

Faculty Senate Minutes
March 22, 1999

Senators Present: Bowe, Valentine, Hummel-Berry, Steiner, Hulbert, Bristow, Ostrom, Haltom (Chair), Tomlin, (Connie) Hale, Birnbaum, Cooney

Guests: Bartanen, Taranovski

Haltom called the meeting to order and asked Ostrom to take minutes. Ostrom agreed to take minutes but moved to adjourn. The motion did not attract a second.

The minutes for the meetings of 2/22/99 and 3/8/99 were approved, after a ritual verbal skirmish between Haltom and Birnbaum, and with one revision to the 3/8/99 minutes: the first sentence under part 6 was deleted.

Special Orders: None.

The rest of the meeting was taken up with a wide-ranging but low-flying discussion of core-curricular revision. Taranovski observed that the process of revision seemed to be "meandering like a river going uphill"; to redirect the river, he offered a core-curriculum plan, which includes the two freshman seminars already tentatively approved by the faculty; four core areas based on "ways of knowing": Humanities, Social Science, Natural Sciences, Mathematics (students would take one course in each area); and a yet-to-be-conceived upper-level seminar. Taranovski then fielded questions, such as "What about foreign languages?" Answer: Only one semester of foreign language does not fluency make, and a lean core with many electives available might lead many departments to require foreign language in their majors. "Why include math as a separate category?" Answer: Traditionally, it has been part of a liberal-arts curriculum; pragmatically, a core-plan is more likely to pass if our colleagues in science and math like it, and they are more apt to like it if it includes math.

Haltom reminded senators that four core-plans had now surfaced: Taranovski's, "The Economists", Haltom's (a leaner version of The Economists'), and (Jim) Evans'.

Tomlin and others asked, What will/might/should happen in the next faculty meeting? Should the Senate attempt to collate or collapse these plans in some way? Taranovski said that he had intended to move adoption of his plan, but that he would also entertain the notion of deferring to the Senate's wishes. Cooney observed that two basic approaches seemed to undergird the four proposals, one featuring well defined categories (Taranovski), and others featuring looser clusters of courses (Evans, for example). Taranovski observed that the current core-curriculum of 12 units was large and convoluted but that students at least had the same general experience and that, in his plan, the curriculum would be smaller, not convoluted, and therefore more likely to achieve a similar general-educational experience for all students. Haltom concurred with Cooney and Taranovski, observing that Taranovski's plan offered well defined rubrics ("ways of knowing"), whereas the other plans were versions of the legendary Core Light (or Lite).

Valentine asked whether the Senate itself might put forward a plan. Haltom said, yes, it might, but such a plan would not have privileged status. He continued by saying that perhaps the Senate should merely copy the proposals for the faculty to generate an informal discussion, as opposed to discussing each plan in turn, "piece by piece." Valentine suggested that the revision process has been the reverse of what it should be insofar as the senate seems to be considering specifics before discussing "liberal education" in general. Cooney agreed with Valentine in principle but said that the current discussion grew out of a history, in which the faculty has discussed at length what ways the core might embody a liberal-arts education. He reminded senators that a change in the core curriculum would require a revision of core-guidelines and other curricular documents.

Steiner asked whether the seven-unit maximum for which the faculty had voted was, in fact, a maximum and observed that the Evans proposal (for example) translated into nine or ten units. Haltom allowed as how "seven" meant "seven." He asked Taranovski whether his (T's) plan could be implemented with

existing courses, and Taranovski said yes, that many existing courses would embody the "ways of knowing" and that departments would be chiefly responsible for determining which courses would be in the general-education core; that is, the History Department (for example) would decide which courses it would contribute to the Humanities core and whether (or not) major-courses might also satisfy core requirements.

At which phase of the process, Bristow asked, will we discuss "overlays," such as those concerning international studies and multicultural interests? Haltom: That could occur in phase three and continue into phase four.

Cooney observed that one issue with which all the plans seemed to grapple was whether math should stand alone as a separate category. In his view, it should not stand alone thusly. Bowe observed that, given a seven-unit maximum, math would probably have to be included in a science category and not stand alone. He observed that how or whether to include foreign languages in a core-curriculum seemed to be a difficult question. Hulbert observed that the percentage math represents in the current core-curriculum is significantly smaller than that in the current proposals. He agreed with Taranovski insofar as humanities, social science, and science should be "the heavy hitters" of the core curriculum and said that including fine arts within humanities, not giving it a separate category, seemed appropriate to him. Birnbaum wondered whether students might be allowed to choose between foreign languages and math, and the senators batted that issue around for a good while. Taranovski observed that his plan, despite his personal predilections, included only one required course in humanities but that he assumed humanities would be disproportionately represented in the two freshman seminars. He observed that any core-proposal that did not allow math to stand alone in a category would "fly like a lead duck." Bartanen reminded senators that 14 of Puget Sound's programs/majors have some kind of "numbers" requirement and that 8 have some kind of foreign-language requirement. Hale pointed out that the Evans plan allowed students to choose between math and foreign languages. Birnbaum spoke in favor of the Taranovski plan, and Taranovski reminded senators that a seven-unit core curriculum would translate into more electives for students, who will be likely to take courses in such areas as fine arts--without being forced to do so. Valentine spoke in favor of a relatively more "pure" version of a "distribution core," as exemplified by the Taranovski plan. Bristow observed that the faculty will probably need to debate the merits of "pure distribution" versus those of the current core curriculum.

Cooney indicated that he believes discussions occurring nationally about college curricula are important to consider, as are the recent accreditation report and the university's mission statement. He said the national discussions include concerns about science education, concerns related to science-in-context. He reminded senators that any new core-curricular plan will need to be acceptable to the Board of Trustees.

Taranovski suggested that an alleged choice between a straightforward, relatively conventional distribution scheme and a core-curriculum based on more elaborate guidelines probably represented a false dichotomy because either way students will be asked to take certain courses for the purposes of general education, purposes embodied in both approaches.

Ostrom asked whether Haltom, on behalf of the Senate, might move at the next faculty meeting that we proceed directly to phase three ("distribution"/"general education"). Haltom and Cooney said that doing so would render the process on which the faculty had voted inoperable because Tomlin's "Connections" seminar (for example) would then be discussed out of order. Ostrom said that the intent of his question was to insure that Tomlin's proposal might receive due consideration at a time when the faculty seemed eager to discuss distribution and general education.

At long last, an approach to the next faculty meeting materialized:

1. Tomlin will move adoption of the Connections seminar and describe it briefly, hoping to trigger a discussion.
2. He will then move to postpone its formal consideration.

3. Senate Chair Haltom will remind the faculty of the four general-education proposals currently circulating, hoping to trigger an interest in moving to phase three and to start an informal discussion of such issues as "macro categories" versus "Core Light (or Lite)."
4. Something will happen.

Taranovski wondered whether the senate might suggest to the faculty that defenestration--in the classical sense--ought to be introduced into the core-curriculum-revision process. Haltom liked the idea but noted that some faculty members, including at least two current senators, would not fit through any windows on campus.

The Senate chose to adjourn and exit--through a doorway.

Respectfully submitted,

Hans Ostrom