

## **Curriculum Committee Meeting Minutes, November 9, 2009**

In attendance: Barbara Warren, Derek Buescher, Kriszta Kotsis, Greg Elliott, Rob Schaller, Brad Reich, Brad Tomhave, Brad Dillman, Alisa Kessel, Steven Zopfi, Alyce DeMarais, Kurt Walls

Visitor: Lori Ricigliano

### **Preliminaries:**

Meeting was called to order at 12:05 p.m.

Student representative, Rob Schaller, was introduced.

Meeting minutes of previous session were unanimously approved after minor correction was moved/seconded/approved to language.

### **Working Group Reports:**

- Working Group 1 reported to be working on assignments.
- Working Group 2 had nothing to report; the group is waiting for the Humanities Program Review.
- Working Group 3 reported to be in the process of discussing a Connections course proposal and the Connections core reviews
- Working Group 4 nothing to report, working on Business Curriculum Review.
- Working Group 5 reported to be working on Humanities and Fine Arts Core questions left over from last year's curriculum review; group is beginning to review Asian Studies.

### **Discussion of Charges from the Senate**

After the reports from working groups, further discussion followed on the charges the Curriculum Committee received from the Faculty Senate, based on an e-mail summarizing these charges on October 30, 2009.

Working Group 1: is charged with reviewing the **foreign language graduation requirement**. Walls asked why it was necessary to review this requirement. Buescher asked whether there is a way to ensure that students enroll in the courses that truly correlate with their level of preparation; he also noted that advanced students often fill 100-level courses (even though they should be in 200-level courses) creating difficulty for true beginners. Tomhave noted that there is a mechanism in place that allows students at the beginning of the semester to move up and down in FL courses to match their level of skill and that students do take advantage of this opportunity; he also added that students are advised to "aim high," namely, to enroll in a higher level course matching their experience in the language. Yet Tomhave also noted that often the problem of a student's true level of skill is difficult to establish as there may be a significant difference between speaking ability and writing ability; this discrepancy will lead students with poor writing skills but good speaking skills into lower level courses, again, making it difficult and intimidating for true beginners. Walls noted that FL faculty should be involved in the

discussion. DeMarais pointed out that the reason why the Curriculum Committee continues this discussion is because questions linger about this requirement from last year's Core Curriculum Review. She also mentioned that the FL Department will be reviewed this year and this discussion should be part of the Foreign Languages Dept. review. Kotsis noted that Kent Hooper offered suggestions last year to the Curriculum Committee that would be worthwhile discussing; these suggestions offered potential ways of strengthening the academic rigor of the FL requirement. Walls will follow up with Hooper about these topics. Discussion also included the possibility of a proficiency exam. While incoming students have time in their schedules during orientation to take proficiency exams, not many actually take advantage of this opportunity. It was noted that some institutions make the exam mandatory and the question was raised whether this would be possible at Puget Sound. Tomhave and others noted that making the exam mandatory will be a logistical difficulty and will have a possible conflict with Freshman Orientation. Elliott also pointed out the potential problem of mandatory exams for students who did not take a foreign language in high school; he suggested the possibility of requiring students who wish to take 101 or 102 of a foreign language to take the exam. Tomhave noted that students can come in with AP credits which could be used to satisfy FL graduation requirement. He also noted that there are no 102 courses offered in the fall for logistical reasons. Zopfi noted that it would be helpful to receive feedback on the topic from the FL Dept.

Working Group 2: is charged with continuing discussion about the **first year seminars**. DeMarais noted that the review of the freshman seminars will take place next semester, which will be the first time they will have been reviewed independently since their inception; (although they were reviewed in the year they were instituted, this year's review will provide the first opportunity to review how the seminars are working based on accumulated experiences of the past six years.) DeMarais also noted that she will send examples of the questions sent to faculty teaching freshmen seminars to members of the working group. Buescher mentioned that some faculty believe that the freshmen seminars are not successful as students don't acquire the appropriate skills (in writing and analytical skills, and development of arguments) that more advanced classes could build on. Dillman noted that poor writing skills should be addressed not only with regard to freshman seminars but also in relation to other courses, acknowledging that poor writing skills indeed are a problem. Tomhave mentioned that the questionnaires that the CC distributes to faculty teaching freshman seminars perhaps survey the wrong people—he suggested that faculty other than those teaching freshman seminars should also be surveyed about the efficacy of the first year seminars. DeMarais noted that during the review of the full curriculum last year it was suggested that the freshmen seminars should be sequential, i.e. the seminar students take in the fall should emphasize writing skills. Buescher noted that RW seminars can be more difficult to teach in the spring term as students believe that they are trained in writing when this is not necessarily the case; this leads to less openness in the spring to receiving instruction about writing. Buescher also noted the possibility of instituting a 3-week intensive summer writing term for freshmen as a potential solution.

