

Minutes of Meeting of the Curriculum Committee

26 February 2010, 9am

(recorded by Kena Fox-Dobbs)

In Attendance: Derek Buescher, Alyce DeMarais, Brad Dillman, Kena Fox-Dobbs, Leon Grunberg, Kent Hooper, Caitlin Martin, Brad Reich, Brad Tomhave, Kurt Walls, Barbara Warren, Steven Zopfi; Visitors: Keith Ward

Minutes from February 5, 2010: **M/S/P**

Keith Ward, Director of the School of Music, came to distribute and discuss "Response from the Music Faculty on the Proposed Change to the Fine Arts Approaches Core Rubric" [Appendix A]. Keith summarized the response document, and then spent some time going through the specific content issues that the Music faculty raised. The content issues are (well) articulated in the document, but Keith summarized them as;

1. Take issue with explicitly adding 'literary arts' and literature to the Fine Art (Aesthetics) Approach rubric
2. students can completely avoid courses in fine arts by taking a literature course instead
3. expanding the rubric to include studio art means must also include studio music and theatre

Keith proposed (several times) that the curriculum committee administer an ad hoc 'fine and performing arts' faculty subcommittee to explore changes to the existing Fine Arts core. He felt strongly that the committee should be predominantly comprised of faculty from the fine arts (Music, Theatre, Art).

The committee then spent a fair amount of time asking Keith questions and discussing the issues he raised. Derek steered the discussion away from the process issues in the Music department response, and focused on the content issues. Kurt weighed in with input from the Theatre Arts department faculty; he suggested they have a similar opinion as the Music faculty. A range of topics was explored, a few examples include; 1) what is the working definition of 'fine arts', and what understanding of fine arts do Puget Sound students need (in a liberal arts framework), 2) what specific language changes to the core rubric did the Music faculty take issue with [no specific issues with the proposed language], 3) what exactly are the connections between music and theater, and the fine arts, 4) should studio music and theater courses be included in the core?

Derek asked to table the Fine Arts Approaches core discussion. **M/S/P**

Working group reports

- #1 - almost done with Foreign Language review
- #2 - **M/S/P** COM104 for Writing and Rhetoric
received a request to postpone the Humanities curriculum review
- #3 - **M/S/P** LAS380 for Connections
continuing discussion of activity unit credits

- #4 - almost finished with Business department review
working on Gender Studies, and nothing has been received yet from Religion
- #5 - waiting for Asian Studies materials
continued discussion of Fine Arts core

Next meeting tentatively scheduled for March 12, 2010, 9am.

Topics to be discussed include revisit the Fine Arts core issues, continued discussion of independent study credit (with perspective/input from the Academic Standards committee).

M/S/P Meeting adjourned

Appendix A on next page.

Response from the Music Faculty on the Proposed Change To the Fine Arts Approaches Core Rubric

Context

It is our understanding that the Curriculum Committee is considering modifying the Fine Arts Approaches rubric in the core curriculum as follows:

1. Fine Arts Approaches becomes Aesthetic Approaches
2. New description: "A course to develop understanding and awareness of aesthetic expression and artistic traditions and to develop skills in employing methods of critical analysis of aesthetic expression and the processes that contribute to the production of works of art. This course should be taken during the first three years."

The rationale, explained in an email from Alyce DeMarais on February 1, she speaking on behalf of the Curriculum Committee, is "to better represent the courses that are currently part of this core area, to further delineate the differences between the Humanistic Approaches core area and the Fine Arts Approaches core area, and to allow for the inclusion of other types of courses in this core area (for example, studio arts courses and other literature courses)."

In a conversation with Alyce on February 3, again with Alyce speaking on behalf of the Curriculum Committee, Keith Ward learned that the following issues, some of which overlap the statement above, influenced the work of the curriculum committee:

1. The change attempts to address what we currently offer in the Fine Arts core, but also give more latitude in studio art and literature, that the new description must be inclusive of both fine arts and literature.
2. The current label does not represent what is being taught, that there is not a fine arts "way of knowing" per se.
3. Graduating seniors assess low in aesthetic approaches in the senior exit survey; they are not making the connection between what they are learning in Fine Arts courses with their own aesthetic development. In this regard, the change of title of the rubric is important.
4. It will bring in more courses in the area, especially in studio art and literature. The result will be a broader representation in courses; the creation of more seats will be a by-product, not a driving factor.

