

## **Faculty Senate Minutes December 7, 1998**

**Senators Present:** Bill Haltom (Chair), Bill Beardsley, Michele Birnbaum, Nancy Bristow, Terry Cooney, Rafael Gomez, Duane Hulbert, Kathie Hummel-Berry, Judith Kay, Hans Ostrom, Bob Steiner, George Tomlin

**Visitors:** Kris Bartanen, John English, John Finney, Christine Kline, Curt Mehlhaff

Meeting called to order at 4:06 p.m. by Chair Haltom.

Minutes of the 11/23/98 Senate meeting were approved.

The Chair's soliloquy was deferred. There were no special orders.

[Note: the order of some conversational exchanges below has been altered to increase the coherence of the discussion.]

First item of business was the Curriculum Committee Assessment Plan for the Core, presented by Curt Mehlhaff, chair of the Curriculum Committee. Mehlhaff reported that the Senate had charged the Curriculum Committee to assess the core curriculum for the university 10-year review for accreditation. Last year under Christine Kline a pilot assessment was conducted of the core categories Fine Arts, Communication I, and Science in Context. Assessment tools were designed and implemented at the end of AY97-98. This year the Curriculum Committee assessed the value and processes of this pilot study. The Fine Arts pilot was a questionnaire with Likert scale items; the Communication I pilot consisted of student interviews over pizza; the Science in Context tool was also a questionnaire, supplemented by collecting abstracts of papers done by students. In response to a question from Steiner, Mehlhaff offered that the pilot tools themselves were not sufficient as final data collection instruments, but were a start. They entailed taking a random sample of students and faculty involved in core category courses, which, it is anticipated, would continue.

Subsequently this fall a Curriculum Committee subcommittee, chaired by Kline, formulated and proposed a Core Assessment Plan, with the Office of the Associate Deans to act as a resource for convening the assessment processes. Kline added that the plan provides for an ongoing system for core assessment, where faculty in each core area have ownership of the process. The plan seeks to balance the responsibility for assessment instruments with the extra work required.

The Chair asked if each core area would assess itself. Mehlhaff replied yes, with the Curriculum Committee providing oversight, just as with regular reviews. Cooney added that Julie Neff and Geoffrey Proehl, as core course instructors, collected compelling evidence for student achievement of core course objectives, as opposed to merely asserting success. Finney noted that the plan will only work if faculty are in charge of it, and that it would not be a faculty evaluation system, but rather an instruction improvement plan.

Beardsley asked how the information from the random samples would be used by course instructors. Mehlhaff replied that the Curriculum Committee would use the fallow year for analyzing data on the core. But prior to that, faculty would be organized into core category groups to communicate and would then be involved in the design of the tools themselves. Maybe sometimes core guidelines would need to be changed. Ostrom questioned how much faculty within a category could communicate about their courses, given, for example, the diversity between Science in Context's "Cosmology" and "Biology at the Bar." Bartanen answered that the delivery of the core curriculum is what would be assessed, which, for Science in Context, has the key elements of increasing curiosity in the sciences, and increasing student ability to use what they learned about decision-making in science as applied to broader contexts. The data reviewed by the Curriculum Committee would be core category aggregate data, to distinguish this process from a faculty evaluative one. Hummel-Berry added that in her department there is already a lot of curriculum evaluation beyond faculty evaluation, and that it inevitably takes time away from teaching.

Ostrom noted that faculty in other core areas are communicating, for example, in freshman writing. Plus there may be other ways of conducting evaluation.

