October 17, 2016

Dear Claire, Carol and MJ,
I am writing as the UPD of the Department of Veterinary and Animal Sciences. I have concerns that the new Gen Ed DIV will negatively impact our majors’ ability to complete their required classes within four years.

My main concerns are:

1) Requirement to take the DIV within the first year-

Our students have a full schedule the first year. At NSO, they generally fall into three groups, based on their pre-calculus preparation as assessed by the math placement exam:

Group 1) greater than or equal to 20 on part A of the math placement exam
AnSci 101 (4 cr) AnSci 103 (4 cr)
Bio 151 (4 cr) Bio 152/153 (5 cr)
Chem 111 (4 cr) Chem 112 (4 cr)
Math 127 (3 cr) Englwrit 112 (3 cr)
freshman seminar or RAP (1 cr)
total of 16 credits
total 15 credits

Group 2) 16-19 on part A of the math placement exam
AnSci 101 (4 cr) AnSci 103 (4 cr)
Bio 151 (4 cr) Bio 152/153 (5 cr)
Englwrit (3 cr) Chem 111 (4 cr)
Math 104 (3 cr) Math 127 (3 cr, if pre-vet track) or Gen Ed (4 cr)
freshman seminar or RAP (1 cr)
total of 15 credits.
total 16-17 credits

Group 3) below 16 on part A of the math placement exam
AnSci 101 (4 cr) AnSci 103 (4 cr)
Bio 151 (4 cr) Bio 152/153 (5 cr)
Englwrit (3 cr) Math 102 (2 cr)
Math 101 (2 cr) Gen Ed (4 cr)
freshman seminar or RAP (1 cr)
total of 14 credits

Group 2 and 3 are at a disadvantage compared to group 1, because they must wait 1 semester or one year to begin the Chem 111/112 General Chemistry series and to take Math 127 Calculus. Because multiple later courses depend on the Chem 111 and 112 prerequisites, it is important that they complete the developmental math courses Math 104 and Math 101/102 as soon as possible. They are also less academically prepared, so that taking 18-19 credits with the addition of a 4 credit DIV Gen Ed would be extremely unwise. Scheduling for group 1 is optimal for success in chemistry and calculus and graduation in four years, but there is no room for a 4 credit Gen Ed in year 1. There
is only room for group 2 if they defer Math 127, but it is better if they take Math 127 while the material from Math 104 Pre-calculus is fresh in their minds. Because previous data analysis has shown that students scoring below 20 on part A of the math placement exam are more likely to be from groups underrepresented in science and math, a first year DIV requirement would be an additional obstacle to their success.

All of these schedules have been worked out over many years and can be easily upset by a lack of seats of even one of the classes, especially for those students attending later NSOs, or in the second semester, students who haven’t transferred in credits from AP classes (usually students from high schools with fewer resources) and thus, register later than their peers. Adding another freshman year requirement with variable scheduling would make it very difficult and would lead to high levels of student dissatisfaction.

An additional issue would be how a DIV deadline (even if it was extended to the first three semesters) would be enforced. Would students be sanctioned if they did not meet this deadline?

2) Removal of the Social World requirement (AL, AT, I, SB, SI) would remove the status of I and SI GenEd classes as Gen Ed classes and disproportionately affect honors and science majors by adding another Gen Ed requirement -

Besides the IE GenEd classes, our department has one Gen Ed class AnSci 260 Animal Care and Welfare (SI). It took a considerable amount of effort to apply for and gain approval of this class as a Gen Ed class. However, it benefited our majors, in that it fulfilled the Social World requirement and allowed them to complete their major requirements in a timely fashion. This is especially important for students who are struggling academically and financially, which can be students with health issues, from underrepresented groups and first generation students. Other departments in the College of Natural Sciences teach I and SI courses - it seems very unlikely that other departments in CNS teach AL or AT GenEd courses. In the fall 2016 semester, the only SB courses offered by CNS departments are taught by Psychology and Brain Science and Geosciences; the rest are taught by departments in colleges other than CNS. In contrast, in the fall 2016 semester, there are four SI and I Gen Ed classes taught by CNS departments, plus Honors 201H Ideas that Change the World (I).

"Rebranding" of all SI and I classes to SB classes would place a significant workload on the departments affected and the Gen Ed Council, even if it is possible. The language in the form J for SB designation refers only to “...variations among human cultures and to understand their own social milieu in relation to other social milieu...Insights and explanations about the causes of human behavior, the nature of human societies, the structure of social relationships and the ways in which people and societies change should help students think more clearly about their own human nature and the social worlds in which they live.” In these two sentences, the words “human” and “people" occurs five times. This human-centric approach does not admit any interdisciplinary or scientific thinking, since science necessarily is not focused solely on humans.

If DIV is approved, I would propose that it replace SB (Social and Behavioral) instead of the Social World requirement (AL, AT, I, SB, SI). The SB requirement would still be available as an option in the
Social World requirement and SI and I Gen Ed classes would maintain their status as Gen Ed courses.

Thank you for your considerations of my concerns about the DIV proposal.

Best regards,
Janice

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