Other additional issues articulated in an email from Kriszta Kotsis to John McCuiston on February 22:

- "Significant overlap" purportedly between FA and HU cores specific to "content and the very general nature of the language of the FA core rubric."

- Enrollment issues, with “about three times as many Humanities core courses offered than FA core courses” which “drives up the numbers in the FA core classes which tend to be full.” Changing the requirement would affect enrollment patterns. One of the hopes of the proposed change, therefore, is to “alleviate the enrollment pressures on existing Fine Arts Core classes.”

Response

Based on the information above, the School of Music faculty unanimously opposes the proposed changes to the rubric. Our objection is based on the following reasons:

- There most certainly is a way of knowing and understanding the world through the fine arts. Students venture into a course of study that, at its base, focuses on a form of abstraction and expression fundamentally different from the study of literature. While it is the case that faculty in departments outside the fine arts incorporate, much to the benefit of their students, the study of visual art, theater, music, and dance as vehicles for understanding history, sociological context, literature, etc., such an approach does not place the study of the arts at the core in which history, sociological context, literature, etc. *serve the study and understanding of the arts*. Put differently, what one places at the core of intellectual inquiry changes the content and purpose of that inquiry. This fundamental difference, of what rests at the core of study, makes the expansion of the rubric to include literature very problematic. Adding literature courses does not strengthen or clarify that study; it muddies it by removing exposure to and analysis of works in the fine and performing arts *as the fundamental purpose for the course of study*.
- Expanding this requirement to include literature will *not* increase a student’s aesthetic appreciation. Instead, it will do the opposite. It will enable students to avoid the fine arts, “safely” taking courses in literature – that is, courses in an academic area and a type of inquiry they are, on the whole, far more comfortable and familiar with after having taken courses in the area well before their matriculation and, through Humanistic Approaches, at Puget Sound. In other words, students will graduate with *less* knowledge about the fine arts – that is, *less* aesthetic awareness.
- If studio art is to be included as a new course that could satisfy this requirement, then studio music and studio theater must be included as well. There is no educational or pedagogical rationale that can defend the exclusion of two out of three areas of studio instruction at Puget Sound. Any other reason, including purported enrollment pressure, does not have its place in a discussion of *curricular* revision.
- According to Randy Nelson in Institutional Research, the current exit survey we administer to our seniors is produced by HEDS (Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium). Randy also said we were contributors to the design of the survey. The result is a commercial product for multiple institutions whose question(s) on aesthetic awareness may be unclear or whose content does not speak to the question we really want answered, regardless of how clear it might seem on the survey itself. I asked Randy whether there has been any consideration of looking at the question we ask

regarding aesthetic awareness, and he said there has not been any. If the responses to this question on the survey are low, why haven't we looked critically at the question to see if the problem lies there? Why haven't we tried modifying the question to see whether responses change? What if the problem is not in the absence of higher aesthetic awareness in our students but in the question we ask? It is unclear whether this is the case, but it also is just as unclear if such revisions have not been considered.

- Finally, we have concerns about process, of the way this change has been developed and is now pursued. We recognize the responsibility of the curriculum committee to review, assess, and propose changes to the core curriculum, among its many other charges, but we do not agree with a process that charges a subcommittee that includes only one member of the fine arts faculty with revising the core rubric that is central to our respective disciplines. We would object just as much if a committee proposed revising the Natural Scientific core rubric with only a single scientist on the committee. With all due respect to our colleagues on the subcommittee and their well-meaning work, we believe that any change in the Fine Arts Approaches core rubric must include representatives from all the arts departments at the *start* of the process, as was the case when we as an institution last revised the core (and as what similarly happened in other disciplines with their respective core areas). The Puget Sound faculty has struggled mightily every time it has visited, revisited, tinkered with, or revised the core curriculum. The magnitude of change currently under consideration for Fine Arts Approaches should not be any different. We are not opposed in principle to review and possible change in the rubric, but we are concerned about matters of representation when a governing body considers such a profound change as modification of a core rubric. It is within the powers of the curriculum committee to solicit participation of faculty in ad hoc, advisory roles. This, we believe, should be done at the start of any proposed revision to the core, regardless of the rubric.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the School of Music faculty,



Keith Ward
Director, School of Music