

Curriculum Committee Minutes January 27, 2003

Present: Anderson-Connolly, Barry, Beck (chair), Clark, Derryberry, Goldstein, Hale, Jasinski, Kline, Livingston, Notrica, Ricigliano, Rogers, Rousslang, Sable, Sackman, Tomhave, Washburn, West

Guests: Hooper, Rocchi

Beck called the meeting to order at 1:03 p.m., amid general enthusiasm for the new meeting time.

Minutes: The minutes of December 2, 2002 were approved with the following revision:

Barry reported that one of the charges from the Faculty Senate was to look at the impact on faculty time of extra-departmental honors requiring a thesis. The Honors Program review subcommittee will address this issue as it relates specifically to the Honors Program. With regard to other extra-departmental honors, Barry reported that University Honors is determined by GPA; the Registrar's Office administers this award. Both the Asian Studies and IPE programs also award honors in the major. Asian Studies is currently under review and anticipates some significant changes to their program, including the thesis requirement. IPE requires a thesis for all its majors (whether or not they are candidates for honors). This requirement is, however, built into the faculty load as IPE401. Occasionally, there is an outside reader for these theses, but there were no reports of complaints about the burden on faculty of this requirement. The Curriculum Committee elected not to pursue the change further, except through the pending Honors and Asian Studies reviews.

Seminar in Scholarly and Creative Inquiry subcommittee report

Barry M/S/P approval of the following three courses for the SCIS core:

- Freedom on the Will and the Concept of a Person: A Freshman Seminar (Beardsley)
- Democracy and Equality (Cannon)
- Analyzing Health Care (Hummel-Berry)

Barry reported that the SCIS subcommittee has at most four more proposed courses pending.

Seminar in Writing and Rhetoric subcommittee report

Sackman M/S/P approval of the following three courses for the WR core:

- Print Culture, Literacy, and Argument in American Life (Christoph)
- Power and Perception: The Music and the Mirror (Putnam)
- Controversies in Contemporary Economics (Stirling)

Sackman described the current form of these courses as an excellent "affirmation of the process [of review]," saying that the revisions made by the course proposers in response to the subcommittee's questions resulted in well thought-out courses that better address the letter and spirit of the seminar's goals.

Jasinski and Nicole wondered about the "music" reference in Putnam's title. Sackman will ask Putnam for clarification.

Honors review subcommittee report

Goldstein reported on the subcommittee's review of the Honors Program's 5-year review. He began by noting that Honors is not a department, but rather a program of special courses (primarily core courses) and a thesis requirement. He then identified the three primary issues evaluated in the review: the increase in the number of students to be admitted into the program, the revision of courses to fit the rubrics of the new core, and the administration of the thesis requirement. All but the second generated significant discussion.

1) increase in the number of honors students admitted each year, from 35 to 51, beginning fall, 2003

Barry stressed that the increase was the result of a collaborative process, and had been considered as long as six or six or seven years ago when the idea was broached by admissions staff. Barry then described several benefits from the new policy. First, increasing the limit will allow the program to admit strong students who apply for honors (perhaps after the deadline) but who would not “fit” now. (In response to Rousslang’s question, Barry confirmed that many students denied admission to the honors program may choose not to attend UPS at all.) Second, having larger enrollment may actually decrease the student-faculty ratio within the program, since courses will now be able to be team-taught. Finally, administering a larger program may be more feasible under the new core, which has fewer requirements and therefore allows students more freedom.

Accommodating more students will, however, require logistical adjustments, and Barry describes the program administrators’ embrace of the new limit as “cautious.” Michael Kerley will be closely monitoring his assessment metric (proportion of students who complete the thesis: now averaging 20-23 students, or approximately 60-65%) to evaluate the impact of the change.

2) revision of courses to conform to guidelines for new core

Goldstein reports that this work is ongoing.

3) institution of a new process for the administration of the thesis requirement

There has been some concern among the faculty that some honors students start their thesis work too late and/or ill-prepared. (In fact, there is at least one faculty member who refuses on principle to read student theses, having been assaulted by so much inferior work in the past.) The Honors Program is instituting a process that will require, by the end of the junior year, a formal thesis proposal specifying the topic to be addressed and the advisor who will supervise. The head of the program will screen these proposals and recommend approval or revision when appropriate. Faculty hope that the institution of an earlier screening process will provide students with timely feedback that will facilitate their successful completion of their theses. Goldstein noted that even if a student decides after the proposal review not to continue in the honors program, he still will have benefited from participation in his earlier honors courses.

Rousslang commented that he has read numerous honors theses, and that all their authors had received research awards for the summer of their junior years. He said that students motivated by such awards begin concerted work on their research early in their careers, and that, as a result, chemistry faculty see their students’ theses months before their deadlines. Hooper responded hopefully that perhaps summer research awards in the humanities would have a similar stimulating effect.

