
WMU Essential Studies Executive Advisory Committee

Minutes of 14 February 2023

Call to Order

The regular meeting of the Western Michigan University Faculty Senate WMU Essential Studies Executive Advisory Board was called to order at 1:03 pm on 14 February 2023, via Webex video conferencing, by Brian Tripp, chair.

Members in Attendance: Elissa Allen, Decker Haines, Lois Lemon, Jessica Parker, Brian Tripp, Kathryn Wagner

Members Absent: Elizabeth Isidro, Lindsay Jeffers

Advisory Members Present: Jonathan Bush, Carrie Cumming

Advisory Members Absent: Nicolas Witschi

Ex Officio: Lisa DeChano-Cook

Guest: Randy Ott, Senior Director, Academic Collaboration, Merze Tate College

Quorum

A quorum was present.

Agenda

[MOTION] It was moved by DeChano-Cook, seconded by Lemon, to accept the agenda as presented. The motion carried unanimously.

Minutes

Approval of the 10 January 2023 minutes was postponed.

Reports of Officers

Chair Tripp reported that a WMU Essential Studies Leadership Team meeting was held in person on 10 February 2023, with Bush, Ott, Tripp, and Weideman in attendance. WMU Essential Studies curriculum issues were discussed. The WMU Essential Studies Executive Advisory Committee and the WMU Essential Studies Course Review and Approval Subcommittee (CRAC) will be participating as a combined group. This group will have the objective of articulating the criteria for the fourth-year review of all WMU Essential Studies courses, when courses may be dropped from the WMU Essential Studies program.

Ex Officio DeChano-Cook reported on a meeting with Bush, Ott, and Ed Martini, WMUx Associate Provost and Merze Tate College Dean, to discuss the roles of WMU Essential Studies leadership, WMU Essential Studies CRAC, and the WMU Essential Studies handbook.

Reports of University Representatives

Bush reported meetings with individual faculties and groups to provide advice about WMU Essential Studies courses. Faculty are encouraged to send all comments and questions about WMU Essential Studies, including the process of how to deal with rejected proposals for cyclic reviews, to Bush. Bush met with over 20 departments to give an overview of the WMU Essential Studies program, discuss their available WMU Essential Studies courses and strategic plan, and review how to use WMU Essential Studies assessment data. More WMU Essential Studies course offerings by a department are not necessarily the best option. Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) must be honored, and WMU Essential Studies assessments should be intact, but differences in day-to-day teaching of a course by multiple faculty members should not be a concern.

The WMU Essential Studies CRAC is currently in the middle of a cyclic review of WMU Essential Studies courses. Previously, the majority of all WMU Essential Studies courses were submitted for cyclic review during the 2021-22 academic year, while the remaining WMU Essential Studies courses have been submitted for cyclic review for the current 2022-23 academic year. A current issue is that the Curriculum course management software may show that the cyclic review of a course in the WMU Essential Studies program is rejected. However, no WMU Essential Studies course can be rejected during the cyclic review process. Once this issue is resolved, the review will either be accepted with comments, accepted without

comments, or returned for resubmission with a request for additional documentation. As discussed in the 10 February 2023 WMU Essential Studies Leadership Team meeting, the WMU Essential Studies Executive Advisory Committee and WMU Essential Studies CRAC members will jointly participate in the fourth-year review of the overall WMU Essential Studies data in 2024-25. Bush will distribute letters to deans with lists of current WMU Essential Studies courses that have not been submitted for cyclic review for academic years 2021-22 and 2022-23, and a reminder to submit them by 15 March 2023. Otherwise, departments will be asked about these courses at the end of the fourth-year review. If the cyclic review for a WMU Essential Studies course is submitted, it will be accepted. If a department wants a course removed from WMU Essential Studies, Bush can be contacted for the course to be removed without going through the curriculum process. Faculty are encouraged to contact Bush with any concerns about the WMU Essential Studies program so that problems can be resolved and procedures are as non-onerous as possible.

