

**Undergraduate Studies Council**

Minutes of 14 January 2025

**Call to Order**

A meeting of the Western Michigan University Faculty Senate Undergraduate Studies Council was called to order at 3:02 p.m. on 14 January 2025 via Webex video conferencing by Diane Riggs, chair.

**Members in Attendance:** Jessica Birnbaum, Carrie Cumming, Lisa DeChano-Cook, Tomika Griffin-Brown, Dave Karowe, Dylan McGlothlin, Diane Riggs, Priyanka Sharma, Scott Slawinski, Katherine Suender, Yuanling Sun, Jennifer Townsend (substitute for Irma Lopez), Bret Wagner

**Members Absent:** Lucy Clark

**Advisory Member in Attendance:** Colleen Stano

**Ex Officio:** David Rudge

**Guests:** Bradford Dennis, Faculty Senate International Education Council Chair; Anna Popkova, Faculty Senate International Education Council Secretary; Joseph Milostan, Director of Study Abroad & Faculty Enrichment; Ying Zeng, Interim Associate Provost for Global Education

**Quorum**

A quorum was present with 14 members in attendance, of the 10 needed to establish a quorum.

**Agenda**

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

**Minutes**

**[MOTION]** It was moved by Rudge, seconded by Karowe, to accept the 3 December 2024 minutes. The motion carried unanimously.

**Reports of Officers**

Chair Riggs introduced Wagner as USC vice chair and welcomed Townsend as a substitute for Lopez. The USC has been tasked with collaborating with the Experience-Driven Learning Working Group to develop a new definition of Experience-Driven Learning at WMU. A subcommittee, consisting of faculty members from USC, will be formed to focus on this project to complete it within three weeks. "Experiential Learning" is a term widely used for activities like volunteering and community projects and is also referred to as "Service Learning" at WMU. Recently, WMU has focused on "Experience-Driven Learning," where students apply classroom knowledge to real-world activities, such as internships. The upper administration is enthusiastic about positioning WMU as an institution for Experience-Driven Learning. Although optional, it will influence pedagogy at WMU. One of USC's charges is to collaborate with the International Education Council (IEC). There is a possibility of involving IEC in developing the new definition of Experience-Driven Learning. After the new definition is established, criteria and assessment will be necessary to determine which courses can be classified as Experience-Driven Learning courses.

Ex Officio Rudge reported that at the last Faculty Senate Executive Board meeting, members were updated on experiential learning with the provost present and had the opportunity to ask additional questions. Tony Proudfoot mentioned that his team has received input from faculty who submitted grant proposals, so it's a little misleading to say there's been no faculty input. However, the group still doesn't fully represent the broader WMU faculty.

**Reports of University Representatives**

DeChano-Cook reported the following:

1. There are three curriculum proposals for approval today.
2. Currently, there is no written policy regarding the WMU Essential Studies requirement for students pursuing a second bachelor's degree at WMU. These students have likely completed some form of general education at other institutions. USC needs to discuss whether or not to require these students to take WMU Essential Studies courses. The decision will likely need to be included in the Memorandum of Action (MOA). A variety of related topics were discussed,

including:

- a. the requirements specified in the WMU catalog;
- b. the Michigan Transfer Agreement (MTA) and WMU's transfer credit policies;
- c. other requirements, such as required writing courses in different colleges;
- d. Individuals in specific fields who wish to pursue a second bachelor's degree at WMU could potentially strengthen community service and connections;
- e. Cumming reported that at least nine Michigan universities do not require second bachelor's degree students to complete general education requirements.

Griffin-Brown reported a comparison of advising appointments between the last two academic years. From 30 August 2023 to 12 January 2024, there were 14,716 advising appointments. In comparison, from 28 August 2024 to 13 January 2025, there were 15,939 appointments, an increase of 1,223. This is noteworthy because data indicate that students who meet with their academic advisors at least once per semester are more likely to be retained at the university.

