

Curriculum Committee Minutes September 29, 2003

Members Present: Richard Anderson-Connolly, Bill Barry, DeWayne Derryberry, Mott Greene, Cathy Hale, Sue Hannaford, Christine Kline, Kelli Kline, Lynda Livingston, David Luper, Ken Rousslang, Karin Sable (Chair), Joyce Tamashiro, Brad Tomhave, Melissa Weinman Jagosh, Carrie Washburn, Lisa Wood

Visitors Present: Lori Ricigliano

Karin Sable called the meeting to order at 8:04 a.m.

announcements:

Relying on a broad definition of the word "announcement," Barry expressed consternation at having used the definite article last week in his "formal organ" remark ("Barry emphatically reiterated his point from last week: the curriculum committee is **the** appropriate 'formal organ' for faculty's initial airing of concerns about staffing" [emphasis added]). He prefers the indefinite "a."

Wood reported that she has crafted a brief statement to be included in the departmental review document (see minutes of 9/22/03). She will e-mail this statement to the committee; we will consider it formally next week.

approval of minutes: M/S/P minutes of September 12, 2003 meeting.

consideration of academic calendar:

Washburn reminded the committee that the bylaws charge us with developing the academic calendar. We accomplish this with the help of time-honored calendar-setting guidelines, and we provide schedules for the next four years. However, after we determine the academic framework for a semester (beginning and ending dates, for example), certain special interests (i.e., the dean of students' office, the registrar, the comptroller) add in numerous other "internal" dates. Washburn therefore asked us to approve the full-blown 2004-2005 academic calendar.

We were scarcely able to contain our enthusiasm.

Weinman-Jagosh M/S/P approving the 2004-2005 academic calendar.

It will now go to the Senate for final approval.

In additional calendar news, we have formed a calendar subcommittee (Hannaford [chair], Hale, and Weinman-Jagosh) to consider the following two issues:

- ◆ Veteran's Day: The Senate has received a suggestion that the university recognize Veteran's Day (November 11th). They have charged us with considering this possibility.
- ◆ the 2007-2008 calendar: According to our calendar-setting guidelines, we cannot extend the fall term beyond December 20th. However, when applied to the fall of 2007, our standard procedure for selecting starting dates would imply that the last day of finals would be Friday, December 21st. We could simply move classes back a week, ending on Friday the 14th. However, this would imply a much earlier starting date for classes (August 27th), an early-August arrival of student athletes, and a five-week winter break (we normally have four weeks). Washburn's question for the subcommittee: Should we accept these consequences? Or should we make an exception to the guidelines and finish the semester on the 21st?

There was a bit of discussion:

Washburn noted that December 21st probably the latest we could possibly end, given our guidelines.

Tamashiro commented that she thought we had recently had a five-week winter break. There was a smattering of concurrence.

Lupher wondered why the fall semester has 41 MWF sessions, while the spring has 43. Washburn responded that we have 15-week semesters. However, in the fall, we lose three days for Fall Break Day and the Thursday and Friday of Thanksgiving. Fall is therefore three days shorter than spring.

Hannaford represented her constituency by predicting massive dissention if a calendar change affected the sciences' lab schedule. Wood asked if there were lab meetings during Thanksgiving week. Hannaford said there were two approaches: either have a lab, advertise it thoroughly and repeatedly, and have punitive consequences for truancy; or to not have a lab. Rousslang said there were no chemistry labs that week. Washburn informed us that consistency required that all labs for science survey courses be cancelled in any partial weeks, so that we make a concerted effort to have as few partial weeks as possible.

SCIS review subcommittee report:

Weinman-Jagosh M/S/P approval of the following three courses for the Scholarly and Creative Inquiry seminar:

- ◆ **Atrocity and Moral Responsibility in the 20th Century (PHIL 103, proposed by Mark Jenkins)**
- ◆ **Musical Film Biography: Fact, Fiction, and Art (MUSIC ***, proposed by Geoffrey Block)**
- ◆ **Homer (CLASSICS 105, proposed by David Lupher)**

Weinman-Jagosh reported that the subcommittee felt that all three courses met the SCIS guidelines quite well. She also noted that the subcommittee was continuing to ask proposers to have an explicit discussion in their syllabi about how the courses meet the core rubrics. She believes that such a discussion will be helpful to students.

core assessment discussion:

Sable reviewed our proposed core-assessment procedure, as described in the 4/28/03 subcommittee report. We have a five-year cycle. In each of the first four years we are to review two core areas; in the fifth, we consider the core as a whole. The proposed schedule for these reviews is:

2004-5:	review both first-year seminars (WR and SCIS) (note: we be reviewing the seminars taught in 2004-5, not those taught this year)
2005-6:	review mathematical and natural scientific approaches to knowing
2006-7:	review fine arts and humanistic approaches to knowing
2007-8:	review connections and social scientific approaches to knowing
2008-9:	review overall core

We then began to discuss the parts of our evaluation procedure described in paragraphs E and F of the subcommittee report, which are:

E. During each core area's five-year review (or more frequently if the curriculum committee feels it beneficial), the curriculum committee should invite all faculty teaching in a particular core category to a dinner at which we would give the faculty a questionnaire (questions could include: Based on your assessment results, in what ways are your students meeting the core course learning objectives? Based on your assessment results, in what ways are they not doing so? If you could change the core objectives or guidelines, how would you change them?), provide the fifteen minutes to fill it out, have dinner, and then open the floor to discussion.

