

Curriculum Committee

Minutes of the November 17, 2017 meeting

Present: Ben Tromly, Leslie Saucedo, David Chiu, Julia Looper, Julie Christoph, Chris Kendall, Nila Wiese, Gary McCall, Peggy Burge, Jonathan Stockdale, Bryan Thines, Bill Barry, and Martin Jackson

The meeting was called to order by Ben Tromly at 12:06pm.

1. The minutes of the Oct. 31st meeting were approved after a minor change (name discrepancy).
2. No new courses were approved. David CHIU indicated, however, that the German Studies 202 was close to a decision, pending answers to a few questions.
3. TROMLY inquired whether there was any “violent” opposition to the way that working groups had been assembled. There was no opposition (violent or otherwise). TROMLY also reported that he, MCCALL and WIESE would be working together for SIM review.
4. The committee then turned to the main business of the day: discussion of the Experiential Learning (EXLN) attribute as designation for experiential learning classes. Rachel DEMOTTS and Elise RICHMAN were present as representatives of the EXLN faculty advisory board (ELFAB) to aid in this conversation. A lively and fast-paced discussion ensued:

The “EXLN” tag was presented as a voluntary opt-in way for faculty to list courses that have experiential learning approaches. DEMOTTS outlined benefits of having this designator, which included helping students recognize experiential learning opportunities, eliminating confusion about what courses would count, and creating opportunities for faculty to share/discuss experiential approaches. Having the EXLN designation listed under “course attributes” would make these experiential courses easy to find. RICHMAN pointed out that there were questions from last year regarding what types of courses would count as Experiential Learning, and that this was/would be discussed by the advisory board, but that curriculum committee (CC) would have final say.

The conversation turned to how a course would receive the EXLN designation. DEMOTTS indicated that a brief narrative/syllabus from the faculty member would be submitted, after which point there would be a conversation. WIESE inquired about who receives the requests (ie. a committee?). DEMOTTS indicated that requests would go to Renee Houston. WIESE then inquired how CC would know about these submissions. A comparison was then made to CC, where authority for some tasks is delegated to Dean Martin Jackson, and it was suggested that CC might delegate authority to examine requests to Renee Houston (BARRY/JACKSON).

JACKSON then raised a more fundamental question about whether CC even has a stake in the EXLN labeling (a comparison was made to the “Travel Study” attributes). CHRISTOPH questioned if not CC, then which committee would this review fall under? BARRY inquired about: 1) the composition of the current committee that reviews submissions, and 2) how this

EXLN designation is going to be used (ie. why are we labeling courses as such?). If EXLN becomes a bigger part of what we do, then CC involvement makes sense. RICHMAN/DEMOTTS replied that Renee Houston (in conversation with Deans) and other faculty members compose the current committee (open to all faculty), and that these experiential approaches are not new but that they are trying to make things more visible to students. It was also stated that there is no collaboration with admissions, although there could be admission-related benefits. WEISE points out that as things are currently described that experiential learning should fall under some faculty body and that CC makes sense, to which DEMOTTS agreed that CC seemed logical.

The conversation then moved towards exploring how having the “EXLN” designation would affect course offerings and other, if unplanned, curriculum implications (TROMLY). CHRISTOPH pointed out that students like hashtags and that it gives faculty some agency and credit. KENDALL raised the issue that this designation should be a serious consideration, that it is a way that things may become standardized/regimented, and that at the committee level we should know what courses are/are not being designated and be aware of the boundary. It was agreed by BARRY that there are ways this might become institutionalized and that, furthermore, there is financial investment/interest from the university to support experiential learning, and so CC should consider its role.

Some suggestions were then made about how CC might interface with experiential learning: 1) that CC should give Renee authority but still have room to examine, and if CC delegates it has the power to take back (WIESE), and 2) that there could be a CC faculty liaison to experiential learning (KENDALL). Considering these potential new roles for CC members, SAUCEDO stated that following the initial onslaught of submissions to Renee, the workload may only be one or two courses per year and pondered what a transition to the CC would look like. DEMOTTS responded that there had been some discussion about an advisory board taking on some of this responsibility, so that not everything would fall on Renee.

The conversation then returned to the EXLN designation as a whole (whether to have it) and who decides on this (STOCKDALE). To which JACKSON responded that it seemed like this job would fit under the purviews of CC, given its bylaws. JACKSON also reiterated that this was a bigger thing than just tagging courses, and also pointed out that what CC does automatically is brought before the full faculty. STOCKDALE questioned what the faculty view of experiential learning was. RICHMAN pointed out that this (review; yes/no evaluation) opens up a conversation about experiential learning that will help with its meaning. She also acknowledged the worry about “opening the floodgates.” TROMLY reiterated potential effects of institutionalizing experiential learning. DEMOTTS responded that a “big thing” here was to have more conversation and that having things more visible will help this conversation. She went on to describe how there is a lot of confusion about what experiential learning is (ie. many seemingly fitting classes would not actually qualify for the designation), so this process is helping us understand what experiential learning is. LOOPER asked whether this had already be examined this as a full faculty and inquired whether we establishing guidelines without full faculty participation.

The pace of the conversation quickened . . .

KENDALL reminded the committee that last time we discussed this that we were not completely comfortable with the course attribute, and that we wanted to see more courses with that had received the designation. It was suggested that having a list of fitting courses might help faculty know whether theirs might fit as well. RICHMAN/DEMOTTS responded about the challenges of compiling a list of courses that fit, but that there was a process for designating courses.

KENDALL advocated for a process where people can submit things. WIESE commented on the need to have a way for approval to occur that we can take to the faculty. RICHMAN asked whether there was precedent in going to the faculty for permission to add an attribute such as “Travel Study” and pointed out that this is for designation/identification purposes only and has no weight otherwise. WIESE stated that we are not saying designation is wrong but that we should slow down and have input from the faculty. CHRISTOPH pointed out that when faculty members are thinking about classes and whether they would fit that it is hard to know if they do based on what is online.

JACKSON emphasized that the important issues here are roles of the full faculty in both the EXLN designation and in experiential learning.

There was some additional conversation about stakeholders. BARRY pointed out that a lot of people want experiential learning and there is some push from administration for this. To which RICHMAN replied that they hope that concern about the roots of for this does not influence whether it is a good/bad idea. WIESE pointed out that having a process that is clear/transparent will help remove myths, but that we need to make sure faculty is behind it. CHRISTOPH opined that a stumbling block in having experiential learning work is our lack of understanding.

In the waning minutes the conversation returned briefly to the initial purpose of this discussion, which was permission to add the EXLN attribute (CHIU). A comment/reminder was made about guidelines (LOOPER) and that a purpose of the attribute is to help us define what experiential learning is (RICHMAN).

TROMLY adjourned at 1:02pm

Minutes submitted by Bryan Thines