

Faculty Senate Minutes February 8, 1999

Senators Present: N. Bristow, T. Cooney, R. Gomez, Connie Hale, B. Haltom, D. Hulbert, K. Hummel-Berry, J. Kay, H. Ostrom, B. Steiner, G. Tomlin

Visitors Present: Kris Bartanen, David Droge, Ben Heavner, Kesa Kohler, Mele Moore, Mike Veseth

The meeting was called to order at 4: 05 p.m.

1. Minutes. Approval of the minutes of January 25, 1999 was postponed until the next meeting.

2. Announcements.

Gomez confirmed that a new student representative to the Faculty Senate would be appointed before the next meeting.

Gomez announced his completion of a plan for African American student recruitment, which he will present to the Board of Trustees. He urged the Senators to look at it, and expressed his hope that the Senate would support it. He encouraged individuals to express their support as well.

3. ASUPS Core Curriculum Survey.

Mele Moore, sophomore senator, began the presentation of the ASUPS survey to the Senate. Moore noted that as the students' representatives the Student Senate had a responsibility to provide a voice for the student body. Given that changes in the core would affect all students, the student leadership chose to survey students on the current core curriculum. The survey was conducted during registration in November, 1998, and included students from all classes and majors. Registration was a useful time for this survey because it facilitated access to this range of students at a time when students were thinking about the curriculum and their own individual goals. 1166 students participated, representing 41.2% of the student body. In writing the survey the Student Senators recognized that a longer survey could have provided additional information, but chose to keep the survey brief in order to encourage large numbers of students to participate. They were aware that students would have different reactions depending on aspects of their identity, such as their class standing. Those who completed the survey reflected a cross-section of the student body. Results were broken down by class.

Ben Heavner, ASUPS Webmaster then presented the highlights of the results from the survey. Responses to Questions 2 and 3 suggest students believe the current core is too big, and that it limits their exploration of fields of study in which they are interested. Responses to Question 4 suggest student support for a multicultural component in the core. Also, more advanced students were more likely to favor a multicultural component. Responses to Question 5 and others related to the particular core categories suggest students feel core areas do live up to their stated goals, except for the Science-in-Context core area. Question 6 and others related to the particular core areas suggest that for all areas except Science-in-Context the largest group of students favored neither more nor fewer courses in that core area. The second largest group of students favored fewer courses in each core area, again except for Science-in-Context. Student responses suggest that the largest group of students favor fewer Science-in-Context core requirements. Heavner also suggested that Question 11 had the fewest responses of any question on the survey. He explained that this seemed logical, given that most freshmen and sophomores would not yet have taken their Science-in-Context core course. He also surmised that this low figure could reflect ambivalence among other non-respondents. He also noted that a majority of students from each class believed that courses in this category did not fulfill the goals of the core area. Turning to Question 12 Heavner noted that, with the exception of freshmen, all classes suggested there should be fewer Science-in-Context core requirements.

Kesa Kohler, Senator-at-Large, completed the presentation, explaining that the students would be presenting the survey to the full faculty at its meeting on Wednesday, February 10. She explained that the students did not mean to target any particular core area, but were looking for the overall view of students, and will present what they have found. They know that some may not like the findings, while others may. They then asked for feedback and fielded questions from the Senate.

Hulbert asked why only seven core areas were considered. Kohler connected this decision to the effort to maximize the number of respondents. Gomez also pointed out that some core areas were more easily identified by students. Ostrom asked about the first page of the materials distributed, and Kohler explained that these were excerpts from comments included with the survey responses. Moore noted that many students felt strongly about their replies. The excerpts included are intended to reflect the range of responses. Cooney noted that in 1990, at the time of the previous work on the core, students had been surveyed. The survey at that time asked students whether they would favor each of the new proposals, and all received a majority of support. At that time the additional Natural World core requirement received the least support. What is interesting, Cooney maintained, is that these results are reflective of the same attitudes, as students express overall support of each core area. This makes the faculty's work of trimming the core difficult. Cooney continued by noting that students have embraced the core and reiterated that faculty face the difficulty of balancing the calls for a smaller core with issues of content. He offered the students one suggestion regarding the issue of presumptions about student responses used in shaping the questionnaire. Moore suggested that they had hoped students would use the opportunity for comments at the conclusion of the questionnaire to speak to other core areas not included in the survey. Gomez concluded by asking the Senators if they found the survey useful. If they did, he asked them to use it, and to encourage others to do so. Cooney pointed out that the faculty had already confirmed the students' desire for a smaller core.