A discussion ensued about how the structures would be created for faculty teaching in core categories to assess the effectiveness of these courses. Several faculty favored faculty volunteers leading the process, with random sampling of students in category core courses. It was recognized that which faculty volunteered in each category and which courses' students were selected would affect the outcome of the process. Since, though, the desired outcome was an overall appraisal of success in category courses, not individual course evaluation, this influence was argued by some not to pose a problem. Disagreements within rubrics would come before the Curriculum Committee in the end, anyway. Haltom expressed concern about conflict of interest, if faculty doing the assessment were parties of interest in the outcome. Ostrom suggested using neutral, outside observers for assessments, to avoid the tension between faculty ownership of the process, esprit, and the assessment of students. Kline questioned whether an outside agency could understand our core goals as well as we do. Cooney stated that the goal of assessment was not publishable research, but serving the needs of faculty teaching the courses: if there's a disjunction between goals and outcomes, then either change the courses or change the goals. Finney added that conclusions from an outside agency would be worthless in his opinion, and would not qualify for what the accreditation process requires. Cooney offered to fund faculty in a core category who decided to employ outside sources, but did not see that as a necessary step. Hummel-Berry supported the skeptical view of outside review, but reiterated the need for competent design of data collection (for both quantitative or qualitative data), to address the appeal of Birnbaum for faculty training lest the volunteer evaluators become imprisoned in trial and error. Kline wished to emphasize that assessment was more than a summative stance, but a continual appraisal of the correspondence between student experience and the stated goals of core courses.

Kay began a new topic by posing the question, what would we conclude if our assessment showed that 75% of students were not achieving the core goals? Is it a core problem? a faculty problem? or would we look at everything: goals, teaching, syllabi? Mehlhaff replied that such evidence would come first to faculty teaching in that core category, and only to the Curriculum Committee in the fallow (every fifth) year. Bartanen pointed to possible sources of deficiency as syllabi not designed in line with the core rubric, assignments and exams not focused on a core goal, or the student not experiencing the core course as faculty had intended. In any case, the Curriculum Committee would ask faculty what they thought should be done about it.

Finally, since the accreditation document had already been sent to the printer with the core assessment plan in it, the Senate

M/S/P to receive the Core Assessment Plan of the Curriculum Committee.

Bristow asked if approval of the plan is the Senate's responsibility or the full faculty's. Cooney informed those present that if the Senate does not act on the Curriculum Committee plan within 30 days, it goes into effect. Hummel-Berry suggested that the plan have a provision for review. Mehlhaff answered that the Curriculum Committee has its fallow year AY99-00 and could report back to the Senate in April, 2000. Cooney brought the discussion to a close by expressing that the assessment process, though already yielding some enthusiasm, is still murky, and its final form is not carved in stone.

Next item of business was a presentation from John English, Chair, Academic Standards Committee, on the opportunities for a common hour, a time when no courses would meet and governance and co-curricular activities could take place. English noted that every proposal would intrude on a fragile university schedule. A memo of the committee, written by Peter Greenfield, identified two possible times as Tues./Thurs. 4-5 p.m., and Wed. 8-9 a.m. Advantages of the first option are that it provides two hours per week for meetings and would be a useful time for co-curricular activities. The disadvantages are that it would interrupt labs that run 1-5 p.m., interfere with education courses that begin at 4 p.m., and disrupt OT/PT classes which are very tightly scheduled throughout the day. The advantage of the Wed. 8-9 am option is that it affects the smallest number of courses, but the disadvantages are that it is only one hour a week, it is a difficult time for faculty whose children begin school at 8 or 8:30 (or later), and that it would

not be a useful time for co-curricular activities. In either case, moving courses out of the common hour would increase the "room crunch" at other hours. Finney noted that room demand is somewhat exacerbated by MTTF classes that leave rooms empty on Wednesdays. The new academic building and Collins renovation may only bring a net gain of two classrooms. But the problem, Cooney declared, was matching the classroom to the needs of the course. We have a set of schedules with geological accretions, he noted, and one and one half years before the new building opens. Maybe this is the time to consider broader issues of the schedule, he felt. English replied that the Academic Standards Committee did consider broader issues of the schedule, but that every change brought increased concern. The current schedule has "microscopic tampering tolerance," but there is also great inertia against an entirely different schedule. He re-iterated that the common hour proposal and a schedule overhaul are separate options, and that the committee's enthusiasm for either one was "not great."

The Senate then adjourned at 5:35 p.m.

Enthusiastically submitted,

George Tomlin Minute Maker of the Day