WSGE Task Force Charge

The charge for the Committee on Undergraduate Education (CUE) includes the following:

- Promote the goals of a liberal education in general, and writing and general education goals in particular, within the academic community.
- Periodically review these educational goals and assess the degree to which these goals have been achieved. These spheres of assessment include the University, colleges, and departments. The Committee on Undergraduate Education shall communicate its findings, and recommendations for improvement, to the ACC and the appropriate units.

Over the past two years, in the course of fulfilling these aspects of its charge, CUE has examined a broad range of data, reviewed reports and policy documents, convened focus groups, met with an outside expert, Jennifer Summit, who took part in Stanford’s recent general education reform, and engaged in numerous conversations with stakeholders around campus. In addition, CUE has discussed these aspects of our charge in the course of ordinary business such as reviewing proposed GUR courses. Although we have learned that there are many excellent GUR courses with talented and enthusiastic instructors, we have also come to question whether the program as a whole meets WWU’s liberal arts and sciences mission, and whether its current structure enables it to fulfill that mission. Although the earlier white paper released by CUE emphasized student survey data, CUE’s conclusions were not based exclusively or even primarily on those data; those data are simply easier to communicate to an outside audience than the other sources we have drawn on. Rather, we view those data as one of several indicators that the program is not functioning as well as it could be. Our focus is not on improving student satisfaction per se but student learning outcomes, and our question is whether those learning outcomes could be achieved more effectively with a different program structure.

Careful consideration of this question will require a substantial investment of time and energy that exceeds the time and energy CUE is able to expend on it, given the other responsibilities of the committee. Furthermore, we recognize that the CUE membership likely consists of individuals who place a high priority on general education relative to other university goals, and that the viewpoints of the membership may not represent the full range of viewpoints within the university community.

Motion
Therefore, CUE recommends the formation of a Western Study of General Education (WSGE) task force. CUE will propose the membership of the task force in consultation with ACC. The membership shall provide broad representation of the university community, and shall include faculty, staff, and students.

The task force will first determine whether revision of the structure of the general education program is desirable. Should the task force determine that revision is desirable, it shall further consider whether such revision is feasible at this time. CUE will advise the WSGE task force on
criteria to define desirability and feasibility of GUR revision, with advisement from ACC and the faculty senate.

1) The task force will first determine whether revision of the structure of the general education program is desirable. This determination shall be guided by the following questions, in addition to any others determined by the task force:

   a) To what extent are the stated goals (11 competencies) of the GUR program aligned with WWU’s mission and the broad goal of providing a liberal arts and sciences education? To what extent does there exist evidence to show that the GUR program overall is structured to meet those goals?
   b) To what extent do there exist opportunities for students to integrate knowledge gained from their varied experiences in WWU’s GUR program?
   c) To what extent does the existing program interface productively with major programs of study while meeting both the goals of general education and the goals of preparing for entry to degree programs?
   d) To what extent do students, faculty, and advisors value and understand the purpose of the GUR program?
   e) To what extent do faculty teaching in the GUR program demonstrate that they have enough training and resources to teach the GURs in a way that meets the program’s goals and WWU’s mission?
   f) To what extent could issues with the above be effectively addressed without a revision of the program structure?

The task force shall consult broadly with stakeholders across the university community in examining these questions.

2) Should the task force determine that revision is desirable, it shall further consider whether such revision is feasible at this time. This determination shall be guided by the following questions, in addition to any others determined by the task force:

   a) To what extent has a broad base representation of faculty, as well as staff and students, articulated a desire to engage in a restructuring of the GUR program?
   b) To what extent does there exist evidence that restructuring is sufficiently important and urgent relative to other university goals to spend the time and energy, and financial resources that revision will require?
   c) Could such restructuring be accomplished without undue negative impact (e.g. loss of SCH or increased workload) on departments, programs, initiatives, or groups?
   d) Are there opportunities for synergies with other departments, programs, or initiatives that would not be available if revision occurred at a later time?

3) The task force shall submit a report to CUE containing the following:
   a) The specific criteria utilized by the task force to determine desirability and feasibility
b) A summary of stakeholder groups the task force consulted with as well as other information sources used
c) A summary of key findings
d) A recommendation regarding whether general education revision is desirable and feasible at this time, along with the rationale for that recommendation

4) Once the report has been received, CUE, in consultation with ACC, shall take one of three actions:
   a) Advise ACC to accept the recommendation of the task force
   b) Advise ACC to reject the recommendation of the task force
   c) Request the task force to collect additional information or explore additional questions and provide a revised report.