Working group 3: is in charge of evaluating **Connections courses**. Walls noted that Curriculum Committee members have been concerned about the rubric, as it does not provide helpful guidance in evaluating course proposals and in his experience the rubric is much too open for interpretation. He

advocates the establishment of stronger guidelines for Connections courses. He also noted that course proposals often don't present the course clearly (perhaps as a result of the too open guidelines) which makes their evaluation particularly difficult. DeMarais noted that last year's review of the full curriculum raised questions about the relevance of the Connections core. Several members of the faculty voiced the opinion that the Connections core no longer has a purpose in our curriculum which has many multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary courses, and the outside the major upper division graduation requirement also exposes students to fields outside the confines of their major. She also noted that faculty disagree about the function of the Connections core, some believe it should serve as a capstone experience while others strongly disagree with this. She noted that a possible redefinition of the Connections core should be evaluated. Elliott noted that initiating this discussion will "open up a can of worms." He also noted that before serious initiatives and discussions begin in the committee about the possible redefinition of the Connections core, it would be useful to get a sense of the opinion of the faculty at large, as he believes that those who have been vocal about their dissatisfaction with the Connections core might represent a minority view. He mentioned some of the complaints leveled against Connections: they are difficult to teach; the courses gets watered down because there is no prerequisite; it used to be taught by two faculty members (in the old core, when it was called Science and Context) but staffing of these courses was difficult to maintain. Buescher noted that he had a good experience teaching a Connections course and mentioned that the Connections discussion should also be linked with the discussion of the Upper Division Outside the Major graduation requirement (UDOM from here on). He was wondering whether the UDOM requirement should be eliminated, as some noted the various problems with it—e.g. when non-majors take 300-level courses to fulfill the requirement and without preparation, it does disservice to the majors enrolled in the same class, as it slows down progress and the material needs to be taught at a more elementary level. Zopfi wondered whether this problem could be handled by imposing pre-requisites to affected 300-level courses. If the UDOM requirement is eliminated, how would that affect the Connections core? Buescher wondered whether some courses might be migrated from the core to eliminate this problem. That is, in the event the UDOM requirements are eliminated, some Approaches core classes could be moved to the 300-level with a requirement that students take a certain number of their Approaches core classes at the 300-level. In essence, the UDOM becomes upper-division Approaches. Buescher asked Working Group 3 to review the survey of the Connections core and to prepare another survey. He also noted that the following questions should be asked: does Connections fulfill its intended role within the curriculum? Do the guidelines need to be changed, made more specific? Should the UDOM be removed as a graduation requirement? Should some Approaches classes be migrated to the 300-level? Walls noted that reduction of class size would benefit those teaching Connections courses and might attract team teaching. Elliott noted that it is difficult to find teams teaching Connections courses. Buescher wondered whether a different type of teaching would be possible for Connections courses—multiple professors teaching a unit of the class rather than a single professor or a pair of professors.

He also noted that members of the working group should address questions regarding activity credits.

Working Group 4: is charged with **Social Scientific Core rubric change**; the change was suggested by faculty teaching in this core area. Buescher encouraged the WG to discuss this.

Working Group 5: is charged with continuing discussion about the imbalance of courses offered in the **Fine Art and Humanities Core** areas. The working group was asked to come back with a report on the lingering question about these two areas.

### **Credits for Independent Study**

Discussion continued with questions about independent study credits. Buescher noted that independent study credits are often taken to fill in missing credits so that students can graduate on time and are often taken in small increments (1/4 or ½ credit) and as a last minute 'stop gap' measure, therefore they often don't reflect a genuine interest in learning. He also noted that CC has no ability to review independent study projects and that there is no oversight. He also noted that certain departments use independent study to fulfill a course that can't be staffed (e.g. thesis in Religion Dept.). Elliott noted that this is indeed the case sometimes in Physics. Kotsis noted that the large number of independent studies in the Art Department in the past 5-6 years resulted in the restructuring of the Art Dept.'s studio art curriculum to alleviate the heavy burden of independent studies art studio faculty had to carry. Buescher noted that a student is not allowed to take a course as independent study if the course exists in the curriculum but is not offered in the particular semester or year when the student wishes to take it. Tomhave noted that independent study guidelines suggest that independent study is intended for individual students yet the guidelines do not prohibit more than one student signing up for the same independent study project. Buescher asked whether it would be possible to eliminate the offering of ½ unit independent study and whether this would solve the problem. He also asked how independent study credits are related to activity credits. Kessel asked about the nature of half units and why they are used. Tomhave noted that they are the equivalent of half the amount of work that would be carried out in a normal full unit class. He also noted that sometimes students take only a half unit because it is cheaper yet they actually undertake a full unit's worth of work.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:55.

Submitted by Kriszta Kotsis