Report to the University Senate  
Evaluation of the University Liberal Education Committee  
3 April 2012

I. CONTEXT
On 12 October 2010, the University Senate approved changes to the function of the University Liberal Education Committee (ULEC, formerly called UGEC). The motion included a requirement for the University Senate to “re-evaluate the language change of the membership and function of [the] committee after a period of one year.” On 22 February 2011, the University Senate approved the changes in membership. At the University Senate Executive Committee meeting of 7 February 2011, Paul Kaldjian was assigned the task of preparing the report for the University Senate. This document is that report.

II. PROCEDURE
The data for this report was gathered by surveying University Senate and ULEC members. On Thursday, 8 March 2012, all members were sent a Qualtrics survey and asked to respond by 17 March 2012, before departing for spring break. A reminder was sent 14 March. The survey included three substantive questions, plus a fourth, open-ended question to capture any remaining thoughts (see III. Responses below). A fifth question was used to identify the affiliation of survey respondents (Figure 1).

III. RESPONSES
45 people responded to the survey, 32 from the University Senate, 12 from ULEC and one ex-officio member from the Provost’s office (see Figure 1). For reference, the University Senate has 71 members: 39 faculty, 4 academic staff with faculty status, 25 academic staff, plus the Chancellor and two Vice-Chancellors. Three are ex-officio members. ULEC has 17 members: 13 faculty, 1 lecturer, two ex-officio members (provost’s office and academic staff), and one student. Respondents were not asked to identify whether or not they are faculty. The overall survey response rate was 51%. Following are responses to the survey questions¹.

Survey Question 1: Does the current configuration of ULEC membership adequately serve the committee at this time?

23 respondents are satisfied and another 6 have no opinion (Figure 2). The remaining 15, about 1/3rd of those surveyed, expressed dissatisfaction with the make-up of ULEC. Of these, six feel that ULEC should be smaller to be more effective, more efficient, and to enable the entire committee to convene. With so many members, it appears impossible to find a common meeting time.

¹ The University Assessment Committee (UAC) requested an opportunity to respond to the survey questions. UAC comments are discussed in IV. Summary and Recommendations, but not included in the analysis of III. Responses.
The remaining nine feel that representation is imbalanced. One feels that lab scientists and foreign language instruction is inadequately represented. Three feel that Colleges other than Arts and Sciences are under-represented, and six feel that teaching faculty are over-represented at the exclusion of library faculty, non-instructional academic staff, and program directors (e.g., CETL and Assessment). One respondent feels that some visitors dominate discussion at ULEC meetings.

**Survey Question 2:** *Does the current language describing the membership and function of ULEC adequately describe the perceived function of the committee at this time?*

Most respondents feel that the commission of ULEC is appropriate. 30 respondents are satisfied with the language describing the function of ULEC, and another 3 have no opinion (Figure 3). The remaining 12, just over a quarter of those surveyed, expressed dissatisfaction with the commission of ULEC, and offer a range of suggestions. Of these, one is recently ok with how things are proceeding, and another left no comment. While a number of respondents reiterate their membership comments from the first question, one encourages ULEC to consider how to evaluate all programs as they pertain to liberal education, including those out of the classroom.

The most serious concern regards the uncertain and apparently tense overlap between ULEC and the University Assessment Committee. Eight of the eleven dissatisfied respondents who wrote comments raised this issue. Specifically, conflict exists over the extent to which ULEC’s mandate includes development of the liberal education learning outcomes or whether it is intended to be the work of the University Assessment Committee (UAC). Based on the intensity and range of comments, the issue is in need of resolution. The following is among the more measured of the comments and captures a sense of the problem:

*The responsibility for "developing criteria and intended learning outcomes for the liberal education core" is being carried out by the University Assessment Committee. I'm not saying the UAC shouldn't be involved, just that the fact that the same learning goals are in place for both the liberal education core and the entire liberal ed (baccalaureate) degree means that the development of learning outcomes plus assessment criteria probably needs to be a shared endeavor between ULEC and the UAC."

**Survey Question 3:** *Are you satisfied with the process by which UWEC is reforming General Education to improve and enhance its liberal education core?*

This question attempts to capture some sense of the overall sentiment regarding progress toward improving UWEC’s liberal education foundation. Interestingly, while fewer respondents express outright dissatisfaction to this question than to either of the previous two, fewer also express outright satisfaction. The majority of
respondents have mixed feelings (Figure 4).

Of the nine respondents that said no, eight provided comments; of the 20 with a mixed sense of satisfaction, 19 provided comments. Indeed, the comments from both groups of respondents emerge from the same set of concerns; for the purposes of this report, all comments are considered together.

The comments can be broken into four categories. Numerous respondents mentioned the slow pace with which ULEC has undertaken its task. Of the eight that highlighted this as a problem, three attempted to identify the reasons for the slow progress. Only one explicitly acknowledged the complexity of the task; the other two blamed committee members’ attitudes and lack of understanding. This leads to the second category of comments.

