

Minutes of the Student Life Committee
February 9, 2011

Present: Peter Bittner, Peggy Burge, Bill Dasher, Lisa Ferrari, Cameron Ford, Bruce Mann (Chair), Geoff Proehl, Mike Segawa, Stephanie Wood.

Mann called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m.

The committee approved the minutes of the January 26, 2011 meeting.

Burge explained some of Collins Library's work in promoting information literacy. She referred to the Library's online information literacy portal for faculty, having sent committee members the link to that portal in advance of the meeting. The Library is currently focusing on information literacy in response to a recommendation of reaccreditation team visiting the university in April, 2009, from the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. The team recommended that the university more fully integrate information literacy into our curriculum.

Burge noted that the Library provides some level of information literacy instruction to about 40% of each first-year class through the first-year seminars. Beyond that, librarians and faculty members have difficulty knowing how much library training any particular student has had. The Library is reaching out by meeting with residence hall and Writing Center advisors. Librarians have also developed online tutorials in research methods and academic integrity. For the past several years, the university has participated in a survey of new students' research practices. Survey results show that our students over-estimate the strength of their research skills upon entering college.

Mann wondered whether these results indicated a significant and pervasive weakness among our entering students. Burge reported that levels of information literacy vary along many factors, including students' disciplinary background and training. We do not have good aggregate data on students' development in information literacy.

Dasher asked whether our survey results were typical of other universities'. Burge replied that Puget Sound students enter college with information literacy levels similar to those of students at the other fourteen colleges in the survey. However, students at some other schools finish their education with better levels of information literacy than do our students. After the first year of the survey, some other liberal arts colleges (including Swarthmore and Carleton) have increased their levels of student training in information literacy.

Segawa commented that the Curriculum Committee had recommended that information literacy be a component of first-year seminars. Information literacy is gained most effectively when integrated into coursework, rather than learned in the abstract. Not all faculty members think in terms of “information literacy” when teaching research methods in their disciplines.

Dasher asked why the information literacy component had not become part of the first-year seminars. Segawa and Ferrari replied that seminar faculty already felt overloaded with the number of expectations placed on those courses.

Bittner, Ford, and Wood reported entering college with widely varied levels of research experience and information literacy. All agreed that library overview sessions were much less helpful than were sessions tailored to specific courses or assignments.

Bittner suggested that an information literacy component could be added to new student orientation. Segawa observed that this is why the topic of information literacy is now before the Student Life Committee. If we are unable to accommodate the issue systematically in first-year seminars, where else might we do so? Two possibilities are through orientation or residence life. Dasher asked whether such an approach was really indicated, given the students’ observations that information literacy is best learned in conjunction with course content. Perhaps information literacy needs to be a campus-wide initiative along the lines of writing across the curriculum.

Mann commented that the committee could recommend to the Senate that Curriculum Committee examine the rubrics for first-year seminars to see whether information literacy needs to be given higher priority. If the world now expects top-level college graduates to have a high level of information literacy, we are doing a disservice to our students if we don’t encourage that level of knowledge.

Segawa compared the challenges of information literacy to those of many other campus issues. We have good personnel and resources here, but we need to be more deliberate about using them effectively.

Mann wondered how to promote faculty interest in the topic.

Burge emphasized the Library’s commitment to personal service, while acknowledging that it would be impossible for the small staff of liaison librarians to work individually with each student on campus.

Proehl wondered whether committee members imagined incorporating information literacy into Writing and Rhetoric or into Scholarly and Creative Inquiry seminars. In past years, Writing and Rhetoric faculty have been clear that they regard the seminar rubric as making too many

demands on the courses. If teaching information literacy is on a par with teaching writing, there is no quick fix to the problem of integrating it into the curriculum.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Ferrari