(process point: Greene suggested that we distribute our questionnaire *before* the dinner, so that faculty need not disturb their meal with our paperwork. Hannaford agreed.)

F. The curriculum committee representatives and/or subcommittee at the dinner would supply faculty with their preliminary assessment of course design and ask faculty

teaching in the core area for feedback. The representatives and/or subcommittee would then report back to the full committee with any potential recommendations for modifying the particular core rubric based on “data” gathered at the dinner and the written responses (which are, themselves, based on the assessment tools which each faculty members has designed).

(Barry noted that paragraph F refers to the curriculum committee’s normal function of reviewing course design, a function that the accrediting agency says we are acquitting with distinction.)

Also relevant to the ensuing discussion was paragraph D of the same document:

D. The responsibility for assessing outcomes begins with faculty teaching core courses. The curriculum committee (through the associate dean) should contact all faculty teaching in the core and ask them to develop some sort of assessment instrument (test, paper, other writing assignment, discussion, etc.) which provide instructors with an opportunity to reflect on the degree to which the course addresses the learning objectives of the core area (faculty retain possession of their assessment instruments).

Barry and Washburn informed us that Julie Neff-Lippman has planned to host dinners this semester for faculty teaching the freshman seminars. These are not the curriculum committee’s Paragraph E dinners. (Those will begin in the fall of 2004.) Instead, these dinners are meant to allow the faculty to discuss the progress of their courses and to provide feedback on their initial experiences with the new seminars. Neff-Lippman may provide the participants with a questionnaire concerning assessment (a Paragraph-D topic). We may be able to learn something from the discussions, and should send a note-taker.

As for our dinners, Greene wondered where the questions on our (paragraph E) questionnaires would come from. Sable said that next year we will create a subcommittee to design our questionnaire. She might ask faculty to suggest questions.

Wood offered some suggestions: How well prepared were students for the designed tasks? What was the distribution of that preparation? If you previously taught 3rd- or 4th-year seminars in the old core, what (if anything) did you change for the new seminars? Did you have any problems with students whose learning could not be facilitated with additional aids? If so, what percentage of the time did that occur? She also suggested that we develop questions that distinguish content from process and that describe employed methodologies.

Barry noted that our accrediting agency, the Commission on Colleges, does not require that we answer specific questions. Instead, it asks us to identify our objectives and assess whether we are meeting them.

Greene articulated his concerns about “creeping assessment”: we should not allow our curriculum decisions to be shaped by our need to report to external groups about our “assessment” process. Questions relating to our internal evaluation of our success at fulfilling our mission should be separated from questions coming from accrediting agencies.

Washburn stressed that the responsibility for assessing student learning outcomes (and for creating the tool to do that) lies solely with the faculty teaching in the core areas. Anderson-Connolly expressed skepticism: “There are degrees of ‘getting it’—how can we assess this?” Barry parried by describing some current efforts at macro-level assessment:

- ◆ Julie Neff-Lippman conducts a writing survey, having faculty read and evaluate papers from the core. Those from the old core will provide a baseline for our evaluation of papers written under the new core. We can also use the writing survey to track a student’s progress longitudinally throughout her tenure here.
- ◆ We can track the number of applications for student research projects. The new freshman seminars provide students with opportunities to get involved with larger projects, some of which could turn into grant proposals.

- ◆ We can determine whether specific goals of core courses (such as developing facility with argumentation) are being met. However, broader goals, such as fostering appreciation for the concept of a liberal-arts education, may be more difficult to assess.

As for assessment in specific courses, Hannaford noted that we can simply ask the students the first day what they want to learn from the class. The generated list can be written on a large piece of paper, which can then be brought out again at the end of the semester. Students can then perform a self-assessment about their progress.

Kline agreed that asking students to assess their overall understanding would be valuable. She also noted that grades provide a professor's evaluation of a student's performance. (However, according to Greene, the Commission on Colleges does not recognize grades as a relevant input in assessing student learning outcomes.)

Wood noted that since all freshmen take the freshman seminars, we have no comparison group for assessing the seminars' efficacy. However, we could pre- and post-test students to measure their progress. Anderson-Connolly cautioned that such an approach might lead to "teaching to the test." Washburn noted that while we have pretested students in the past, we did not do so this year. Wood was appalled.

Hannaford expressed hope that we would be able to identify early students who were poor readers and who would therefore have more trouble with seminar material.

Washburn reiterated that the Commission on Colleges does not have standard for our assessment process. We are responsible for setting the standards, and then we have to show whether or not our students are meeting those standards. At our last evaluation, we were "dinged" for not having data on students learning outcomes (and, Kline added, on how we responded to those outcomes in designing our curriculum).

Barry summarized our external obligations by noting that the only meaningful assessment is programmatic assessment.

Bringing us back to the topics of our dinners, Derryberry recalled that our original intention was to use them to foster a less adversarial relationship between the core professors and the curriculum committee (and to nurture general camaraderie). Using scary words like "data" and "assessment" will not be conducive to such fostering. Besides, isn't it too early to assess these seminars, since they're still in development? We should be brainstorming now and assessing later (when the courses have reached their "steady state").

Sable promised to talk to Neff-Lippman about her plans for generating questions for her dinners this semester. Hannaford noted that Neff-Lippman would indeed be an excellent consultant.

Eager to begin assessment of student learning outcomes, **the committee adjourned at 8:52 a.m.**

Respectfully submitted,

Lynda S. Livingston