

MUS GENERAL EDUCATION COUNCIL MEETING

April 28, 2017

Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education; Helena, MT

Meeting Minutes

Attendees: Tyler Seacrest (UMW); Brendan Mumeey (MSU), Carrie Vath (MT Tech), Clint Reading (Missoula College), Garth Sleight (MCC), Janet Heiss Arms (Gallatin College), Jessica Hopkins (FVCC), Matt Redinger (MSUB), Robyn Kiesling (Helena College), Mandy Wright (GFC), Sue Bradford (UM), Tom Steen (North Dakota), Elizabeth Ternes (OCHE), Erik Rose (OCHE), Katrina Schweitzer (OCHE)

Orientation and Overview

Today's Purpose and Goals

Elizabeth opened the meeting by describing the purpose and goals of today's planning session. The culmination of two things, Montana's participation in the Interstate Passport and a need for improvement of the MUS Core, served as the catalyst to bring the Council together. She encouraged the Council to take advantage of the opportunity to leverage the MUS' systemness and collective impact to bring general education back to the fore front in Montana.

In March, the system Chief Academic Officers (CAOs) met in Helena where the Interstate Passport was discussed along with issues currently facing the MUS Core. The CAOs felt both of the topics were worth discussing further and put them into the hands of the Council to address and make recommendations.

The goals for today are to begin the discussion around where we want to go with Passport and the MUS Core and identify how we might get there.

Elizabeth introduced Tom Steen, Professor Emeritus at UND and the North Dakota Passport State Facilitator, who is joining the group to introduce the Interstate Passport program and provide information on general education reform.

MUS General Education Overview

Elizabeth used a PowerPoint to provide an overview of the MUS Core and BOR policy on general education.

The current MUS Core was formalized into policy in 2005 and has had only minor updates, including the addition of the Cultural Diversity category, since that time. The MUS Core existed outside of policy prior to 2005. Members of the Council believe it was developed around 1989. Elizabeth pointed out that the MUS Core is based off of credits earned not outcomes achieved. Briefly walking through the MUS Core curriculum, Elizabeth noted that while the Communication requirement includes 3 credits in written communication and 3 credits in oral communication the courses within the Communication category have not been distinguished between oral and written communication. Across the system, there are currently 868 unique courses students may choose from to complete the MUS Core. (This is individual courses, not iterations of courses. For example, WRIT 101 at UM, MSU, MSUB, and UMW counts as 1 course.) For some Council members this was a concern while others perceived this not as a bad thing, but an opportunity for student choice. Elizabeth included the number of Cultural Heritage of American Indian courses in this list, because the operational rules require students completing the MUS Core to

have a course in this area. Because it is not a core area there are no defined outcomes and some campuses do not distinguish courses by this name.

At the beginning of 2017, a request was made to campuses to provide data on the number of incoming and outgoing students using the MUS Core. The data gathered indicated that campuses are not actively tracking student use of the MUS Core and a consistent way to collect the data has not been established. Many campuses indicated they had not been tracking this information and to do so now would require them to go back through every transfer student transcript. For those who provided information the numbers of students using the Core are very minimal. Some campuses indicated it was not possible to note completion of the MUS Core on a student transcript while others are doing just this. Great Falls College awards a Certificate of General Studies which is based off of completion of the Core requirements, so they are able to track it this way. Elizabeth stated a major take-away from the data provided is that we have a program that we are not tracking, so we don't know what students are using it, why they are using it, and if it is benefiting them.

Elizabeth provided the definition for a Certificate of General Studies which is used by OCHE to define the credential for Performance Based Funding purposes. Only Great Falls College and Miles Community College award the certificate. The certificate is valuable to students who transfer, but also as a completion milestone to encourage students to continue on in their studies. Elizabeth expressed interest in expanding this certificate offering to more campuses. Questions arose among the Council regarding financial aid tied to the certificate because there is no gainful employment information that can be provided to satisfy Department of Ed requirements. GFC and MCC have had success using this certificate, so it was suggested that other campuses look to them for information on this.

In wrapping up the overview of the MUS Core, Elizabeth pointed out the concerns with the current state of the MUS Core: tracking, credit v. competency, awareness, and added value for students.

BOR Policy 301.10 – General Education Transfer Policy defines four ways in which a transfer student can meet lower division general education requirements. Some discussion was had over the third provision, “Other ‘general education’ coursework.” It was determined that this likely applies to students who have not completed a full general education program whether of the campus or the MUS Core. The General Education Council is defined in this policy as having 12 members, at least 4 of whom must be selected from nominations submitted by the faculty governance councils on the campuses. The current make up on the Council does not meet this requirement. Wrapping up the overview of the BOR policy, Elizabeth highlighted concerns over inconsistency/conflict as well as the definition of transfer student. A clear definition of who can utilize the MUS Core based on the definition of transfer student is necessary to clear up confusion around the use of the Core for students at embedded two-year colleges who continue on at the university campus. Currently, two embedded two-year campuses do not allow students to use the MUS while two others do.