4. Proposal for a "Seminar in Scholarly and Creative Inquiry"

Haltom noted that the topic of the Seminar in Scholarly and Creative Inquiry would appear near the beginning of the agenda for the faculty meeting on February 10, as the first item of old business, and referred senators to the "Proposal for a Seminar in Scholarly and Creative Inquiry" dated November 9. Steiner asked how this discussion would be related to the discussion of possible themes for the core. Haltom explained that an answer to this question would be up to the faculty, and that the two discussions could occur simultaneously once a faculty member chose to introduce the issue of themes, but that they could also occur separately. Under Step Two of the process accepted by the faculty both of these subjects are in order. This particular proposal is Old Business, while the theme issue will be New Business. Cooney suggested that the faculty may need to be clear that what they pass need not represent final language. The omnibus motion leaves room for revision and shaping later. He noted that the student survey asked whether core areas met their goals, and suggested that as the faculty craft language for any changes in the core it will be important to be clear about the objectives for student learning each represents.

Tomlin pointed out that at each faculty meeting there are inquiries regarding whether there are examples of each potential addition to the core. He wondered whether the Senate could prepare for this inquiry in this case. Kay asked whether the Senate had not already done this. Tomlin acknowledged that the Senate had the option either of telling the faculty that, or of being unready to respond, but noted the Senate might instead want to be prepared. Cooney suggested the Senate might be ready with a few examples, and with references to where additional ones could be located on the web. Haltom agreed to prepare these responses.

Ostrom raised the issue of staffing in this proposed new core area, worrying that faculty might vote for this core area without planning to teach in it and without a presumption of departmental responsibility to it. He wondered if the Senate had a responsibility to raise this issue. Bartanen maintained that it would be possible to staff this area, pointing out that there are sixty-five courses this semester with ten or fewer students in them, with many below five. With some shifting of resources this core area could be staffed. Ostrom wondered how faculty would be convinced to do it. Bartanen asked whether faculty expressed support for a core area when they voted in favor

of it, and noted that departments would have a responsibility to this core area if it were approved. Cooney reminded the Senate that it is not possible to know what will happen with the core as a whole as the faculty proceeds to revise it piece by piece. He noted that the university does expect more students in upper-division courses if they face a smaller core. He also pointed out that departments are talking about this new core area, and that he has had job candidates inquire about it. He also agreed that Ostrom's question is a serious one. Bristow also agreed, noting that the Comparative Values core area, for which no department claims particular responsibility, faces a perennial problem of understaffing. She also suggested, though, that if the core shrinks in size with the removal of some existing core areas, some faculty would be freed up to teach in new core areas. She explained her own situation in which she currently has responsibility to the Historical Perspectives core area, noting that if this area were eliminated she would be freer to teach in any new cores. Cooney pointed to the possibility of a smaller requirement for Natural World core courses, and suggested that this would open up the possibility of science faculty participating in the proposed freshman core. Veseth suggested that when a proposal such as this one comes forward it needs to be supported by faculty who favor it and can talk about it. The core has to be built by faculty, and faculty need to see people who are knowledgeable about and supportive of proposed changes. He also wondered whether this proposed core area is a bit like the Comparative Values core area. Ostrom expressed his concern that some faculty might try teaching in this proposed area once, but then might be surprised by the experience of teaching freshmen and decide not to return. Haltom reiterated that the faculty will need to see the entire core proposal in order to resolve staffing issues. He noted his own concern that people will come to this proposed core area with high hopes the first time and with a more practical approach the second time, for instance cutting back on the quantity of writing. He suggested that he worries about what will happen as this area evolves, and as practicality overtakes the high hopes, and when departments go hunting for people to teach in the area. Cooney reminded the senate that this core area is not defined as "writing intensive."

Regarding the upcoming faculty meeting Bristow expressed her hope that as it is introduced that this proposal will be contextualized for the faculty. Ostrom volunteered the Senate Chair to provide this context, and Haltom agreed. He will bring copies of the proposal to the meeting, and will begin with the motion itself, reminding faculty that it is the motion itself which is the subject of the discussion and voting.

5. Themes and the Core Curriculum

Mike Veseth introduced his proposal for a theme to unite the core. He began by recounting the history of his proposal, which he first made about two years ago. His motivation at this point, he suggested, remains the same. Liberal education has as one of its goals the preparation of citizens, and so he believes this would be a reasonable theme around which to organize the university's core curriculum, thus providing coherence. He maintained that the current core does an acceptable job, but offered his hope that the future core might be made more coherent. He then reviewed his original plan, which appears as Plan D on the university web, and which included four courses including two freshman seminars, a sophomore course on global relations, and a junior course dealing with C. P. Snow's notion of "two cultures". With this final course he hoped to solve what he understands to be some of the structural issues and problems with the current Science-in-Context core area, in particular the large size of the courses and the limited number of course options. He referred to the meetings held over the past summer to discuss his proposal, and then introduced his new proposal, which picks up many of the ideas included in Kris Bartanen's proposal of a few years ago. This new proposal seeks to begin the discussion by looking at what we already have, and proposes four courses, three of which are related to existing core areas—International Studies, Science-in-Context, and Comparative Values. He asked for the Senate's reactions.

