

CCATF GenEd Conversations
7 February 2024

Topic: Faculty Perceptions of our Current General Education Program

Location: Taylor 404

Max participants at any one time: 6

Total people attending: 6

Notes:

To initiate conversation, CCATF members presented basic quantitative info from first faculty survey. (PPT slides posted on the CCATF website).

Discussion:

- External APR Team has some very good points. Many of them rang true from my experience. I'm a great supporter of GenEd, but I have had some challenges. GenEd can seem like an external entity. It's their program, and we're servicing it.
- To what degree is the last APR going to guide revisions?
- Hard for some faculty to gain in-roads into GenEd oversight structure.
- Have experienced tug-of-wars over who "owns" courses and who is qualified to teach them.
- Was, historically, very helpful to have faculty lines allocated through GenEd to fulfill GenEd obligations. This doesn't seem to happen any more, though I don't know for certain.
- My experience has been that GenEd says, "We need these seats." Dept head: "Where are we going to get the resources?"
- Maybe this should be the guiding question for GenEd renewal: "Is there a better model?" If we don't have a better idea, I don't want to change for change sake. I don't want us to be driven solely by vague dissatisfaction with our current program.
- In our area, GenEd does serve our major. It recruits majors for us.
- Could we differentiate sections of courses to help address students who are interested in following on in the major?
- Should we follow established programs? The CCATF is cataloging programs and seeing how they address the known challenges facing our program. Transfer students are particular challenge for most programs.
- How do GenEd organizational structures vary? How might reconfigure our organization structure that are closer partners with departments? Current departments can see themselves as servants of an external program. Not really partners. It's a demand we're satisfying. Need more two-way and more reciprocal. The external team report (APR) indicates this feeling is widespread. Not an issue of personalities. I've gotten along fine with the people.
- GenEd has no carrots and sticks. We ask for seats. Working at a backlog. This creates tension. We want to be able to get to that more cooperative position.

- We seem to be in danger of having a broad crisis of faculty staffing, which can lead to a crisis of confidence in our abilities to fulfill our basic missions. This can create tensions. GenEd asking for seats only increases the tension. Part-time faculty will always be part of the solution but we're not seeing a rise in faculty to parallel rise in student numbers.
- APRs for GenEd seem to have paid increasing attention to JMU's ability to provide the program as it was created.
- Does it mean that we simply need more faculty?
- Can a distributed model help with staffing?
- Depending on the area, faculty can also feel this increased pressure for seats too. Caps are being raised to meet demand.
- Can we build instructor hires to help with teaching demands? There is an advancement path for instructors, which is a good thing.
- Not impressed with evidence that we need to change our current GenEd program. Last revision experience showed us that changes can lead to huge disruption. Incremental change might be okay.
- Don't reinvent the wheel. Look for other proven models.
- Against educational fads. Against DEI focus. It politicizes the curriculum. We have an obligation to maintain institutional neutrality on critical political topics.
- Because of major constraints, it's unlikely that we can have a major overhaul.
- Essential to DEI is viewpoint diversity, not simply identity-based diversity. There would be wider support for inclusion if we strongly supported viewpoint diversity as central to our work as a university. Students are afraid to engage in conversations. Freedom of expression and freedom of dissent is central to our work in search of knowledge.
- Ground is shifting regarding use of diversity statements in hiring. We're in the middle of this broader shift. There should be more opportunity for more faculty input in GenEd discussions regarding how diversity is framed and actioned.

END OF NOTES