

**Faculty Senate**  
**University College and General Education Committee**  
**Report #2007-08-6**

**SECTION I**

**Informational Report on Review of URI 101**

On December 15, 2005, the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate asked that the University College and General Education Committee conduct a review of URI 101. The review was described alternately as a “cost/benefit analysis” and as an “outcomes assessment.” The Executive Committee suggested that the following charge be given to the subcommittee:

1. Evaluate URI 101’s success at meeting its six learning goals, and
2. Consider how much URI 101 contributed to the retention and graduation of undergraduate students.

For most of the rest of 2006 the subcommittee struggled unsuccessfully to achieve a consensus as to how it might measure the effectiveness of URI 101 and how it might quantify the costs and benefits of URI 101. Late in the fall semester 2006 the committee regrouped and altered its focus and chose instead to collect opinions about URI 101 from various constituency groups. The decision to change course was reinforced by advice from Gary Boden, the Director of Institutional Research.

Dean Interviews (n=11)

The deans who were most supportive of URI 101 were those who had replaced URI 101 with a major or college-specific course or who had been able to shape URI 101 to suit their needs. As a point of information, instructors teaching a URI 101 courses designated for majors are encouraged in training to shape the course to their major. In addition, Engineering has an academic course, but it is not the Engineering version of URI 101 as it is strictly an academic course for majors. EGR 105 does not use the six learning goals established for URI 101. There is MUS 119 and BIO 130 but these classes were not evaluated.

Some deans praised URI 101 because of its role in Learning Communities. We see URI 101 and the Learning Communities as related but different programs. However, every Learning Community has a URI 101 as a common factor. Otherwise Learning Communities would be block scheduling that enrollment services could do.

The perception that URI 101 is an “unfunded mandate” looks like a serious issue. We think that there is a connection between this perception and the difficulty of finding instructors for URI 101.

### Student Surveys (n=336)

Students indicated their responses to a questionnaire on URI 101 on a 5-point scale: 5 Agree Strongly, 4 Agree, 3 No Opinion, 2 Disagree, 1 Disagree Strongly. On average the responses to questions about non-academic goals of URI 101: making connections to other students, gaining familiarity with university resources, learning about extracurricular activities were more positive.

On average the responses to questions about academic goals of URI 101: planning educational goals, improving academic skills, and making connections with a faculty member were less positive.

We conclude from this that students thought URI 101 had met its non-academic goals better than its academic ones although responses from students who took EGR 105 rather than URI 101 were opposite of the URI 101 findings.

### Workshop Provider Interviews (Health & Safety, Academic Advising, Service Learning, Study Abroad, Internships and Experiential Learning, Academic Enhancement, and Library Services)

Nearly all programs involved in making presentations to URI 101 sections indicate that it is an effective mechanism for reaching freshman and is crucial to their mission. Some indicate that alterations in delivery systems could be accomplished but with some logistical and administrative difficulty and potentially significant increases in cost.

### Department Chair Survey (n=20)

The Department Chairs reported that fewer than 1/3 of the faculty of a department have taught URI 101 (15 of 20) and that most faculty who have taught URI 101 have done so as part of their normal workloads (11 of 20). In addition, the Chairs report that the majority of faculty who they have asked to teach URI 101 have done so (15 of 21), although many have done so reluctantly (8 of 15).

There is sharp division over the value of URI: eight chairs agreed that it is valuable, but ten either disagreed (5) or disagreed strongly (5) that it is valuable. No chair agreed strongly that it is valuable. Those who valued the course mentioned most often that it helped in establishing peer groups (9) and in presenting an academic program (7). Some favorable responses to this question referred to courses other than URI 101 such as EGR 105, LAR 101, and NRS 101. These courses, however, are not substitutes for URI 101 as they do not use the six goals established for URI 101.

In speculating about how their department would adjust if URI 101 did not exist,

eleven department chairs said that they would probably not (8) or definitely not (3) need to provide additional services to their first-year students. Five suggested that they probably would (4) or definitely would (1) need to provide additional services. Some responses to this question may have been based on the assumption that alternative courses such as EGR 105 would continue to exist.

The most common suggestions about the future of URI 101 were to abolish it (8) or to make it optional (5). Other respondents favored retaining the course in its present format (2), modifying it (1), having the course taught by undergraduate students (1), perhaps developing a department-based alternative course (1), and perhaps expanding URI 101 to a three-credit course (1).

