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**CAS Motions on General Education**

The model adopted for this General Education Program was developed with the best of intentions and in the abstract—that students learn in shared, interdisciplinary learning communities and develop oral and written skills simultaneously—is laudable. In practice, however, there are significant problems, both pedagogical and structural, that impede student success and affect student recruitment and retention.

Given significant pedagogical problems with the current structure, implementation, and delivery of the Discourse and Discourse/Anchor pairings in the General Education Program that directly impede student success, recruitment, and retention, as well as efficient time to degree, the faculty of the College of Arts & Sciences present the following two motions. ***Neither disrupts the delivery of the UMKC General Education Program or changes the existing thirty-hour General Education block***. Both changes would resolve considerable pedagogical, administrative, and structural issues that would allow us to focus our attention on student learning.

To make motion #2 viable, the Writing and Speech specialists in the Departments of English and Communication Studies at UMKC would lead a campus-wide conversation about the revision of the existing Discourse SLOs and course syllabi to foster the desired critical engagement and communication skills critical to a solid General Education Program.

**MOTION #1: The College of Arts & Sciences moves that the Discourse / Anchor pairings be decoupled as soon as possible.**

**PEDAGOGY**

* Linked courses, even when voluntarily offered, have not been shown to improve success, especially in college writing classes.
* The original intention was for faculty to focus on a shared SLO. Neither Anchor or Discourse faculty work on this model; instead, as a general rule, Anchor faculty expect Discourse faculty to adapt their courses to match the content and goals of the Anchor with which they are paired, ignoring that that there is specific content and skills-building required in a Writing or Speech course.
* Very rarely are significant links developed between Discourse / Anchor pairings, in part because Anchor offerings change each semester.
* Students do not perceive a link between Discourse / Anchor pairings and continue to be very frustrated by the theory versus the practice of these linked courses.

**RECRUITMENT & RETENTION**

* Students are required to take six-hour blocks of Discourse / Anchor, and should one not perform well in one or the other, students are encouraged to drop all six hours, potentially affecting their Financial Aid status and their time to degree completion.
* The College of Arts & Sciences Advising Office witnesses these difficulties on a regular basis, even as they have a hard time placing students in stand-alone Discourse classes, should that be the only course needed. In addition, a number of students in any given Anchor course are often *not* enrolled in Discourse; one faculty member teaching an Anchor in Spring 2016 indicated that of the 250 students enrolled, one-third were not also enrolled in Discourse. Another faculty member indicated that of her 22 Discourse students, one-third were not enrolled in the linked Anchor course. Already, the plan to ensure an integrative educational cohort is not working.
* The College’s student recruiter, moreover, has indicated that our General Education program is a tough self for transfer students who do not have an AA degree, for they risk losing credits already earned elsewhere in favor of our thirty-hour block.
* Given the interdisciplinary nature of Anchor I (3 credits) and Anchor II (3 credits), instead of allowing two subject courses (6 credits) to transfer, students must have twelve (12) credits in multidisciplinary courses to be equivalent to the six (6) credit Anchor I and Anchor II sequence.
* Students wait longer to transfer to UMKC, for if they earn an AA degree this extra demand is waived. The net effect is fewer students transferring into UMKC as soon as they are ready and the loss of SCH and dollars coming to UMKC.

**LABOR**

* Most often, tenure-line faculty teach Anchor courses; contingent faculty teach Discourse. There is a stark disparity in power and pay for Anchor / Discourse faculty.
* Anchor faculty elect the topics of Anchor courses and teach to their own specialties; Discourse faculty are asked to accommodate a range of Anchor course foci, a practice that ensures that there can rarely be a coherent link of content or a consistent approach to a shared SLO.
* Discourse faculty are paired with Anchor courses most often because of scheduling demands, not shared interests.
* Anchor offerings change each semester which requires Discourse faculty to modify their syllabi on a semester-to-semester basis to accommodate different Anchor pairings.

**Motion #2: The College of Arts & Sciences moves that the three Discourse classes which collectively account for nine (9) hours of the thirty-hour block be separated into two (2), three-credit Writing courses and one (1), three-credit Speech course.**

The initiative to combine the teaching of Writing and Speech in the Discourse classes is, again, an abstract ideal and some good has come from it. Speech faculty and writing faculty have a much better understanding of the goals for different kinds of communication skills acquisition. The implementation of “library week” for students in Discourse to develop strong research skills has also been a bonus.

**PEDAGOGY**

* The current model of combining the teaching of Speech and the teaching of Writing does not take into consideration the national standards for Writing and Speech or the disciplinary expectations of each.
* The national organization on the teaching of writing, The National Council of Teachers of English, follows current literature in supporting the pedagogical view that *Writing about Writing* is the best way to encourage significant growth in writing development. Their principles for the sound teaching of Writing detail a specific grounding in theories of composition and student development, as well as intense training in the teaching of writing, are available here: <http://www.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/postsecondarywriting#principle11>.
* Further, scholarly data indicate that stand-alone speech courses are the best model for developing articulation skills and that educators trained in speech theory are integral to a successful program is well presented by the National Communication Association: <http://www.natcom.org/teachingandlearning/basiccourse/>.
* Instructors of speech indicate discomfort when teaching writing as they have no disciplinary or theoretical training in that area; likewise, writing instructors indicate that they have not received training in speech theory to prepare them to teach students effectively.
* Beginning in 2017, the Higher Learning Commission indicates that faculty teaching a subject should have at least 18 graduate credits in that discipline. This means writing faculty in the Department of English would need 18 graduate credits in Communication Studies to offer Speech; and speech faculty in Communication Studies would need 18 graduate credits in English to offer Writing. Given the nature of the disciplinary differences, moreover, it would be difficult to find and secure a large pool of faculty who have training in both areas.
* There are too many components expected Discourse 100, 200, and 300 to address them all and to meet students’ individual needs.

**LABOR**

* Discourse faculty are contingent faculty and many have indicated that if they had the option, they would refuse to teach Discourse.
* All Discourse faculty teach outside of their departmental homes, which creates difficulties in chain of command, supervision, and annual evaluation.
* Writing faculty can easily go to a college or community college and teach within their discipline, drawing on already established training, for more money and less work than is required in the Discourse classes and in the Discourse / Anchor pairings.
* We should be treating our faculty better than this: we should acknowledge their training and expertise, allow them to teach what they are well-qualified for, and support them in developing rigorous and effective experiences in learning Writing and Speech in distinct courses.