Elizabeth provided transfer data specific to Montana. In Fall 2016 50% of transfer students in Montana came from out of state institutions.

General Education Trends and Issues

Tom Steen briefly discussed some of the national work that has been going on around general education including AACU's LEAP initiative and efforts to integrate general education throughout the major. He also discussed UND's recent reform work which began in part due to accreditation concerns over the lack of general education assessment taking place. Tom stated that the most important first step for ND was getting together with other campus to discuss what's working and what's not working.

The Interstate Passport: An Orientation & Invitation

Tom provided an overview of the Interstate Passport which stemmed from discussions among leaders in the WICHE Forum and Alliance. Key tenants of the program include: lower division general education areas from the LEAP outcomes, passport learning outcomes in each area, transfer-level proficiency criteria per learning outcome, institutional passport blocks, and a tracking system of student academic progress. The outcomes and proficiency criteria were developed by faculty throughout the WICHE region. Registrars, institutional researchers, and advisors have also been involved in the development of Passport. Passport is meant to facilitate student transfer across state lines, by reducing unnecessary repetition of academic work for students after transfer. Passport does not replace campus general education programs, but many campuses often find the two align with one another.

A major component of the Passport is tracking of academic progress for transfer success. Passport network institutions will report grades to the National Student Clearing House and receive an annual academic progress tracking report which will tell them how well their transfer students are doing at other institutions after transfer. The Passport Review Board will receive only an aggregate report to continuously evaluate the efficacy of Passport. The Council found this aspect of Interstate Passport favorable especially in regard to the need to provide evidence of assessment to accreditors.

Interstate Passport is still relatively new. Institutions were first able to join the network in 2016. Work on the program up to this point has been grant funded. To become self-sustaining the program will begin charging a membership fee. To encourage membership, the first 100 institutions are offered a free 5-year membership. To join Passport, institutions must commit to record keeping and data collection and map their curriculum to the passport learning areas and outcomes. Tom mapped the MUS Core areas to the Passport and found that they aligned pretty closely. Two passport areas focusing on crosscutting skills, critical thinking and teamwork, may require some looking in to the individual courses to identify if the outcomes are met.

In response to questions from the Council, it was indicated that the Passport fulfills lower division general education requirements, however, major requirements and graduation requirements for the institution will still have to be met.

Campus Updates

Each member of the Council was asked to provide a brief update on general education on their campus in line with the following: the current state of general education on your campus, your Gen Ed Committee and process, and issues or challenges on your campus. Below are a few highlights from these updates.

FVCC- Jessica noted that they have started working to align their general education program to the MUS Core. Advisors in the Student Support Center have specifically been advising students to use the MUS Core. Especially valuable for some students is the ability to transfer with 20-29 credits of the Core complete and have the option to complete either the Core or the campus general education program upon transfer.

GFC- Mandy noted that the Curriculum Committee is responsible for general education at GFC. They don't have a lot of specialized coursework, and most of their courses offered are gen ed. When offering new courses, they use course outcomes that are available on the CCN website. This can be a challenge because not all courses have outcomes and not all of those that do are written well. Outcomes assessment is also a challenge as they received a recommendation to provide evidence and make the process more transparent.

Helena College- Robyn noted that the college has worked recently to align their general education program with the MUS core. This included removing WRIT 201 as a general education course. Robyn also commented on the connection between dual enrollment and the MUS Core noting that the two need to be aligned, because many dual enrollment students will attend a 4-year institution despite taking courses at the 2-year colleges while in high school.

MCC- Garth noted that during a previous accreditation visit the college was dinged for lack of general education assessment. Students within a general studies AA/AS take an MCC general education core, but if students declare an area of emphasis they follow a general education program modeled after the MUS Core.

Gallatin College- Janet shared that the college does not have its own general education requirements, but uses the MSU program. AA/AS students are able to choose to complete either the MSU core or the MUS core. About 90% of students choose the MSU core. Only two students have done MUS.

Missoula College- Clint commented that Missoula College shares a general education program with the university. This can be challenging because Missoula College does not offer all of the classes to meet the requirements, such as foreign language courses. The UM General Education Committee has recently agreed to waive this one requirement for Missoula College students and is looking at others. There is also an agreement between the university and the college to allow Missoula College students to a number of general education requirements on the main campus.

