Notes from General Education Council Meeting: February 11th, 2015

Members in attendance: Kelly, Mike, Jack, Gisella, Alan, Matthew, Aaron, Betsy, Boram, Nancy, Sacha
Guests: Michael Driscoll

Summary
The council discussed several important issues with the help of Michael Driscoll, the University registrar including how to deal with International Baccalaureate diplomas and other work, the current status of degree audit, and the implications for our program of changes under discussion in COMAR regarding general education. There was also a discussion of budget priorities with Boram Yi, who has been appointed Program Director of General Education for the semester.

IB Competency
Michael Driscoll outlined UB’s application of credits from IB programs. Towson and Salisbury accepts IB diplomas granting 30 credits of college coursework. Some high schools in the area offer this diploma, for instance City College, and the number of students who graduate with this certification is increasing. UB does give students credits for International Baccalaureate work but on an individual course basis, not in a comprehensive manner for the diploma. The registrar wants to have faculty review the lists of course before posting publicly what UB accepts but we have had difficulty contacting IB to get more information to update our equivalencies.

Towson applies some of the 30 credits to GenEd, but not everything... so GEC would need to make some kind of decision as to what equivalency would be. There are some existing guidelines as to what courses and scores we use... but our requirements seem to be higher than other colleges and universities in the area. The provost would like to ensure that someone can come in with the diploma and can get 30 credits in some way to attract these students. We should also consider what to do about the students who get only the certificates. However, we also need to bear in mind how much difficulty can be caused by the lack of electives in business majors and other highly structured programs.

We could also explore the possibility that some courses in a major area of study would have an equivalency, for example a student might potentially get a leg up on a history or an integrated arts degree. We should also, now that we have degree audit, explore the testing equivalencies more broadly. Would it, for example be appropriate for use to take credits as part of gen ed when we do not have an equivalent course? We don’t’ want students to be discouraged from coming by turning away credits. It’s also possible that IB could interface with our competencies in good ways, for instance writing is an especial strength of IB!
**Budget**
Boram plans to develop a short term and a long term budget. The short term budget would outline needs for the remainder of this academic year, the long term budget will address recurring needs for support and multi-year priorities. GEC members were asked for their thoughts on potential budget priorities and needed resources. The suggestions included:

- Support for the sophomore seminar
  - Desk copies for future common reads
  - Resources allocated to promote the common read beyond the seminar
  - Resources to support experiential learning (beyond the seminar as well)
- Support for larger initiatives in learning communities
  - Field trips
  - Speakers
- Staffing IDIS101, which is generally adjunct taught
- IDIS 302, which is in a way general education subsidized by the major programs
- Workshops to communicate with and train advisors
- Attendance at General Education conferences for the council
- Food budget, which when added together across all events is not insignificant
- Summer workgroups
- Student worker salaries for data mining, etc.
- Support for the GEC Chair and any future Director

A suggestion was also made that we could explore funding through sponsorships but alumni.

**Degree Audit**
Michael Driscoll discussed how the degree audit recently implemented by the university works and presented rules based on the General Education program for comment:

- The lists of courses should be condensed in HAT and other domains.
- Some wording needs to change in HAT also to clarify how the program works.
- Rules regarding INFO110 and UNIV20X are missing.

Additional wordsmithing can occur over email. Ryan from the registrar’s office will email the council about the whether different views of the rules exists for students at different points in the curriculum.

The council also briefly discussed the concerns raised by the academic policy committee regarding C- grades in classes; no recommendation was made.
There is discussion afoot about changing some of the COMAR General Education requirements to no longer require two different social sciences or humanities. This is an ongoing discussion but members of the council offered the following thoughts and observations:

- This could be indicative of a decreased valuation of liberal education and we should consider:
  - Is that in line with our own values, given the opinions expressed at the January retreat which generally valued the exploration of a wide variety of disciplines
  - Put another way should you be allowed to get through our General Education without taking some subjects?

- There are some ways in which this might be an improvement or benefit for our architecture:
  - Eliminating the “two different subjects” requirement would simplify the structure of general education which can be confusing to students
  - If our goal is to build a competency in a skill or way of thinking:
    - It can be argued that it is not necessary to use different disciplines to do this
    - Further it might be better to have students two sequential courses in a single area as we could more easily track growth in sophistication or application of student skills
  - Given UB’s limited ability to offer a broad range of courses this might also make it more logistically flexible to complete general education at UB

- As a counterpoint it was noted that the “freedom to choose” might be better suited to another type of institution:
  - At a more elite school where students are better prepared it makes more sense. Our students seem more likely to need broad exposure to different disciplines
  - There could also be a decreased enrollment in some programs with this change as students would lack exposure

- We might feel differently depending on whether a language change would mandate UB being more flexible.

- From an assessment perspective, as long as you are still meeting the UB General Education learning outcomes this would be a neutral change. It does again raise the question though of how institutions collect information about gen ed classes taken at other schools, which middle states would like to see us take into account when assessing our own program. That situation could be made more complicated by the change in COMAR language.