
WMU Essential Studies Executive Advisory Committee
Minutes of 8 October 2024

Call to Order

The regular meeting of the Western Michigan University Faculty Senate WMU Essential Studies Executive Advisory Committee was called to order at 1:02 p.m. on 8 October 2024, via Webex video conferencing, by Brian Tripp, chair.

Members in Attendance: Elissa Allen, Elizabeth Isidro, Lindsay Jeffers, Lei Meng, Jessica Parker, Brenda Srof, Brian Tripp, Kathryn Wagner

Member Absent: none

Advisory Members Present: Jonathan Bush, Lisa DeChano-Cook

Advisory Members Absent: Carrie Cumming

Ex Officio Present: Decker Hains

Quorum

A quorum was present with nine members in attendance, of the six needed to establish a quorum.

Jeffers joined the meeting at 1:05 p.m.

Ex Officio Hains joined the meeting at 1:15 p.m.

Agenda

[MOTION] It was moved by Allen, seconded by Srof, to accept the agenda as presented. The motion carried unanimously.

Minutes

[MOTION] It was moved by Srof, seconded by Parker, to approve the 10 September 2024 minutes as presented. The motion carried unanimously.

Reports of Officers

Chair Tripp reported that issues related to transferring credits are a work in progress. There are no updates from the fourth-year review liaisons.

Ex Officio Hains did not provide a report.

Reports of University Representatives

Bush reported the following:

1. All three major committees for the fourth-year review have met or will meet this week.
2. WMU Essential Studies Course Review and Approval Committee will meet in October to review new and revised courses for the academic year 2025-26, working through November to reach their December deadline.
3. Professor Kate Langan, University Libraries, will work on WMU Essential Studies pathways to provide courses that students can use to follow their interests or passions. Langan will also work on a WMU Essential Studies search feature as a marketing tool for students.
4. There have been some issues with the assessment plan template document, and Bush has revised the original template to make it more user-friendly and fix some glitches. There are new 3- and 4-letter codes that can be used to articulate student learning outcomes for different levels and areas. Three areas of student learning outcomes have caused some confusion:
 - a. There are two versions of Increase Foundational Knowledge Student Learning Outcomes (FKSL), which are confusing:
 - i. "Increase foundational knowledge of social sciences, humanities, or the arts."
 - ii. "Increase foundational knowledge of the sciences, social sciences, or the arts."
 - b. The level II Societies and Cultures course student learning outcomes are different from those of other level II classes. There are no required student learning outcomes (it's a choice of student learning outcomes). Bush recommends that clarification is needed to be consistent and parallel with other level II courses.

- c. There are two science categories, Science and Technology and Scientific Literacy with a Lab, that share the same student learning outcomes. Why do two different categories share the same student learning outcomes, and should both science categories use the same student learning outcomes?
5. Additional consideration for future meetings: Should the First-Year Experience (FYE 2100) be a level I Inquiry and Engagement (IE) class? Will that take credit hours from academic units? It may result in students taking FYE instead of a level I academic class. Can non-faculty members teach a Level I WMU Essential Studies course? These are questions to be considered, and this proposal is in early stages.
6. There are two ad hoc committees. One is for rubric review to revise and simplify outcome rubrics so that rubrics are simple, broad, and parallel. A second ad hoc committee will review assessment plan models to provide examples at each level.

DeChano-Cook reported that transfer credits in WMU Essential Studies are still in progress.

Unfinished Business

Chair Tripp shared the charges for the WMU Essential Studies Course Review and Approval Committee and discussed the submission of the WMU Essential Studies Course Review and Approval Committee year-end report, which must be approved by the WMU Essential Studies Executive Advisory Committee.

[MOTION] It was moved by Allen, seconded by Isidro, to approve the charges for the WMU Essential Studies Course Review and Approval Committee, modified with a change of due date before 9 April 2025 for the final report. The motion carried unanimously.

