

Curriculum Committee Minutes
Tuesday, March 25, 1997

Present: Ron Fields, Tom Fikes, Kent Hooper, Chris Kline, David Luper, Steve Neshyba, Curt Mehlhaff, Mary Morgan, George Tomlin (chair), Mike Valentine, Carrie Washburn,

Visitors: Barry Anton, David Droge, Jim Evans, Leon Grunberg, Cathy Hale, Kathy Ann Miller, Carolyn Weisz

The meeting was called to order by George Tomlin at 12 noon. Minutes were accepted.

The report on the Physics Curriculum Dept. Review was postponed pending an opportunity for the sub-committee to meet.

The primary business of the meeting was a discussion of the Science in Context Guidelines. The Science in Context Sub-Committee, chaired by Mehlhaff, requested clarification from the Science in Context Advisory Board and the Curriculum Committee on two points: 1. Does one of the teachers need to be a natural scientist? (See part II. of the Guidelines), 2. Should 1/3 of the class content be "natural science" or science in a more general sense of the word?

These questions were raised, in part, by a Science in Context course proposal from Carolyn Weisz and David Droge for a class entitled "Science and Social Stereotypes." Did Weisz, a psychologist, need to be natural scientist for the class to qualify? Did 1/3 of the course content need to be in the "natural sciences"?

Weisz offered to answer questions about the course. She noted that psychology has been a component of the SCXT program from its inception and that for her the guidelines were not ambiguous, that they did make a place for her and the kind of science she practiced.

Evans, chair of the Science in Context Advisory Board confirmed that psychology has historically played a role in the SCXT offerings as the science component. He felt that the course proposed by Weisz and Droge did meet the spirit of the guidelines, that it would bring students into dialogue about race from a scientific perspective. He acknowledged that the natural/social science divide is somewhat problematic and that the guidelines may be ambiguous, but did not feel that the committee should worry too much about whether psychology is a natural science.

Hale, SCXT Advisory Board, noted that it was clear from the inception of the program that psychology was an important scientific component. She said she was puzzled at the feedback around the "natural science" issue. Her understanding of the guidelines was that science is not meant to be exclusively "natural science." She voiced the concern that limiting courses to natural sciences would eliminate important science questions and issues from the program. She spoke for the adoption of the course as meeting the spirit of the guidelines.

Kathy Ann Miller, SCXT Advisory Board, noted that as a "natural scientist" she was not threatened by bringing in a social scientist. She noted that the "natural science" language was in essence an invitation for "natural scientists" to participate in the SCXT classes. She underscored a notion of science, not so much as a field or topic of study as a way of knowing. She argued that the need to study humans scientifically need neither put them at the center of the natural world nor should it exclude them from consideration as part of it. She also voiced her support for the course.

Hooper noted that with this clarification, the course seemed fine.

Tom Fikes said that he understood the potential for confusion in that "natural sciences" appears in part II. of the guideline and it is potentially unclear whether or not subsequent references to science are meant as "natural science" or other sciences.

Mehlhoff noted that the pre-req. for SCXT classes was natural world classes and argued that science in context implied putting science or non-human issues in a human frame (the context) as opposed to humans in a human frame. He does not see psychology as a science.

Weisz said she perceived the natural world pre-requisites as important to developing a scientific methodology and saw them as important pre-req. for the course.

Tomlin noted that the natural world core must be done before SCXT.

Fikes took issue with the presumption that because it deals with humans psychology would be excluded from the natural sciences. He argued for psychology as science and against labeling it only as a social science. He noted the funding implications inherent in such presuppositions that currently make psychology students ineligible for certain science research grants. More importantly, he argued for the need to train students to see psychology as a science and voiced concern for that mission if the university is unable to resolve this issue.

Kline argued for an inclusion of human subjects within the field of natural science.

Mehlhoff suggested that the guidelines were still unclear and that they needed to be broadened, if that was the intent of the committee, to include all areas of science.

Anton suggested that the university had dissolved the division between the sciences in the 70s and that indeed a psychologically-based class in sensation and perception had been part of the natural world core. He spoke for psychology as science and does not see a broadening process going on here.

Bartanen noted that this was the first course to come to the sub-committee that was not created as part of the original batch of SCXT courses and that they were in a case building process that would help them make future decisions. She also spoke for the course as fitting alongside courses in SCXT that deal with cognitive science. She supported the course proposal.

Valentine spoke for accepting the course as within the guidelines.

After some further discussion, the following question, framed by Bartanen and Tomlin was put to a vote of the Curriculum Committee: "Does the full committee find that 'scientific aspects of psychology' fall within the rubric of part III. of the SCXT Guidelines?" The committee responded "yes" in the majority by a voice vote.

Meeting adjourned at 1 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Geoffrey Proehl