#### Instructor Survey (n=42)

Of the 133 URI 101 sections taught approximately 1/3 were taught by tenured or non-tenured faculty, 1/3 were taught by administrators or staff and 1/3 were taught by students. The largest group of respondents were tenure-track faculty (14). Smaller numbers of respondents identified themselves as administrators (8), staff (8), lecturers (5), part-time faculty (4), and graduate students (3). This distribution is very different from the overall distribution of URI 101 instructors in the fall semester 2007 which we calculated from the University College list. Overall we determined that 24 sections of URI 101 out of 127 were taught by tenure-track faculty. By contrast we identified 43 sections taught by administrators or staff and 49 sections taught by students. We mention these two distributions to indicate that our sample is not representative of the entire population of URI 101 instructors.

More than half of our respondents indicated that URI 101 took between 2 and 4 hours of their time each week. Only two indicated that the course took 6 or more hours of their time, and 9 indicated that the course took 2 hours or less. The majority reported that they were not compensated in any way for teaching URI 101.

The answer to the fourth question suggests that most instructors believe that URI 101 has a positive impact on their own work. From their qualitative responses we see that these instructors value their opportunity to become acquainted with their advisees and other students in their major. They also value the opportunity to present information to students about their department or their major. The smaller number of instructors who reported that URI 101 had a negative impact on their other work emphasized the time which they had to take away from other professional activities.

In responding to the fifth question, instructors reported different approaches to using the course modules produced by University College. Most instructors use most or at least some of the modules. In their qualitative answers to the sixth and

ninth questions, instructors offered a variety of opinions as to which modules might be most valuable. We do not see a dominant theme in those responses.

In answering question 7, a majority of instructors agreed or agreed strongly that URI 101 is valuable to their students. Most of the rest of the respondents indicated that they were not sure whether the course is valuable. In their responses to question 8, the majority of instructors agreed or agreed strongly that they enjoyed teaching URI 101. Again it is the case that most of the other respondents said that they were not sure that they enjoy teaching the course.

If there is a pattern in the other qualitative responses to questions 6 and 9, it is that instructors favored more emphasis of academic topics.

## CONCLUSIONS

### Retention

As retention is the product of a combination of complex and interrelated factors, gauging the effect of URI 101 on retention is not possible. However, on the programmatic level, the College of Engineering has asserted that EGR 105 has had a positive effect on retention within Engineering.

### Cost Effectiveness

As each College, Department, and Unit measures the costs of URI 101 differently and the benefits of URI 101 are often diffuse and difficult to measure, it is probably impossible to create any absolute cost/benefit analysis. However, most instructors of URI 101 spend several hours a week in class and preparation for class. No matter how that time is accounted for, it is time and effort that could be spent on other University initiatives.

As a related point, many Deans and Chairs expressed frustration that URI 101 is an “unfunded mandate.” The creation of a program that demands College- and Department-level resources without an equal level of input is almost guaranteed to create resentment and hinder “buy-in.” If, after 10 years, URI values URI 101, then the program should be funded, with 1 credit of teaching supported as 1 credit of teaching across the board. This would have the added benefit of encouraging greater participation from the tenure-track faculty, though the overall impact on individual faculty workload, teaching, and research productivity must be weighed against the benefits of tenure-track faculty serving as URI 101 instructors.

### Types of URI 101 Sections

It is unhelpful to view all URI 101 sections and students as the same. There seem to be four broad categories:

*URI 101 Program-Specific Analogs* (e.g. EGR 105, BIO 130, URI 101b) – Either heavily modified from the URI 101 model or created as separate but similar courses, these are tailored to a greater or lesser degree to the specific needs and goals of their programs. They benefit from a high degree of support from the Deans, Chairs, and Faculty involved, and the students seem to benefit the most, gaining a sense of direction, program-specific academic skills, and a sense of place in their program, both academically and socially.

*College of Business Program* – While it maintains much of the structure of URI 101, the College of Business version is taught by Undergraduate Mentors under the supervision of a graduate student coordinating. As the new structure is relatively recent, the impact of this structural change is unclear.

*URI 101 Sections with a Major Focus* (e.g. most Pharmacy and Nursing sections) – Occasionally somewhat modified from the standard URI 101 model, but filled with students from a single major and focused on the specific needs and challenges of that major. They benefit from a high degree of support from the Deans, Chairs, and Faculty involved, and the students gain a sense of direction, some academic skills, and a sense of place in their program, both academically and socially.

*URI 101 Sections of Undeclared Students* – These sections are best situated to reach students who need more support during their Freshman year. By allowing some community building, an introduction to many of the possibilities of University life, and more attention to the complexities of the advising system, these sections may well help students “find their feet” at URI.

*URI 101 Sections containing multiple Majors* – These seem to be the least successful. Lacking a major focus (or even the focus of having all Undeclared), the students seem less motivated and gain less from the experience. In the case of highly-motivated, major-focused students, these sections may actually discourage the students by involving them in a class with no obvious benefits to them.