Of more consequence than the pace of reform is the confusion surrounding it. Fourteen respondents are concerned over the complexity and uncertainty of ULEC’s task, of the overall process, and of the motivations behind it. Consequently, respondents express a great degree of confusion over what is going on. Not only do these have to do with the relationship between ULEC and UAC, but also with the Academic Policies Committee (APC)\(^2\). Related to the issue of confusion, eight respondents are concerned about a lack of transparency, and identify poor communication, the absence of feedback, a lack of trust among colleagues, and the existence of unstated, underlying agendas.

A lack of confidence is also evident in concerns over the relationship between faculty and administration. Among the eight who comment on governance, the concerns are procedural and representational. There is concern that the pressure for reform comes from administration, and that “decisions of the Blugold Commitment process violates shared governance traditions and usurps faculty responsibility and control over the curriculum.” As such, there is fear that “individuals, small groups, and other initiatives have influenced and even re-directed the process” and that “a select few people are making all the decisions regarding Liberal Education reform.” As one writes, such “clandestine groups . . . don't function within our governance structure.” Another respondent appreciates the attempt at meaningful reform, but is “shocked and awed” at the lack of response to faculty feedback on initial drafts of the framework.

**Survey Question 4:** *Is there anything else you would like to share or highlight?*

Eleven respondents provided comments to this final question. Their comments cover a wide range of issues, from personal hopes, suspicions and appreciation to reiterations of thoughts and recommendations raised in response to the first three questions (e.g., committee make-up, participation, complexity of the process, the

\(^2\) Regarding the process, one respondent is relieved to see the systematic way with which the APC is reviewing the liberal education framework.
need for committee cooperation, governance, etc.). Some reflect professional and personal frustrations (regarding, e.g., the required number of Arts and Humanities credits, lack of information regarding meeting times, desire for “real change”, impact of transitioning administrators). Others acknowledge the difficulty of the process and wish it well.

IV. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Membership of ULEC

Based on the responses to the ULEC evaluation survey, there is general satisfaction with the membership of ULEC. Two-thirds of those surveyed are either satisfied or have no opinion.

The remaining one-third, however, divide their concerns between those who are concerned over the committee’s size and others concerned about representation. The former feel the committee is so big and unwieldy as to make it less effective than it can otherwise be. It is difficult to find meeting times during which all members can attend, further reducing ULEC’s effectiveness. The latter (less than 20% of total respondents) are concerned about representation on ULEC, namely, that teaching faculty and the College of Arts and Sciences are over-represented.

Recommendation: Leave the make-up of ULEC as it is. While issues of lack-of-representation must be taken seriously, neither evidence nor actual claims of mis- or non-representation were raised by survey respondents. To change the make-up of the ULEC at this stage of the liberal education reform process could be disruptive just as increased stability and certainty are needed. Members of the interested colleges, programs and divisions that wish to have their interests considered are encouraged to attend meetings and provide ongoing input, just as members of non-represented departments within Arts and Sciences must. Similarly, ULEC is encouraged to ensure that all affected and interested groups have access to ULEC deliberations and opportunity for comments and input (see, also, C. below). Toward the goal of more effective meetings, meeting guidelines may need to be established or revisited.

B. Function and role of ULEC

Based on the responses to the ULEC evaluation survey, there is general satisfaction with the function of ULEC and its intended role at the center of UWEC’s liberal education curriculum.

However, there is dissatisfaction and concern over the relationship between ULEC and the University Assessment Committee (UAC). There appears to be overlap in how each body perceives its role, notably with respect to learning outcomes. As one survey respondent, apparently a member of ULEC, commented, “We were told by the assessment committee that developing learning outcomes was their task, not ours.” If ULEC members were elected to fulfill the task outlined in the UWEC
Faculty and Academic Staff Rules and Procedures\textsuperscript{3}, then to be told that this was not their task, it is not surprising that conflict has emerged. For some, the tension in this overlap is perceived as an issue of transparency and communication. For numerous others, it is a more fundamental issue of governance. Indeed, members of ULEC are elected by the senate, whereas the members of UAC are appointed by Deans and Vice-Chancellors.

Unsolicited comments provided by the director of the UAC speak to precisely the same issue. UAC acknowledges the importance of collaboration with ULEC and characterizes the unclear division of labor between the two committees as a system without checks and balances. To remediate, UAC suggests that the tasks of developing learning outcomes and the annual evaluation of the effectiveness of the liberal education core be transferred from ULEC to UAC, arguing that these duties are more appropriately suited to the UAC due to its emphasis on assessing student learning.

**Recommendation:** Deliberate cooperation and coordination between ULEC and UAC needs attention and resolution. Since the University Senate commissioned both committees, sorting out the division of duties begins with the Senate. It will require open discussion. One option, at the risk of generating even more confusion, is to give the task to an ad hoc committee.

**C. Process of liberal education reform**

Based on the responses to the ULEC evaluation survey, there is a general sense of discomfort with the process by which liberal education is being reformed at UWEC. Surveyed senators and ULEC members are skeptical, as captured in the concern of one respondent,

> that a select few people are making all the decisions regarding Liberal Education reform, with discussions involving the larger campus community having little or no impact on the shape of this reform.

