

Curriculum Committee Minutes

March 25, 2015

Committee members attending: Richard Anderson-Connolly, Rob Beezer, Luc Boisvert, Nancy Bristow, Gwynne Brown, Jane Carlin, Jim Evans, Lisa Ferrari, Sara Freeman, Nick Kontogeorgopoulos, Alan Krause, Julia Looper, Janet Marcavage, Tim Pogar, Elise Richman, Brett Rogers, Brad Tomhave.

1) Call to Order at 8:00 a.m.

2) Remarks from the Chair

There are two more scheduled meetings for the semester, and one more “on hold” in case it’s needed.

Last night several CC members hosted a forum for faculty from interdisciplinary programs; Freeman will follow up with the CC about what was discussed at a future meeting.

Freeman wished Rogers good luck on the international conference being held on campus this weekend.

3) M/S/P to approve the minutes from the 3/11/15 CC meeting with corrections.

4) WG Reports

WG1: Bristow said the WG met yesterday to begin on the Business curriculum review.

M/S/P (1 abstention) to approve GNDR/HUM 327, Queer Cultures, as a KNOW course. This is a pre-existing course that has been revised to fit KNOW. The course is team-taught by 8 faculty! One person is the lead, attends every class and does the major grading.

Bristow said that two other curriculum reviews, of Hispanic Studies and Asian Studies, are ongoing.

WG2: Kontogeorgopoulos said the WG met before Spring Break to go over the survey that will be going out to faculty soon about the core. Ellen Peters urged Kontogeorgopoulos to send the survey with his name on it, as people are more likely to be responsive to a survey sent by a delightful colleague than to one sent by a (less likable) committee. Kontogeorgopoulos is working hard to ensure that the survey with his name attached to it is free of errors. He noted that the survey will be sent out next week. It can be completed quickly, and faculty will have two weeks to do it.

WG3: Looper reported that the WG is trying to find a date to meet with faculty in the Mathematical Approaches core area. She asked what the process is for making changes to the core rubric, which faculty in the MA area had wanted to do during the *last* 5-year core area review but never quite happened. Members recalled that the changes to the Artistic Approaches rubric came before the full faculty for a vote a few years ago, and that the changes were passed without much controversy. There was consensus that the changes should come to the CC first and then be presented at the faculty meeting. Looper was urged to request that the topic be put on the agenda for the year’s last faculty meeting now.

Looper also noted that the SOAN review was ongoing.

WG4: Rogers said that the WG has nearly finished the Theatre Arts review and expects to bring it to the next CC meeting. The WG is knee deep in the BMB review, reviewing 2 SSI syllabi, and is gearing up to do the Natural Science core review. The hardworking WG will have a meeting immediately after this meeting.

Freeman said that she would send each WG lead a prompt by the next CC meeting, reminding them of the need to write a year-end overview of the WG's activities. Freeman will use these for her CC year-end report.

5) Old Business: The 9-unit limit

Rogers provided historical context, originally dug up by Mike Spivey during his term on CC: in 1983, the faculty passed two resolutions. The first was that no major would exceed 9 units. The second was that no major could require more than 16 units when counting courses outside of the major (e.g. prerequisites). Last year, the CC affirmed the 9-unit limit. In conducting the Theatre Arts curriculum review this year, WG4 felt compelled to bring this matter to CC for discussion: if a major requires more than 9 units, what does that mean for the CC's curriculum review? Do we have the will (or ability) to enforce the limit we affirmed?

In discussion:

- Religion is the only current major that requires exactly 9 units. ENVR will require 8 + an experiential component. Business and Economics each require 9 units in the major but 2 more outside.
- CC has no enforcement ability. We depend on the willingness of departments to comply with our urgings.
- Faculty do take the CC seriously. When Freeman came in to talk to the Faculty Senate about the CC's actions last year, they were keen to talk about the implications of the CC's affirmation of the 9-unit limit for their departments.
- We changed question 3 last year in hopes of getting more thoughtful responses from departments that exceed 9 units. Let's see how that goes before getting enforcey.
- If the CC wanted to start enforcing the limit, we'd want to open that up to the full faculty for discussion first and get the mandate to do so.
- Is it a good use of faculty time to ask almost every department to answer a question about why their majors, like almost everyone else's, exceed 9 units? Would it make more sense to accept the reality that most majors are at 10 or more units, rather than conducting reviews as though this were anomalous?
- This isn't just a matter of 9 units vs. 10 or 11 or more; it's a question of how does Puget Sound balance the integrity of a discipline/major with the integrity of a liberal arts education. Since there are broader conversations going on right now, hosted by Kris Bartanen, this might be exactly the right time to be thinking about these issues.
- CC members were encouraged to attend one of the aforementioned conversations, whose topics overlap considerably with CC matters. One of the threads of discussion involves the constitution of majors.