### URI 101 as a Graduation Requirement

As it currently stands, URI 101 is not a graduation requirement. In light of the divisions noted in point 3 above, perhaps graduation requirements could be used as a way to steer the students most likely to benefit from the course into it. Program-specific analogs are already required for graduation by their Colleges (i.e. Engineering majors must take EGR 105). The sections with a major focus could also be required as part of the requirements of that major. As Undecided Freshmen seem to benefit from URI 101, perhaps making URI 101 required for those students would also help. Allowing students who fit into the fourth group, those without a major focus, to avoid a course that might be counterproductive for them would also be a bonus. As URI 101 is not required for graduation at the moment, this is not really a shift in policy.

### Range of Instructors

URI 101 is taught by a diverse range of faculty (tenure-track, lecturers, part-time, etc), staff, administrators, and students. Of the 127 sections of URI 101 which were taught in Fall 2007, 34 were taught by faculty (24 tenure-track, 7 lecturers, 2 by part-time, 1 emerita), 43 were taught by administrators or staff, 49 were taught by students, and 1 by an instructor whose status has not been verified. This does not count sections of BIO 130, EGR 105, and MUS 119, almost all of which were taught by tenure-track faculty (16 of 18). Some sections are run by student mentors, either by design or circumstance. Obviously, the instructor will affect the quality of the class a great deal. Given the variety of instructors, we question whether the course should be graded on an A-F basis. We suggest that S/U grading be considered as an alternative.

### Social Issues Aspects of URI 101

Many Deans, Chairs, and Faculty expressed dissatisfaction with the amount of time spent on the social issues, especially since they were seen as taking attention away from academic skills. This was not universal – at least one Dean felt that more social involvement was important – but it is a clear trend. Given that almost all students arriving at URI have experienced most if not all the social elements of URI 101 in High School (including service learning), it may be a good idea to reevaluate these sections of the syllabus.

### Academic Skills Aspects of URI 101

At all levels participants recognized that URI 101 has not done a good job of providing academic skills to students. With only a fraction of the instructors in the most recent semester being drawn from the faculty involved in the daily teaching mission of the University, this is unsurprising, and the largely faculty-taught sections of the program-specific analogs do not share this problem. If URI 101 is meant to seriously address student's academic skill needs, more attention to the skills (e.g. mandatory attendance at the Library sessions) is critical. A new course on academic skills (URI 102), mandatory for students whose academic performance in their first semester falls below a certain threshold was suggested as a possible solution.

### The Six Goals

URI 101 was meant to serve six goals:

1. adjust to life at URI,
2. become familiar with university resources,
3. plan educational goals,
4. learn about extracurricular activities,

5. improve academic skills, and
6. understand URI community values.

While technically outside of this committee's charge, the Faculty Senate should review the goals and decide if these remain the best statement of the purpose of URI 101. Either the program should conform to the goals, or the goals should be modified to reflect services and skills the program is capable of effectively providing.

#### Learning and Living/Learning Communities Are Not the Same as URI 101

Quite a few of the Deans and Chairs conflated the two programs, but it is important to remember that, while they are closely linked, the programs are not the same. A learning community consists of 20 first year students who take three or more courses in common, organized around a major or, if undecided, general education courses. The foundation of the learning community is the URI 101 class. A living/learning community is a residence hall dedicated to a particular college or major. Students take several classes in common, including a special section of URI 101. With greater reliance on Learning and Living/Learning Communities as a tool to enhance the Freshman Experience, some of the functions of URI 101 could be moved to the Communities in a relatively seamless way. Some of the social issues aspects of the course might benefit (although this could cause scheduling problems for the units that provide the instruction for those sections). Another option would be to use the Community activities as a way to reinforce some of the URI 101 lessons in a more intentional way.

The full Report of the UCGE Subcommittee on URI 101 is available on the web at [http://www.uri.edu/facsen/URI\\_101\\_Sub\\_Report\\_full.pdf](http://www.uri.edu/facsen/URI_101_Sub_Report_full.pdf)

## SECTION II

### Matters That Require Confirmation by the Faculty Senate

The University College and General Education Committee considered the following matters at their meeting of May 1, 2008. They are now presented to the Faculty Senate for confirmation.

#### Natural Sciences (N) Core Area

The UCGE Committee recommends that the Faculty Senate approve the following courses for the (N) area of the General Education program:

BPS 201 How Drugs Work (*reading complex texts, speaking effectively, writing effectively*)

HPR 109 Honors Study in Natural Sciences (three of the following skills: *reading complex texts, speaking effectively, writing effectively, using information technology, using quantitative data*)