

General Education Subcommittee on “Communications”
Mid-year Report
Martha Young, Chair

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*Chris Heavey will replace Dr. Bell effective spring 2008 semester.

Background

The “Communications” subcommittee met twice during the fall 2007 semester. We are scheduled to meet six times during the spring 2008 semester. The initial focus of our discussions was to examine communication materials from the General Education Retreat. We examined the communication groups’ contributions and used these ideas to guide our first discussion. In addition to focusing on the retreat perspectives, we also read and discussed Bok’s chapter 4, “Learning to Communicate,” and Jeff Jablonski’s work in writing across the curriculum (WAC) has served as a major focus in our discussions. It seems clear that a major purpose of a general education curriculum is to prepare students to be effective users of a variety of communication tools not only in discrete courses in which these tools are taught but throughout their preparation.

Preliminary Questions and Directions

1. The big issues are writing and oral communication. What kinds of experiences should a general education curriculum provide to address concerns about the effectiveness of curricula based in building writing and communication competencies?
2. How can we broaden communication opportunities in the core?
3. How do we get people on board to make a commitment to enhance principles of communication across the curriculum?
4. One issue that surfaced related to the importance of providing avenues for professional development so that faculty in the disciplines could understand the goals of communication in the broad sense. For example, what is the relationship between communication expectations in the College of Engineering and the general education curriculum? Where (and how) do the unique purposes of both meet?
5. What can be done to stimulate interest in reinforcing communication across the curriculum? We recognize that the process of definition of discrete communication skills (i.e., how to write a clear scientific report) may need to be left to the disciplines. And this point raises the question, “How can the general education core prepare students for success in communication in their chosen discipline?”
6. A general consensus was expressed regarding the importance of preparing students to be effective and competent communicators. This point is followed by the notion that faculty are not averse to the importance of communication, but many simply do not have the background or tools to utilize recommendations such as those in the WAC report. It takes internal support (professional development) and dialogue with faculty to provide them with a better knowledge of how to assign writing, for example.