March 9, 2012

FROM: Joseph T. Jarrett  
Chair, General Education Committee

TO: Senate Executive Committee

Re: Strategic Plan Implementation Committee Initiatives

The General Education Committee has reviewed the 2012-13 Implementation Initiatives proposed in the recently circulated memo, and we don’t see any conflict or overlap with the current GenEd curriculum, or with current issues being reviewed by the GEC.

We did have a short discussion regarding the first initiative regarding Retention and Graduation. The proposed initiative suggests increasing the extent of “engaged learning” opportunities at UHM, as a means to increase the likelihood that students will “… stay in school, graduate, and go on to advanced study.”

We have previously had many discussions about student attrition at the GEC. As AVCUE Ron Cambra has often pointed out, the majority of students who drop out do so during or immediately after the 1st year. Engaged learning, as described in the initiative, is primarily an educational vehicle implemented at the Program level with declared majors, primarily 3rd-4th year students. Thus we feel that this initiative will not have a significant affect on the retention issue, since it is not likely to target significant numbers of freshmen.

Of course, freshmen attrition has many causes. We have discussed some issues regarding GenEd courses. One issue is undoubtedly that freshmen do not see the value in the courses they are taking, they do not see the connection between the courses and the world they live in outside of the university, and they do not see how these courses will help them find a better job or career.

In short, we would encourage the SPIC to examine how “engaged learning” can be applied to incoming freshmen. This may mean that we have to rethink some aspects of the GenEd core curriculum, especially those courses that students perform poorly in and that cause students to become disengaged. The Assessment Office may be able to contribute to this discussion. They have conducted student surveys that suggest that students find certain GenEd courses (e.g. ENGL 100) valuable because they become engaged by the material and the instructor. The question we should be asking is how can we make more of the courses taken by freshmen this captivating.