The next WMU Essential Studies spring event, tentatively scheduled for 21 April 2023, is typically planned as a faculty and staff help session. However, this year's WMU Essential Studies spring event is planned to be a combined retreat for all members of the WMU Essential Studies Executive Advisory and WMU Essential Studies CRAC committees, and key Faculty Senate members. The goal of this retreat is for members of these committees to work closely and prepare for the WMU Essential Studies fourth-year program review, which will occur during the 2024-25 academic year.

WMU Essential Studies was created by the WMU Essential Studies Executive Advisory Committee; however, the role of governance by this committee needs to be updated and redefined. The WMU Essential Studies Executive Advisory Committee will have a major role in the fourth-year review and in recommendations on how to proceed in the next cyclical review. Chair Tripp noted that following the recent transition to the Curriculog system, WMU Essential Studies course applications already reviewed by WMU Essential Studies CRAC under the previous curriculum submission system are not included; consequently, a previously submitted course appears as a new application for WMU Essential Studies CRAC approval.

Ott has been hosting bi-weekly help sessions for WMU Essential Studies Elearning and SLO. He has been updating WMUx documentation on how to do things for WMU Essential Studies, including a template for assessment planning. [The WMU Essential Studies Faculty Resources web page with current web links and tutorials can be found here.](#)

Due to his absence Witschi did not provide a report.

Unfinished Business

Ex Officio DeChano-Cook gave an update on the WMU Essential Studies Handbook. The WMU Essential Studies Handbook is planned to be made available online by 6 March 2023. A decision regarding which website will host the WMU Essential Studies Handbook, the Faculty Senate WMU Essential Studies page or Merz Tate College, needs to be finalized. The plan is to have the complete handbook and individual section links available on the hosting website.

There is an unfilled position on the WMU Essential Studies Executive Advisory Committee for a member affiliated with WMUx. A discussion was held regarding the history of this position; it may have originally been necessary because of technical, i.e., software, requirements. Ott will discuss this position with Ed Martini and possibly decide if this position is still needed at the next WMU Essential Studies Executive Advisory Committee meeting.

New Business

Ott discussed the issue of how WMU incoming transfer students receive WMU Essential Studies credits if students transfer a course that WMU does not have an equivalent course. This has become a problem for some incoming transfer students. Academic advisors currently have the authority to approve courses as a stopgap solution. The Faculty Senate Transfer of Credit committee will begin reviewing this issue and define a potential process for transferring courses eligible for WMU Essential Studies status. There may be a list of transfer equivalencies for the previous WMU General Education course requirements.

Ex-Officio DeChano-Cook discussed a curriculum issue involving the WMU Essential Studies categories of Planetary Sustainability (PS) and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI); these two categories need to be included in the WMU catalog language. Many of the first approved WMU Essential Studies courses do not have this language. After consulting with Kelley Oliver, Associate Registrar, it was proposed that the WMU Essential Studies Executive Advisory Committee allow the Registrar's Office to make catalog edits so that these courses do not have to go through the curriculum approval process.

[MOTION] It was moved by DeChano-Cook, seconded by Tripp, to allow the Registrar's Office to make catalog edits for courses that are already approved for PS and DEI, with the addition of the statement that department chairs will be notified by email about these changes. The motion passed unanimously.

Parker mentioned a curriculum issue; descriptions of SLO for some WMU Essential Studies courses are visible in some web page searches versus drop-down menus, and students may question the health and wellness requirement for some courses. It needs to be communicated to students that an SLO is not a requirement for a course, and the WMU Essential Studies student pages, which list SLOs, need to be revised so that students are not confused by SLO listings.

Announcements

None.

Adjournment

[MOTION] It was moved by Lemon, seconded by DeChano Cook, to adjourn the meeting at 2:30 p.m. The motion carried unanimously. The WMU Essential Studies Executive Advisory Committee will meet next on 14 March 2023 at 1:30 p.m. via Webex.

Approval

Submitted by Brian Tripp, Chair

Minutes approved on 14 March 2023.