at which ESC members and capstone instructors (both Fall 2015 and Spring 2016) will begin planning for the Spring 2016 Assessment Week – at which capstone students will be assessed for learning relative to the ES diversity and written communication goals. He also mentioned a December 14 scoring session for last spring’s Assessment Week student work products for quantitative reasoning, noting the need for as many ESC members as possible to be in attendance.

IV. For the remainder of the meeting, Lori led a discussion about issues with the current special emphasis requirement, whose goal was to consider whether there may be a need to make adjustments to this aspect of Essential Studies. This discussion began with Lori remarking on various aspects to the current program, such as how the Breadth of Knowledge requirement is mandated by NDUS policy, and the Gen Ed Task Force recommended special emphasis requirements as ways to overlay onto the BoK requirements extra student work on areas of weakness identified at that time. In addition, the special emphasis requirements of Advanced Communication and Capstone were seen as ways to spread ES beyond the first two years of a student’s curriculum.

-A variety of ideas were offered by members of the committee, such as adding prerequisites for all SE courses, not unlike how Math 102 is a prerequisite for Q courses. Concerns were expressed about any ES requirements that come above the sophomore level, especially for students transferring into certain professional programs. This led to a discussion about the difficulties with any aspect of ES when it comes to transfer students, and the need to avoid letting those considerations prevent making improvements to the ES program. For instance, the current policy is that students with a baccalaureate degree have their BoK requirements waived, but must still complete the SE part of ES. The idea of considering whether to change this policy so as to waive all aspects of ES came up, and seemed worth considering as this year’s discussions continue.

-A point was made about how, if SE courses are intended to ensure students focus on certain ES goals, then perhaps it might be worth considering other ways to accomplish that same goal. If SE is not the ideal mechanism for that purpose, then perhaps the SE requirement should be altered. This led to discussion of creating a “core” within ES that functions alongside the BoK requirement. There was consensus that this was an idea worth continued discussion. Various possibilities for doing this were offered, including the creation of courses that are solely about the SE areas, and/or developing an integrated curriculum in which courses in the “core” are linked so as to more coherently connect the various goals/aspects to ES.
Finally, mention was made of some additional issues relative to the idea of special emphasis that have come up recently: undergraduate research as a special emphasis area, making the diversity courses more rigorous, and removing advanced communication from the capstone.

The meeting adjourned at 2:00 p.m.