I. A meeting of the Essential Studies Committee was held on September 29, 2015 in Carnegie, Rm 102. Lori Robison presided.

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

There was a motion to approve the minutes from the September 8, 2015 meeting by April Bradley, which was seconded by Ken Flanagan. The motion was voted on and approved unanimously.

There was a motion to approve the minutes from the September 18, 2015 meeting by Karyn Plumm, which was seconded by Sukvarsh Jerath. The motion was voted on and approved unanimously.

Ryan Zerr gave a director’s report, mentioning that the new Essential Studies webpage went live on Monday, September 21. He also noted an upcoming ND General Education Council meeting on October 23 at Minot State University, and asked that anyone interested in attending should contact him to learn of additional details.

There was general discussion about the goals of the ES Program, whose purpose was to establish a sense of what the ES Committee may need to work on relative to ES goals in the months ahead. Points raised included:

- Ways in which the 2015 administration of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) can help inform the discussion. Particularly UND’s strong scores in quantitative reasoning (which seems attributable to an ES goal), but weak showing in diversity. There were follow up questions concerning how to interpret the NSSE data. A point was also made about how some seniors who took the NSSE did not report taking or planning to take a capstone, which is a clear misunderstanding of the program. This led to general agreement that more needs to be done to ensure students and faculty are more aware of the program.

- It was noted that last year’s program review found general campus support for the goals, yet also recommended an examination of the goals during the 2015-16 AY, which is, in part, why the current discussion is occurring.

- Questions were raised about what recent ES assessment have told us about goal achievement. The most relevant outcome from those assessments has, to date, been related to the oral communication goal, where recent discussion have centered on whether the current rubric is adequate for our purposes.

- A point was made about whether UND should have baccalaureate-wide goals/learning objectives. It was then mentioned that we do, if one teases them out from the mission statement.

- The idea was raised that, even if this and follow-up discussions conclude we already have the right set of goals, that perhaps the way they are framed is not always entirely helpful. Thus, continued discussions should focus also on questions such as this. This also led to discussion of the way the goals are described on the web page, with a point made about them perhaps being too text-heavy to have an appreciable impact on most current students.
There was concern expressed about how little many faculty know about the ES program – goals and otherwise. A key idea moving forward should be a strong educational push for faculty so that they can better present the goals their ES courses address. One idea mentioned was a set of pre-made powerpoint slides that could be distributed to faculty for their use.

In furtherance of the previous point, concern was raised about having four primary goals, but which have within them subgoals. This seems to lead to confusion about what it means to focus on “one goal” for an ES course. This led to discussion of a similar matter, in which courses can be special emphasis courses but not fall within a breadth of knowledge category.

A question was raised about how the NDUS defines the breadth of knowledge areas. Work will be done to determine this.

--Ryan Zerr moved that a subcommittee be formed to study in detail issues related to ES goals, whether raised at this meeting or in some other way seemingly relevant. Motion was seconded by Jeff Carmichael. Discussion ensued. A concern was raised related to the ESC’s general discussions (planned for the next two meetings) about other major aspects of the program, and how those discussions may impact the approach a subcommittee might take in examining goals. This led to general agreement that perhaps now is not the time to form the subcommittee called for in the motion, but rather that such a decision should be deferred until after the October 16 ESC meeting. The motion was voted upon and unanimously defeated.

-- A final point was raised relative to the revalidation process for the 2016-17 academic year, noting in particular that the ESC should – soon – take up the discussion about how to handle next year’s process. The issue is one of notification to the impacted departments, ensuring that they are aware well in advance of the expectations they will need to focus on.

--The meeting adjourned at 3:10, minutes recorded by Ryan Zerr