

Report of the General Education Review Committee

Since our appointment in early November 2021, the General Education Review Committee has met to address the charge we were given by the Faculty Senate in Motion XXVI-M1. The charge asked our committee “to assess whether a modified version of the 2021 Discovery Review Committee proposal should be prepared or whether a new proposal should be developed.” Herewith is our report and recommendations.

Summary

We do not endorse the preparation of a modified version of the 2021 DRC proposal. We conclude, further, that a reimagination of the Discovery program should be undertaken only after clarification and/or resolution of several existing uncertainties that we believe may deeply impact the university’s general education program. We recommend that in the interim, the Senate work with the Discovery Committee, as outlined in the Senate’s April 2021 charge to the Discovery Committee, to entertain recommendations the Committee may make to streamline and improve the current general education program.

Basis for Recommendations

Our conclusions are derived from a careful consideration of the many factors that guided the Discovery Review Committee in its deliberations. The proposal it set forth nearly a year and a half ago reflected a prodigious, thoughtful, and far reaching effort on the part of the DRC to enhance UNH’s current general education program. The ground upon which the Committee made its recommendations, however, has shifted substantially since its report to the Senate in September of 2020.

- I. We note with concern, first and foremost, that the DRC recommendations failed to attract widespread support:
 - a) Survey responses to the 2020 Discovery Program proposal revealed significant faculty discomfort with several key aspects of the Discovery reform proposal. There is nothing to suggest that these can somehow now be easily resolved within the proposed framework.
 - b) Furthermore, the proposal did not gain traction in the Senate after many months of discussion and debate. We believe the proposal is unlikely to do so now without fairly substantial revision.
 - c) Without broad support either in the Senate or among the faculty, the current proposal lacks the consensus that should form the bedrock of general education reform.

- II. Furthermore, a great deal has changed since the DRC prepared its report and submitted it to the Faculty Senate; many uncertainties exist today that could not have been anticipated in the fall of 2020. These realities are likely to impact

general education at UNH and should be addressed in any future reform of the Discovery program. We draw particular attention to the following:

- a) The 2021 DRC proposal was developed with the realities of RCM in mind; those imperatives are no longer governing. While pedagogical considerations should rightfully drive all matters governing general education, a redesign of the Discovery program may be more effective and its endorsement more likely if it is at least informed by prevailing funding models, goals, and imperatives.
- b) In July 2021 the USNH approved a merger with Granite State College which was unforeseen when the DRC developed its recommendations. Much is unknown at present about the merger but reform of the Discovery program should be based, at the very least, on greater knowledge of the merger's likely impact on general education at UNH. Likewise, the Governor has expressed an interest in merging the community college system with USNH. One rationale is that this would make it easier for students to move from one of the community colleges to a USNH institution. It is not clear, however, that the community colleges would be able to meet the attribute requirements laid out in the current DRC proposal in a satisfactory manner. Any review of general education must address this newly emerging institutional and educational landscape.

III The current DRC proposal takes as axiomatic the premise that we must require 10 courses as part of a general education program. According to the NECHE standards, students must complete the equivalent of 40 credit hours. At UNH, general education evolved over time to meet that requirement by means of 10 four credit courses. The DRC Committee was thus guided by UNH's relied upon approach to satisfying the NECHE 40 credit hour curricular demand.

- a) We believe that these assumptions should be revisited. For instance, it might be time for the University to tackle the four credits for three hour classes. In several of our colleges and in many majors, students currently take four courses per semester. Each course is worth four credits and meets three hours per week; thus students take 32 courses to graduate. One solution would be to turn many existing 3 hour, 4 credit classes into 3 hour, 3 credit classes. Under such a system, students would take five courses a semester and need 40 rather than 32 courses to graduate. This model creates possibilities for an expanded, more flexible and more robust general education program. We raise this idea as an example, recognizing that such matters are best engaged in a broader, future review of the Discovery program. Our point is simply to underscore that such new approaches require steps beyond those laid out in the current DRC proposal.
- b) We note as well that the current proposal does not adequately address the growing curricular needs of professional degree programs. Many of

the professional degree programs need to expand their footprint in order to meet the growing requirements desired by accrediting bodies. The proposal does not help these programs address their accreditation needs.

- IV Faculty and students have sought a simplified general education program, even as demands for new requirements grow within and across the colleges. There is nothing simple about achieving general education reform. However, the complexity of the current DRC proposal surfaced as a chief concern in the comments of faculty. Further streamlining and simplifying should remain, in our view, a primary goal of a future general education plan.
- V In April 2021, the Faculty Senate charged the Discovery Committee with reviewing “recommendations (e.g., allowing upper-division courses for Discovery, eliminating the inquiry requirements, etc.) from the report of the ad hoc Discovery Review Committee, and consider whether any should be brought to the Senate as independent motions similar to those adopted to allow Discovery credit for transferred 2.5 credit courses (MOTION # XX.III-M26) and to award transfer and study abroad Discovery credit based on student learning outcomes (MOTION # XXIII-M25) that help to better support our students within the current Discovery program, and if so, to offer such motions.”

We urge that this process go forward until the uncertainties we have itemized in this report have been clarified or resolved. At that time, it would be appropriate to undertake a reimagination of the Discovery program.

Respectfully submitted,
General Education Review Committee

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