Chair Tripp noted that the WMU Essential Studies Executive Advisory Committee lost a representative from Merze Tate. Bush emailed Dr. Luchara Wallace regarding a representative and is waiting for a response.

New Business

DeChano-Cook and Bush suggested a best practices document for advisers to provide written Memorandum of Action (MOA) guidelines for transfer credits. The MOA currently states that a class should meet a minimum of 70% of the outcomes to approve equivalent credit.

Chair Tripp reported that the Department of Math is reviewing their Student Learning Outcomes (SLO).

Chair Tripp noted that the WMU Essential Studies Executive Advisory Committee may need an MOA amendment to consider Summer I and Summer II courses in the timeliness of WMU Essential Studies offerings. Summer I is at the end of an academic year, and Summer II is the beginning of the next academic year. Bush noted that the goal is to make sure a course is consistently available to students. Ex Officio Hains affirmed that classes are not being removed from WMU Essential Studies because they are taught in the summer. It must be clear that the importance of courses being offered consistently to remain part of WMU Essential Studies offerings. If the WMU Essential Studies Executive Advisory Committee makes a statement that courses should be offered each academic year, from 1 July to 30 June, the WMU Essential Studies Executive Advisory Committee can refer to that motion.

At the WMU Essential Studies Executive Advisory Committee November meeting, there will be a vote to clarify that MOA 19/03 "once every academic year" includes summer classes, and WMU Essential Studies classes must be offered at least once between 1 July and 30 June.

Chair Tripp discussed how to review changing catalog guidelines. DeChano-Cook explained that if a WMU Essential Studies course changes level or category, the student is bound by the catalog year, so the student would need to take that course based on the requirements of their catalog year. Bush affirmed that it is based on the year in which the class was taken.

DeChano-Cook inquired about students who are returning with completed General Education requirements but are now moving into WMU Essential Studies. Parker stated that WMU Essential Studies

was created with the first-year students in mind. Parker suggested keeping the integrity of WMU Essential Studies for returning students, but also consider that WMU does not lose those students or have to start over if they have already taken many general education courses in the past.

DeChano-Cook raised the question of who should be vetting classes and discussed the need for a process for determining if a class meets student learning outcomes. Chair Tripp suggested a rapid response team for determining transfer options. Parker suggested an option or policy that looks at the level of transfer. If a student transfers in as a junior, can we make an automatic judgment on credits? Bush agreed that there is a need to continue to work through these questions and discuss a possible policy. Bush stated that it is difficult to match student learning outcomes and will reach out to Randy Ott to ask for suggestions.

Chair Tripp discussed international students and the world language and cultures requirement. Can that requirement be waived for international students? The WMU College of Arts and Sciences already waives the language requirement. This requirement can be considered and discussed. Should the test out include all SLOs and include assessments for that course? What should advisors tell them about world language and culture requirements?

DeChano-Cook raised the question of a second bachelor's degree. For students who already have a degree, would they be required to go through WMU Essential Studies? Parker noted that a second BA degree requires 30 credits, and if WMU Essential Studies requires an additional 30 credits, that would discourage prospective students.

DeChano-Cook will continue to work on a best practices document. The WMU Essential Studies Executive Advisory Committee can continue to discuss various scenarios. Ex Officio Hains suggested holistic ways to look at WMU Essential Studies requirements instead of making decisions based on every unique situation. Parker suggested language that says, "All students will take part in WMU Essential Studies, and exceptions will be..."

1. Students coming in for a second bachelor's degree
2. Students transferring with over 100 credits

These kinds of statements would take the pressure off any advisors who are working with transfer students.

Announcements

None.

Adjournment

Chair Tripp adjourned the meeting at 2:30 p.m. The WMU Essential Studies Executive Advisory Committee will meet next on 12 November 2024 at 1 p.m. via Webex.

Approval

Submitted by Lindsay Jeffers, Secretary

Minutes approved on 12 November 2024.