

Academic Affairs Committee, 19 November 2007

In attendance: Karen Camarda, Dave Pownell, Frank Chorba, Jorge Nobo, Pat Munzer, Caren Dick, and Patricia Renn-Scanlan; guests Robin Bowen, Jennifer Ball, and Nancy Tate.

Minutes of October 29 were approved.

Jorge Nobo noted that the committee's approval of program changes in Music had come out of the proper sequence, and would come back to the committee again.

Nobo drew the committee's attention to the correspondence he had forwarded to members with the School of Business concerning irregularities in course numbering, and noted that the committee would take that matter up at the next meeting.

The remainder of the meeting was devoted to the presentation by faculty who had attended the Integrating General Education conference in Portland, Maine, and to discussion that presentation fostered.

In the presentation, after an introduction by Tate, Prasch outlined the five key lessons he'd taken away from the conference (that the basic problems of general education—defining skills, assessing outcomes, and connecting to capstones—were broadly shared; that trends toward accountability and oversight in higher education, as well as the demands of our own faculty, demanded reform of general education; that, against the long-given advice of assessment figures, grades did indeed count as a form of assessment; that general education took three forms, smorgasbord approaches, developmental models worked throughout the curriculum, and core curricular models; and that the broad national trend was toward developmental or core curricular models where general education was integrated throughout the undergraduate curriculum, instead of being focused on the first years of college). Pownell followed with a more detailed discussion of multidisciplinary, thematic, and core models, employing examples from a range of schools who had participated in the conference, and concluding that there was no “one size fits all” format. Ball concluded the presentation by focusing on process, underlining especially the need for transparency and full consultation with constituent groups through roundtables and other discussion formats, and for revision to be a relatively quick process with a clearly articulated timeline. She concluded by noting difficulties for any reform process, including the problem of transfer students, the lack of flexibility in some professional programs, the need to connect to the Washburn Transformational Experience, and the issue of assessment.

In the wide-ranging discussion that followed, a number of salient points were made. Chorba raised the issue of how to establish a timeline, and Tate expressed the opinion that the faculty should define that, but that she expected a two-year process. Munzer emphasized the need for input and endorsed Ball's suggested roundtables. Nobo reminded committee members that the expert brought in last year had suggested piecemeal change as the most viable approach, which prompted some discussion of

methods. Prasch noted that redefining skills as a first step seemed unproblematic, since skills would be central to any general education program. Bowen made clear that the Vice President's office was willing to commit money for further exploration (more conferences, etc.), and also distributed copies of Loren Pope's *Colleges That Change Lives* to committee members, saying she had found it useful for framing ideas. Nobo underlined that general-education reform was a two-way street, and suggested a three-step process: first, skills; then addressing breadth and any core courses that might be developed; then working out integration of the curriculum with the WTEs. Chorba expressed concern that general education be tailored to fit the students who actually came to Washburn University, and needed to address their skill levels and needs. Munzer reiterated the need to maintain flexibility and to be aware of the effects of any change on transfer students and professional programs. Bowen in response noted one program that had interdisciplinary core courses, but made allowances for transfer students; Tate suggested a hybrid model, using the analogy of a wheel to talk about relation of core courses with "spokes" outside the core, into which flexibility could be designed. Munzer noted that any change should not work against the university's commitment to the 2 + 2 program, and Chorba expressed concern that small class sizes not be undermined in any reform process (Nobo, Prasch, Bowen, and Munzer emphasized that they were not inclined to do such undermining). Nobo reintroduced his ideas on a set of core courses, suggesting nine hours of core courses connected with a capstone project. Munzer noted that new faculty might not be aware of the issues raised at past roundtables, and that more were needed, as well as more presentations about general education at division levels. Bowen raised the issue of core-imbedded assessment, which led to discussion about assessment tactics and success among Tate, Nobo, Prasch, and Ball, and to Tate's stated goals of building assessment into both the WTE and general education.

At the end of the discussion, the meeting was adjourned.