

Summary of the GE Committee Meeting with Dr. Birdsell and Dr. Hargis Monday, May 9, 2022

Dr. Birdsell made the following comments before opening the floor to questions:

1. The GE Program is the core of the University, a distinctive gift to our students, one that influences a student's study in a major by forming a way of thinking and by developing skills.
2. The GE Program needs a "shape."
3. The GE Program largely affects persistence at Kean, as it provides many of a student's first courses.
4. How do we create a vibrant core curriculum that brands you as a Cougar? It should encapsulate the 3 Institutional Priorities from MSCHE: Excellence & Equity, Upstanders, and Evolution/Continuous Improvement.
5. How do we support undergraduate research through the GE Program? Could it include experiential learning?
6. The goals of the GE Program should include the following:
 - a. Intellectually vibrant courses that provide a comprehensive platform for further study
 - b. A shared curriculum: all students get the same GE experience
 - c. Preparation for the major
 - d. Interdisciplinary study, leaving disciplinary inquiry to the major (This point was added at the GE Task Force meeting on May 13)
7. Given the current form of the GE Curriculum, there are extreme differences in students' GE experiences across the majors.
8. The GE Program should be legible and linear: a strong trunk with branches that avoids traveling back down the trunk when changing majors.
9. Any revision to the GE Program should start with the GE SLOs, from which courses are developed.
10. The number of Additional Requirements on the left side of the curriculum guide should be reduced/controlled.

Susan Ahern reported that early findings in preparing the GE Program Review show that the GE SLOs could be presented differently to students so that the GE Program feels more intentional to them.

Dr. Birdsell emphasized that there's no need for a blood bath/knife fight over getting disciplines represented in the GE's core curriculum; all will be represented.

As of September 1, 2022, Kean's number of full-time faculty will have increased by 50%. Dr. Birdsell made the point that Kean's commitment to hiring new faculty is not only providing the energy needed for our R2 initiative, but it's also meant to address Kean's low student-to-tenure-track-faculty ratio. The new goal is to get Kean's top, senior faculty in contact with Kean's most vulnerable students.

When looking at classes with 40 or more sections, there is a huge differentiation between course evaluation results. GESS courses have the highest number of D-F-W grades, especially PSY 1000. Dr. Birdsell asked: Can we make a better experience that is more broadly shared? To answer that question, he is proposing a pilot study of PSY 1000 with sections of 300 students. The format would use 3 class meetings per week: 2 lectures and a section of recitation led by grad students. (This will also make better use of Kean's Graduate Assistantships from the PsyD program.) By citing examples of big lectures that can be exciting, Dr. Birdsell justified the validity of making such sections available as an option to students in 2022 - 23.

Kathy Curran asked: How do we get students to complete course evaluations? Dr. Birdsell responded that giving students a better experience in the course will boost participation in the course eval process. Apparently the President's Student Advisory Council has also discussed strategies for building awareness.

Sean Keegan-Landis asked: What role will the curriculum committees play in changing the course capacities for these large sections? Dr. Birdsell suggested that the piloting of this proposal should happen before any formal action is taken to alter course caps. He also said that perhaps it isn't the lectures that need course caps, but the recitation sections.

Dr. Birdsell added that all of these matters have some urgency behind them since they directly impact graduation rates and retention efforts. His philosophy is that we should discover high impact practices and then codify them.

Bridget White asked: How should we deal with differing needs for MATH Foundation Courses across programs? Dr. Hargis answered that there needs to be flexibility in this area, and that new models for mathematics education are being developed to meet various programmatic needs. He used Financial Technology as an example.

Dr. Birdsell expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to collaborate with the GE Committee. Dr. Hargis offered to meet with members of the Committee to learn more about their programs through one-on-one discussions.

~Rachel Evans, Chair
General Education Committee
May 11, 2022