

Curriculum Committee Minutes – 20 February 2019

In attendance: B. Barry, P. Burge, A. Butcher, K. Campbell, J. Christoph, R. Duthely, N. Jacobi, G. McCall, J. Pitonyak, G. Proehl, M. Sampen, L. Saucedo, F. Secrist, J. Tepper, C. Thatcher

The minutes from the previous meeting were approved unanimously.

Leslie announced that a modest number of Fall course proposals have been received, but not all of them have yet been distributed for review. There are 4 SIMS requests (bringing the total for the year to 7), which is an unusually high number, but it is not clear if this is a trend.

Julie announced that the PacRim Program wants to restructure two courses that participants take in the year prior to going abroad. In order to reduce the work load for Working Group 2 she will review these course proposals.

Members of the Curriculum Committee were encouraged to attend the Wednesdays at 4 session on February 20 (that afternoon), at which the topic was activity vs. academic credits. Maria has compiled a matrix showing how these credits are used in different departments, but she noted that it is not a comprehensive list. A suggestion was made that individual departments might be best equipped to decide what type of credit a course should carry.

Jennifer reported that Working Group 2 has completed its review of the EPDM Program. There were some challenges because many EPDM courses are cross-listed and syllabi formats are not consistent from one department to the next. Nonetheless, EPDM had provided a very detailed analysis of their program and how it was developed into a secondary major. The program is distinguished by its emphasis on policy, and its incorporation of experiential learning activities that have a local flavor. The major is growing; enrollments are not an issue. However, the FTE for EPDM faculty are largely consumed by covering their core courses, and as a result they cannot offer electives (and thus the major relies heavily on cross-listed courses taught in other departments). As a secondary major, students are not required to have an EPDM advisor, and this can lead to capstone courses in which the students have widely varying backgrounds and preparation. There was also an acknowledged need to collect outcomes data (How many EPDM majors attend graduate school? What kinds of jobs to EPDM graduate land?) Upon completing their review Working Group 2 recommended that: (1) Syllabi for elective courses need to include learning outcomes and other “required elements” that are supposed to be part all UPS course syllabi, and (2) Syllabi for EPDM electives include a statement that explains how the course fits into the overall learning goals of the program.

The curriculum committee unanimously agreed to provisionally approve the EPDM Program, with the expectation that all syllabi for courses to be taught in the coming will be revised as needed to include the required elements. A summary of the review is attached.

Kathleen noted that, being a secondary major, advising is a unique challenge for EPDM as the primary advisers for their students are not in the program. The question was raised of whether there should be a requirement that EPDM students have an adviser in the program.

A discussion of syllabi in general followed. It was noted that many have become quite “bulky” and that perhaps some boilerplate elements that are the same for all courses could be shifted to a webpage.

Students might be required to “click” to acknowledge that they had read the material on that page. There is also a question as to what is meant by “learning outcomes”? Do they need to be quantifiable? Julie will check to see whether Martin left any notes on this topic. Leslie will resend a summary of the required elements of a syllabus.

The committee briefly considered including language in CC responses to departments/programs currently under review that would prompt the departments/programs to consider how their department could engage in the Legacies Project. The idea did not have support as the Project is still being developed.

Leslie will forward a link for a survey related to Senate Charge 4, which relates to the distribution of work load among working groups. Some initial suggestions centered on the need for a clear lead. The current “system” appears to choose a lead by default based on experience.

The final topic of discussion was BIOL 231, which is one of three science courses that are “needed” but cannot fit into the existing major. One possible solution could be to allow a student to take 4.5 academic units (keeping the 4.75 unit cap but switching 0.25 activity credit to an academic unit). The concern was expressed that other departments would want to do the same thing, and that if it were permitted for one year it would become entrenched.

Environmental Policy and Decision-Making Program

Summary of Program Review

Prepared by Working Group Two, Puget Sound Curriculum Committee

During the timeframe of December 2018 to February 18, 2019, working group two of the University Curriculum Committee conducted a review of the Environmental Policy and Decision-Making Program. The program report and 21 course syllabi were reviewed. The review consisted of two in-person meetings to discuss the program report and course syllabi and electronic collaboration to prepare this review summary. The working group corresponded with Rachel DeMotts, EPDM program director, several times via email to clarify currently offered policy and general electives due to discrepancies between course listings in the program report and the current Bulletin.

Overall, the review document prepared by the program is clear and detailed, providing an excellent overview of their process and methods of program development and evaluation. The following strengths, challenges/needs, and recommendations are offered as a summary of this program review:

Strengths:

- The emphasis on policy analysis is a strength that distinguishes the program from other environmental studies majors offered at comparable institutions in the region.
- The program embraces experiential learning and use a local lens to prioritize problem analysis. Pedagogy is grounded in theory, and program faculty emphasize the learning process with students.
- Many courses include field trips and other special events that provide exciting authentic learning opportunities for students and opportunities to network with professionals in the community.
- The major has continued to grow, and low course enrollment is not a concern.
- The required courses include significant and diverse writing assignments, with a focus on applied writing that includes opportunities for feedback from local experts outside academia.
- The model as a 'secondary major' contributes to a diversity of perspectives in the classroom and fosters collaboration among students with differing experiences and backgrounds.
- The program is expanding its curricular and campus-wide teaching about marginalized communities and environmental justice.

Challenges/Needs:

- The ability of the program to offer electives is limited by the equivalent of three faculty FTE, particularly for science-based courses.
- Course sequencing up to the senior seminar, ENVR 400, has varied across majors and minors, leading to different experiences and skills across students. As a secondary major,

students are not required to meet with advisors which further contributes to the diverse routes through the major.

- While the many out-of-class authentic learning experiences are positive for students, the time commitment and any added cost may be a burden for students who lack financial resources.
- The program identified that while their policy emphasis is a strength; however, for some students, coursework in the sciences and methodology may be lacking.
- Assessment of student learning and program evaluation are challenging given students sequence courses in different ways leading to different experiences. Students participate in a survey in the senior seminar, but it is primarily measures satisfaction and student perceptions of learning.

Recommendations:

Several course syllabi, ENVR 200, 201, & 400 include a statement describing how that particular course fits with requirements for the EPDM major or minor and expected student learning outcomes for the program, although the wording of this statement varies across these three courses. This explicit linkage between each course and the program learning outcomes likely helps students to understand the big picture of their program requirements. Therefore, we suggest creating a uniform statement and including this in the syllabi of other required courses (ENVR 202, 203).

In addition to this variability across required courses in stating how the course fits with program requirements, there are also differences across syllabi in whether course specific learning objectives are included. We suggest considering whether program learning objectives are sufficient, or if each course requires specific learning objectives. For example, ENVR 200 states learning outcomes for the program and essential questions for this course, but the essential questions are different than articulating the student learning outcomes for the course.

- ENVR 310, 322 – if these courses are offered in the future as policy electives, the syllabi need updated with learning objectives/outcomes.

While the program has collected student outcomes at the course level and via a survey in senior seminar, as the program continues to develop it may be useful to consider ways of obtaining outcomes after graduation (graduate school enrollment, career paths, etc.).

Review the core (required) course syllabi for adherence to the program's mission. That is, how do the syllabi topics and assignments match the 'About the program' statement in the Bulletin) and core classes in regards to issues studied. The core courses focus on environmental issues related to non-human species and habitats, and yet the mission statement also includes a focus on social and human health problems associated with population density and industrialization. While electives cover a range of issues, perhaps the core classes should also address this range of issues (and perhaps the differing goals of the students in the program). It is not clear that they do.