Rocchi wondered if a grade-point standard might allow even earlier identification of students who may have problems completing the program. Goldstein noted that there is currently no such process, and that establishing one once enrollment increases might be difficult, since the students might no longer take all classes as a cohort. Barry added that he could not think of a case in which GPA predicted fulfillment of the thesis requirement.

Goldstein M/S/P to approve the 5-year review of the Honors Program.

Discussion of American Sign Language’s (ASL) fulfilling the foreign language requirement in both the old and the new core

(Note that prior to the meeting, each committee member received a letter from Mark Largent and a packet of materials from Ivey West informing us on the issues involved in considering ASL for core credit.)

Beck opened the discussion by reviewing its proximate cause. In fall, 2002, the ASC denied a student’s request that credits in ASL be counted toward the foreign language requirement of the core, consistent with existing policy. The student appealed to the Faculty Senate. The Senate charged the Curriculum Committee with reconsideration of the policy of excluding ASL from acceptable “foreign languages.” Beck stressed that the CC is not concerned with granting students core credit for ASL, but rather that we are to make a decision about policy. Specifically, we are to consider the following two questions:

- 1) What is the purpose of the foreign language requirement?
- 2) How is this purpose reflected in both the current and the new core guidelines?

Kline moved that ASL be considered a foreign language for the purposes of meeting the foreign language requirement. Jasinski seconded. Discussion ensued.

Barry passed out copies of the current core's Communication II-B guidelines and part G of the new core's graduation requirements. He then provided a summary of debate that led to our current foreign language option, which he gleaned from the minutes of faculty meetings from 1991. Then, there were two issues surrounding foreign languages' incorporation into the core: first, why they should be required, and second, given that they were to be required, where should that requirement be inserted in the core guidelines? As to the first, Barry speculates that the faculty felt that study of a foreign language provides students with a "unique encounter with another culture," and that this in turn allows students the "benefits of reflection on their home language." (These goals can be seen in the current core guidelines: Communication II, Option B, part III.) The faculty decided that an "effective encounter" required two courses in the same foreign language; this became the requirement for core credit.

As to the second issue, the faculty placed the foreign language option in the Communication II (oral) guidelines. Barry notes that an oral aspect was essential, and that students were required to *speak* the language: reading aloud, giving presentations, and talking to each other.

During the more recent debate on the new core, Barry reports that the "why" question was not really considered. Instead, discussion focused on the form that the requirement would take. It was decided that students would be required to demonstrate proficiency in a language, and this was codified in the new code's graduation requirement C, parts 1 through 3. (There was some debate about whether two [possibly apocryphal] parts of this list had been approved: part 4, which allows students to receive credit for passing a proficiency exam in a language not offered at UPS, and part 5, which allows students with certain learning disabilities to waive the requirement. Barry asserted that the fifth was implied by general policy, and that the fourth could be implied by part 1. In any case, it is clear that the new core does not identify specific languages that will be acceptable for credit.)

Rocchi spoke against accepting ASL for foreign language credit. (Although they did not meet, Rocchi e-mailed all members of his department, who were in unanimous support of his position.) His essential argument was that ASL is not "foreign." His initial supporting points were these:

- During debate on the new core, the faculty decided to confine study abroad experiences to non-English-speaking countries. Similarly, then, a "foreign" language is one of a foreign country that is not English-speaking.
- ASL is indigenous to the U.S. and Canada, and has no written form. ASL is an alternative code to an existing language. It is a different system, but it is not "foreign."
- Braille and ebonics would not be considered for foreign language credit.
- Although approximately 130 universities accept ASL for their language requirements, different campuses have different goals and expectations. ASL is inconsistent with UPS's existing standards.

Kline responded that a language can be foreign if it is different from one's own in grammar, syntax, and culture; there need not be an appeal to physical borders. ASL clearly is not a dialect of English, and is therefore foreign to English speakers. We should consider further its application to the core.

Rocchi agreed that ASL has its own morphology and is part of a distinct culture. However, he sees this ASL proposal as "trying to add things into graduation requirements that were not necessarily the impetus of the faculty at the time."

Sackman noted that Latin and Greek were acceptable under the old core, since they were used by scholars and could be part of historical perspective.

Nicole asked whether ASL would satisfy the core for international students, and whether French sign language would satisfy it for domestic students. Jasinski echoed the second question, then observed that French would be acceptable for a student who came from a dual English/French home. He then asserted his interpretation of "foreign" as "new and different to the student."

Beck concluded this initial round of debate by asking us to consider the following two questions:

- 1) Is ASL a foreign language?
- 2) What are the implications of accepting ASL for the core?

Rousslang M/S/P to adjourn at 1:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lynda S. Livingston