While some are hopeful for meaningful reform and recognize the difficulty and complexity of such a task, many express exasperation and admit confusion with the process\textsuperscript{4}. To some, the pace of the process is too slow. More importantly, many are concerned about the issue of governance and who, ultimately, is responsible for driving and making curricular changes. Part of this is related to the ULEC-UAC overlap, but also involves suspicions over who or what is actually motivating liberal education reform and in whose interests. Others emphasize a lack of transparency and communication, suggesting that the ultimate outcome is desirable and

\textsuperscript{3} Membership and function of the University Liberal Education Committee (ULEC) and the University Assessment Committee (UAC) as found in the UWEC Faculty and Academic Staff Rules and Procedures are provided in the Appendix.

\textsuperscript{4} One member of UAC independently emailed concerns that a confusing cluster of committees are involved, with varying jurisdictions, memberships and sources of empowerment.
necessary, but the process for getting there needs more openness and organization.

Many of these same concerns were raised at the Arts and Sciences College Meeting of 6 March 2012. Once the process was explained – whereby ULEC provides its framework to APC, APC systematically develops its recommendations for the University Senate, and the Senate, ultimately, must approve the liberal education reform – members at the meeting were more at ease about the process. In fact, this may be reflected in one survey respondent’s comment, “

. . . it appears that APC is taking a more common-sense approach, and reviewing the framework piece by piece. So in that sense the system seems to be working.

**Recommendation:** Effectively communicate the process by which liberal education at UWEC is being reformed (including participants, time-frames), regularly provide updates on progress and changes, highlight ongoing opportunities for input of interested and affected parties, and publicly provide feedback and responses to comments and input.

Prepared and respectfully submitted
Paul Kaldjian, Associate Professor, Geography & Anthropology
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30 March 2012
APPENDIX – Functions of ULEC and UAC

5. University Liberal Education Committee
   a. Membership: The committee includes seven faculty representatives from the College of Arts and Sciences, two faculty representatives from the College of Business, two faculty representatives from the College of Education and Human Sciences, and two faculty representatives from the College of Nursing and Health Sciences. These representatives will be chosen by existing shared governance processes established through the bylaws of the respective Schools or Colleges. One faculty representative from the Library (ex officio and non-voting) will be chosen by existing shared governance processes established by the Library. One academic staff representative (ex officio and non-voting) will be chosen by existing shared governance processes established by the Academic Staff. One student will be appointed by the Student Senate President in accordance with customary procedures. Faculty serve staggered three-year terms with approximately one-third of the representatives from each College being elected each year. The Provost and Vice Chancellor or designated representative shall serve as an ex officio non-voting member of the committee. (US 3/05; 3/11)
   b. Function: The University Liberal Education Committee is responsible for developing criteria and intended learning outcomes for the liberal education core: the core includes General Education and other university-wide course/experience requirements outside the major/minor. It is responsible for recommending such criteria and intended learning outcomes to the Academic Policies Committee and to the University Senate. It serves as the coordinating body for university liberal education reform efforts. The committee is responsible for periodic review of university graduation requirements outside the major/minor; development of criteria for inclusion of courses and high impact practices in the liberal education core; periodic review of existing course offerings of the liberal education core for re-approval; working with the Office of Academic Affairs to annually evaluate liberal education core effectiveness in achieving the liberal education goals as passed by the University Senate. (US 3/05; 10/10)

6. University Assessment Committee
   a. Membership: The committee consists of fifteen members, including the Director of Assessment who shall serve as chair of the committee. Two members from each of the four colleges shall be appointed by the respective Dean of the college; three members shall be appointed by the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs; and three members shall be appointed by the Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs. Each year approximately one-third of the committee will be appointed by the Deans and Vice Chancellors in consultation with the University Senate Executive Committee to serve three-year terms.
   b. Function of the Committee:
      1) Assist departments and academic and support programs to develop and improve plans for assessing student learning;
2) Annually collect and review assessment reports from departments and academic and support programs and provide feedback;
3) Prepare an Annual Report for Academic Affairs and the University Senate that includes a summary of assessment activities conducted throughout the university;
4) Develop, implement, and evaluate the results of institutional level assessment activities in collaboration with Institutional Research (exit interviews, standardized exams, surveys, etc.);
5) Prepare reports on student learning at UW-Eau Claire for UW System’s VSA program;
6) Annually review the effectiveness of plans and practices for assessing student learning at the University, department, and program levels;
7) Develop and propose to the University Senate policies and procedures related to the assessment of student learning at UW-Eau Claire for approval;
8) Help implement approved policies and procedures related to the assessment of student learning at UW-Eau Claire;
9) Assist with other initiatives involved in the assessment of student learning as requested by the Provost, University Senate, or other stakeholders, as necessary; and
10) Advise the Director of Assessment in performance of the duties of the position. (US 10/11)

Source: Section D – Committee Organization, Article One: University Faculty, Part III: Bylaws of the University Faculty and University Academic Staff, UWEC Faculty and Academic Staff Rules and Procedures, 3rd ed., January 2012, Pages 21 & 22 (see www.uwec.edu/AcadAff/upload/FASRP.pdf).