Haltom explained his own sense that the Senate is only a clearinghouse for themes. Cooney agreed, maintaining that the Senate is not to serve as a body that decides what the faculty should or should not discuss. Ostrom asked whether the Senate might, though, serve as a troubleshooting body, offering suggestions. Tomlin suggested Veseth might think ahead to the

upcoming process and think about how his proposal might relate to the two parts of the upcoming discussion—the two proposed freshman seminars and the issue of a theme for the core as a whole. Veseth articulated his interest in the core's being compact, and suggested that incorporating the second freshman seminar into his proposed core theme would help facilitate that goal. He expressed his frustration that themes for the core had not yet been discussed, and noted his appreciation of Tomlin's point. Tomlin explained his concern that the theme of citizenship not be pitched in such a way to seem to suggest an elitist perspective on citizenship in which a college education is understood as necessary to good citizenship. Haltom wondered how the faculty will move forward, taking what has been approved and combining it with what exists from the former core. He acknowledged Veseth's point about the need to combine existing core areas and wondered if the core would be segmented into pieces included the freshman seminars, the core with a theme, and distribution requirements. Bartanen recounted her experiences at a recent conference, suggesting she had heard about several interesting core curriculum plans that included overlays, and noting that a theme can be woven together with other components of a core curriculum. Kay returned to the discussion of concerns about how a theme of citizenship might be defined, noting her own concern about the tension between United States conceptions of democratic citizenship and issues related to global citizenship in which there are competing models. Connie Hale wondered about how this would be presented to prospective students, and the importance of avoiding a sense of division between students who think about working within the system and those who do not.

Ostrom expressed his concern that as the discussions on the core proceed the possibility of turf wars will increase. He suggested that the proposal for the Freshman Seminar on Writing and Rhetoric may have proven successful because two departments worked together to find a compromise. He suggested that Veseth might talk about his proposal in ways that would discourage turf debates. Veseth acknowledged that he might try to explain more fully how his proposed core areas might differ from the existing ones. Droge suggested that a substantive part of this theme might involve putting a question mark behind the theme of citizenship, raising it as an issue in terms of the role of liberal arts education and institutions in a society. Adding the question mark, he proposed, would make this core area exciting. Haltom wondered whether that would simply lead to ideological combat. Cooney maintained that Haltom was offering a narrow definition of citizenship that dealt only with the political sphere, suggesting that there might be a connection between core courses in terms of their purposes. He noted the possibility for self-criticism within the academy and other interesting grounds for conversation this core theme might invite.

Bartanen raised the issue of the Senate's plan for the remainder of the semester regarding the core discussions. Haltom recollected that the Senate had agreed to see what happens at the next faculty meeting on February 10 in order to decide how to proceed, but acknowledged that Bartanen's point was a good one. He asked whether the Senate should ask to have a few more meetings scheduled. Ostrom wondered if the faculty might be coming to a point at which it would need the Senate to present some possible models for consideration. He asked if the Senate should ask the faculty for permission to do so. Hulbert pointed out that the Senate had already developed some models. Tomlin asked if the omnibus motion at the completion of the core discussions would contain the descriptions of the core's objectives. Haltom maintained that the motion would include only the motions passed by the faculty, not the explanations of those motions. Tomlin then asked if the Senate believed the faculty could complete its work on the core curriculum by the end of the semester. Cooney noted that an omnibus motion of the sort described by Haltom would be absent one final step required with changes in the core curriculum, the completion of a new curriculum statement. Haltom asked if this could be completed this semester and Cooney suggested that even if the faculty completed an omnibus motion he did not believe the curriculum statement could be finished. Haltom maintained that the faculty needs to be in a good position in May to know what needs to happen over the summer in order for the faculty to finish this project by the end of fall semester 1999. Tomlin asked if responsibility for the curriculum guidelines could be passed on to the Curriculum Committee which has a fallow year next year, noting that even in this context the Curriculum Committee would need a semester to

finish this charge. Returning to the issue raised earlier by Ostrom regarding the proposal of particular models, Bristow asked if the Senate's charge related only to process rather than content. Haltom noted that the Senate might suggest that it stands ready if the faculty needs it to complete other responsibilities, and Ostrom suggested the Senate might even offer to develop models for the faculty to vote on if that would prove useful.

The meeting adjourned at 5:32.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy Bristow