

**University of Puget Sound  
Faculty Meeting Minutes  
December 3, 1996**

In President Pierce's absence due to illness, Dean Potts called the meeting to order at 4:07 p.m. in room 103 of McIntyre Hall. Fifty-six voting members of the faculty were present by 4:34 p.m.

Minutes of the October 31, 1996 faculty meeting were approved as distributed.

**Kris Bartanen M/S/P "to amend the Faculty Code to change the name of the 'Instruction Committee' to the 'Academic and Student Affairs Committee' wherever it appears."** This proposal, forwarded to us by the Board of Trustees, had its first reading at the October 31, 1996 faculty meeting. The motion passed on a voice vote.

We then moved to a committee of the whole to continue discussion of the core. Discussion focused primarily on the freshman year experience. The attached document contains informal notes on the discussion, and are provided for our temporary use during deliberations. They are not part of the official record of faculty business.

We adjourned at 5:22 p.m. with no report from the committee of the whole.

Respectfully submitted,

John M. Finney  
Secretary of the Faculty

**University of Puget Sound**  
**Informal Notes of Faculty Discussion in a Committee of the Whole**  
**December 3, 1996**

After Dean Potts reminded us how a document can be crafted in a committee of the whole, with unofficial straw votes guiding our work, Kris Bartanen suggested that we articulate our educational goals as a starting point for a discussion of the freshman year experience. She suggested four such goals: (1) challenging and exciting first year students about learning, (2) developing freshman students' abilities to read challenging texts carefully, critically and repeatedly, (3) developing freshman students' abilities to understand and articulate clear arguments both orally and in writing, and (4) connecting new students with faculty, other students, and this liberal arts university as a community of life-long learners.

Four members of the Communication and Theatre Arts department then addressed various aspects of the oral communication core requirement. Susan Owen spoke of the continuing need among students for help in learning to speak well. Ray Preiss talked about the one-fifth of entering students with "oral communication apprehension," and their need for help in overcoming anxiety and timidity in putting forth their ideas. David Droge spoke about verbally aggressive students and the degree to which oral training increases their confidence and helps to reduce undesirable behavior. Gary Peterson argued that, while one class cannot by itself guarantee skillful communication, it does make a difference. He ended by saying that intellectual abilities of students should drive our thinking about the core.

Jim Evans argued that skills and content exist in varying degrees along a continuum in all courses. He suggested that perhaps allowing students "to choose the right mix" might be one solution to the dilemma of knowing where to come down on the continuum in the core. Jackie Warwick responded that advisors may not be able always to motivate needy students to develop a particular skill if the choice is up to them.

Ted Taranovski suggested that we take a straw vote on whether the freshman experience should include freshman seminars. Gabrielle King responded by asking "what is a seminar?" Taranovski said that, for him, a seminar has three characteristics: (1) it is small, (unlike a survey course); (2) it is focused; and (3) it is oriented toward developing a combination of oral and written communication skills. King responded yes, but (1) we can always limit enrollment to get a small class; (2) survey courses are in fact focused to one degree or another; and (3) seminars aren't necessarily successful just because skills are introduced.

Bartanen said that, for her, a freshman seminar addresses: the kinds of questions it is important to ask, how to find the answers, how to read key texts, and how to read and write about these things. Matt Pickard wondered if a freshman is prepared to address a focused topic without a prior context. Terry Cooney responded that the purpose of a freshman seminar is precisely to teach students how to address a specific topic without a great background in that area, something that cannot be done in a survey course. He suggested as an example his History 100A freshman seminar course, in which freshmen learn to come to grips with *Walden*, a difficult text. Cooney said that students need to learn how to handle difficult reading in order to produce good writing about what they have read. He said this is important and difficult to do.

Curt Mehlhaff asked what is wrong with what we are already doing in the freshman year. Bartanen responded that we may be doing nothing wrong, but there may be comparative advantages in some of the proposals that have been made, and that we may be able to do some things better than we are now. She cited instilling an "excitement for learning" as an example of something we might be able to do better with freshmen.

John Dickson and Jackie Warwick asked the students in attendance what they thought of their freshman year experience. Student #1 said he thought his English 101 course was too much like

high school, and did not provide a broad enough range of writing, reading, and analyzing. Student #2 agreed, saying students with different abilities have different needs, and aren't always challenged in a common course.

Taranovski returned to his suggestion that we take a straw poll on the question: "should we introduce required freshman seminars in the first year as a rethinking of the oral and written core areas?" Preiss suggested that we need to be careful in weighing the probable comparative advantages of a move to something new before we risk a change from something that appears already to be working. Carolyn Weisz suggested adding a freshman seminar as an addition to existing oral and written core courses. Dickson said that faculty have varying talents and strengths, and that some would be very good in freshman seminars, and others may not be. He said that some diversity in teaching options is needed to permit students to access the best that faculty can offer.

David Tinsley said that the issue seems to be skills vs. experience. He suggested that we move the skills debate out of the core debate entirely and deal with them (oral, written, math) on an individual basis later. He suggested that tests could identify needs students have for work in these areas, and that courses could be designed specifically to meet the real need. He said we need to discuss the freshman experience idea in a more focused way.

Droge said that we should vote on Taranovski's straw vote idea to see what level of support there is for freshman seminars. Bill Haltom said that before we vote we should separate the oral/written core "problem" from the freshman seminar vote. Taranovski responded that the only reason freshman seminars make sense is to use them to address some of the problems in the written and oral core areas.

Dean Potts suggested that it was perhaps not wise to take a straw vote at the end of a meeting, and that it might be better done at next week's meeting on December 9. The faculty agreed, and we promptly adjourned, at 5:22 p.m.

(Notes by John Finney, Faculty Secretary)