Griffin-Brown also reported that the First Time in Any College (FTIAC) retention rate is currently 93.6%, the second highest on record, just behind fall 1997, which had a retention rate of 93.7%. Retention rates are up across all classes except for seniors. Additionally, over a 13-business-day period from the Monday after finals to 13 January 2025, academic advisors met with 2,157 students to assist with enrollment. The efforts of the academic advisors have greatly contributed to these retention rates.

### **Guest Report**

Dennis expressed the IEC's interest in collaborating with USC to support faculty in global learning and internationalized curriculum. Dennis discussed the potential for integrating study abroad and Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) experiences into the development of the new definition for Experience-Driven Learning at WMU. Dennis outlined a few tasks currently being handled by the IEC, including:

1. Initiatives from the Welcoming International Students Working Group aimed at fostering connections between international and domestic students at WMU through shared experiences at various events.
2. Addressing transportation challenges for international students studying on the engineering campus by working with the university and the College of Engineering;
3. collaborations with multiple groups, including the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and the Student Navigator Program, to develop a mentoring program based on input from both undergraduate and graduate students;
4. proposing strategies to encourage faculty to integrate global perspectives into their teaching and promote broader internationalization;
5. Working with the Office of Research and Innovation to enhance faculty and student research.

Milostan discussed the importance of experiential learning and his observation about how other universities often define experiential learning as studying abroad, and how study abroad or global learning should be part of Experience-Driven Learning at WMU.

Popkova shared her experience designing and teaching an Experience-Driven COIL course on public relations and social media strategy in collaboration with a colleague in Mexico working in a similar field. This project brought together students from both countries, encouraging professional collaboration. The virtual classroom emphasized accessibility and inclusivity, providing students with the opportunity to learn from each other about topics such as national branding, geography, weather, and cultural understanding.

Key points discussed regarding study abroad credit:

1. Study abroad credits are currently converted to WMU credits, which differs from the process for transfer credits.
2. Courses taken abroad to fulfill major or minor degree requirements are generally not eligible for credit/no credit.
3. WMU policy (unrelated to study abroad) allows credit/no credit for degree requirements with chair or dean approval, though this is rare;

4. Exploring a credit/no credit option for students studying abroad could enhance global engagement.
5. It is common in higher education for study abroad credits to return as credit/no credit.
6. Further discussion and potential approval by USC are needed.
7. Cumming will join Wagner and Milostan as a subcommittee to work out the details and develop an MOA.

Chair Riggs reported that the current Experience-Driven Learning Working Group on campus already has a specific definition of Experience-Driven Learning. USC aims to contribute a few faculty members to collaborate on creating a new, broader definition. Meetings are scheduled for Mondays at 3 p.m. virtually, to complete the work in three weeks. Milostan from the IEC has volunteered to serve on the new subcommittee.

Birnbaum joined the meeting at 3:59 p.m.

### **Unfinished Business**

None.

### **New Business**

Curriculum Proposals: Concentrations Converting to Majors

**[MOTION]** It was moved by Karowe, seconded by Rudge, to approve the following proposals as presented. The motion carried unanimously.

1. Political Science: American Public Policy Concentration (PPPJ)
2. Political Science: International and Comparative Politics Concentration (PPIJ)
3. Political Science: Public Law Concentration (PPLJ)

Suender, Rudge, Riggs, and Milostan volunteered for the new Experience-Driven Learning subcommittee, which will collaborate with Tony Proudfoot's team to develop a new definition for Experience-Driven Learning over the next three weeks. Meetings are scheduled for Mondays at 3 p.m.

### **Announcement**

None.

### **Adjournment**

**[MOTION]** It was moved by Rudge, seconded by Wagner, to adjourn the meeting at 4:20 p.m. The motion carried unanimously. The Undergraduate Studies Council will next meet on 11 February 2025 at 3 p.m. via Webex.

### **Approval**

Submitted by Yuanliang Sun, Secretary

Minutes approved on 11 February 2025.