- On the one hand, sticking to the ideal of a 9-unit major is good because if you don't start imposing limits, you end up with a lot of 12-unit majors. On the other hand, maybe the smarter way to go is with that second number from 1983: no more than 16 units *total* should be devoted to a major's requirements.
- It might be useful to see what peer institutions are doing, in terms of limiting the size of majors and enforcing those limits.
- It's a challenge to find peer institutions whose curricula are sufficiently analogous to ours to make such comparisons worthwhile.
- Our core is smaller than it used to be, and we should take this into account when considering the size of majors.
- We're in the early stages of considering possible changes to the core via an impending survey and perhaps the formation of an ad hoc committee next year. The question of how big majors should be will be affected by how the core is constructed.
- The survey does ask a question about the size of the core. It also asks about each of the four stated objectives of the core.
- There's more than major(s) and core to consider; students have other graduation requirements as well.
- Reviews can proceed; if a WG doesn't like a department's response to question 3, we can ask for a better answer.
- We might want to collect departments' answers to question 3 so we can start to build a sense of what kinds of rationales are provided for >9 unit majors over the next couple of years. This would help us both to define for ourselves what kinds of answers we find acceptable, and to evaluate the 9-unit limit itself. By collecting this information, we can keep the 9-unit limit question from getting lost in the shuffle, and also help ensure that the CC in 2 years can reflect meaningfully on this question even though it will mostly be comprised of different people than today.
- This seems to ask a lot of needless work of departments: justify how you've constructed your major, because we think we know better than you how many units should be necessary.
- Going back to the purposes of question, rather than the enforcement issue: by asking the question, we offer faculty the opportunity to reflect on the values that we bring to the curriculum as a whole. This is about the purpose of a major, which is connected to purpose of the core, and of electives. We can be thinking about the overall balancing act: how can we have a meaningful area of specialization and depth, as well as breadth? Maybe this could offer a chance to look at the purposes of the tension between depth and breadth.
- According to the documents from 1983, the curriculum was designed to include three things:
 - 1) core (liberal arts component)
 - 2) major (specialization/depth)
 - 3) space to explore

This is one particular interpretation of "liberal arts," and liberal arts colleges have a diverse range of (largely implicit) definitions of what that means. It would be worth having a campus-wide discussion of what we think it means. This is fundamental to how we think about that balancing act between depth and breadth, and to our mission.

- In 1983, Puget Sound was transitioning from a regional college to a liberal arts one. Things have changed a lot since then, and we need to think about our curriculum differently.

- If almost every major exceeds 9 units, it's needless to ask every department to justify it. Maybe we should just make 10 units be the real, hard limit.
- Maybe we should have a *minimum* (at least 8 units) and a maximum that includes prerequisites (e.g., 16 units).
- We don't want to open the door to departments moving *up* to 16 units. A cap on the number of courses in a discipline is reasonable.

Freeman noted that more discussion is needed, but ascertained that WGs felt that they could proceed with departmental reviews as things stand.

6) New Business: Core and KNOW proposal form

Members discussed whether the form should specify the length of the cover memo to be included with proposals for core and KNOW courses. After a brief discussion, **M/S/P to replace “cover memo” with “2-page (approx.) cover letter” on the proposal form.** The discussion centered on the sometimes competing challenges of (1) ensuring that faculty have the space they need in their cover letters to sufficiently address how their courses engage the core/KNOW rubric, (2) helping faculty to know that they are not obligated to write bloated treatises, and (3) preventing WG members from having to read bloated treatises.

Additional discussion addressed whether a cover letter is typically an opening salvo in a multi-step communication process with a WG, or simply part of a proposal that will most likely be accepted without further ado. If the former, then a brief cover letter saves all parties time, and then the WG can ask a proposer questions about things that need further clarification. As a general rule, courses proposed for the core are more likely to involve some conversation between the proposer and a WG, whereas non-core courses move through quickly, but there are exceptions.

Freeman said that the proposal to reduce the number of teaching days in spring semester will be on the agenda for the next CC meeting.

7) M/S/P to adjourn, 8:53 p.m.

Submitted by Gwynne Brown