MSUB/City College- Matt stated that MSUB is currently looking to identify coherence and integrate areas within the general education program. They too recently received a recommendation from NWCCU to improve general education assessment. One way they have tried to do this is through a proficiency profile completed by students, but are finding it hard to encourage students to complete. At City College the tech programs have their own general education requirements, but other programs follow the MUSB general education curriculum.

UM-Sue described the work the General Education Committee has been focused on this year which includes developing a new general education assessment process as part of an NWCCU pilot project. The process will be used this fall and multiple workshops will be put on by the committee to ensure faculty understand the new process. The General Education Committee is a standing committee under the faculty senate with a rotating chair annually. In addition to the standard general education areas, UM also requires foreign language and ethics in their program.

UMW- Tyler who is the general education chair at UMW commented on the difficulties associated with developing a cohesive general education program around a block schedule. Two to three years ago, UMW adopted the LEAP learning outcomes for their general education program. He also expressed concern on the campus around ensuring adequate assessment is taking place in preparation for their upcoming accreditation visit.

MT Tech/Highlands- Carrie noted that the majority of gen eds are taught on the main university campus rather than at Highlands College. Grade inflation in general education courses has been a major concern for the campus lately and something they are working to address. She also described a challenge between breaking down barriers and silos on campus around general education and better connecting the curriculum committee and general education committee.

MSU- Brendan noted that a core 3.0 at MSU has been proposed and is waiting on approval. This would replace the existing MSU program if approved. MSU also requires a research experience course to complete the general education program and this is usually at the upper level.

Breakout Discussions

The Council broke out into two small groups to further discuss Passport and the MUS Core. The following questions were proposed to guide the discussion:

Passport

How do we feel about joining Passport?

What questions do we still have about Passport?

If joining Passport, how would we like to move forward? (system, individual institution, subset of institutions)

How do we engage faculty and the rest of campus in this discussion?

MUS Core

What do we want in a system general education program?

What don't we want in a system general education program?

Does the MUS Core fulfill our desires? What are other options we might consider?

Do we want to consider holding a system-wide GE gathering event to broaden the conversation about GE, Passport, and the Core?

Report Out

Passport

Group 1- The view in this group was that Passport should be a grassroots effort, not something mandated at the system level over concerns of academic freedom. They liked the idea of a common set of outcomes. It was unclear to the group if this would really benefit the institutions. Questions remaining included: How much will campuses have to change their programs if implemented? Will this be a third program to manage (the campus general education program and the MUS Core being the other two)? Who are we trying to serve through Passport, incoming or outgoing students? To move forward the group felt they should take the information back to their campuses. They thought it would be helpful to run a "simulation" to see what changes would have to be made if any.

Group 2- Group 2 identified a number of pros and cons for using the Passport. Pros: It would solve our current tracking issues; it could make us more attractive to out of state students; clearly articulated and measurable outcomes are present; clean marketing materials readily available that could be taken advantage of. Cons: we have an existing infrastructure (MUS Core) that might not convert well to passport, asking campuses to take on additional work, unsure of the advantage to students with so few using the MUS Core now. A question from this group was who will cover the cost of membership.

MUS Core

Group 1- What the group currently likes about the MUS Core is that it is a holistic approach to learning. They also like the flexibility it provides campus. They do not want a size fits all approach. Overall they felt that the Core is working. The group really like the idea of a systemwide general education gathering. They suggested holding it in multiple locations to make it more accessible for everyone. A discussion around assessment would be a very good topic for a meeting.

Group 2- Group 2 expressed desire for very clear outcomes for learning in a system general education program. They don't feel that the MUS Core fulfills their desires because the outcomes are unclear and not measurable. They also commented that the existing program is not offering structure across the state which is needed. This group was also supportive of a state-wide gathering to discuss general education.

Summary and Next Steps

Wrapping up the meeting, the Council agreed that they needed to go back to their campuses to gather more information on the MUS Core and the interest in Passport. Many members felt that they could still use more information on Interstate Passport before being able to explain it to stakeholders on their campus. The Council expressed some difficulty with the timing as many committees and faculty will not meet again until next semester.

Elizabeth stated that she would like to move forward planning a system summit on general education. Carrie, Matt, Robyn, Brendan, Jessica, and Clint volunteered to serve on a planning committee for this event. Elizabeth will contact the group in the near future to begin working on this. The summit which may be held in Fall will serve as a venue to further the conversations about the MUS Core and Passport in addition to other areas of interest in general education.

The Council felt positively about today's meeting and desired to continue meeting annually at the least. The end of April was a popular time for an annual meeting.