

Academic Affairs, 3 March 2008

In attendance: Bill Roach, Frank Chorba, Karen Camarda, Patricia Renn-Scanlan, Jorge Nobo, Pat Munzer, Tom Prasch, Robin Bowen. Guest: Nancy Tate

Minutes of the 4 February meeting were approved.

The first order of business was the discussion of the process for catalog changes. Discussion began with a recap by Tom Prasch of the reason the issue arose, in the migration within the catalog from CAS material to university requirement of current catalog language about course numbering. Nancy Tate explained the shift in terms of university history: that the university had once only had a College of Arts and Sciences, and other units had been added later; course numbering rules had always been university-wide, just not in the catalog, and that had changed with the reorganization of the catalog supervised by Tate.

Jorge Nobo noted that the assignment of course numbering to the section on university requirements occurred by default, without any vote by the faculty. Bill Roach pointed out that 900 numbers had been put in place by John Green during his tenure as University President, and that the MBA program had been in place for some 25 years without anyone raising an objection to the system of numbering there. Nobo pointed out that the problem only came to light with the CAS proposal on course numbering in 2006. Tate suggested that the problem was, at root, that no one read the catalog. She insisted that no substantive changes occurred without approval, only cosmetic changes, and that she had gotten then-VPAA Ron Wasserstein's approval for the reorganization and clarification of content when the catalog was revised.

After some further discussion, Tate distributed a flow chart (appendix 1) outlining the process for administrative policy changes and university catalog updates. She noted that the secondary issue was keeping Banner updates in synch, but that that was handled by maintaining a spreadsheet of changes. She noted that the processes were clearer for curricular changes than for administrative changes. Nobo noted that the flow chart for academic policy changes should include faculty approval; Tate agreed, and said that had just been omitted in preparing the current document.

After some further discussion of copyediting and the possibility that editing changes could affect meaning, Nobo suggested that all schools be advised about the flowchart and the rationale for the migration of course numbering language to university requirements. Prasch suggested that distribution of committee minutes would accomplish that end.

The committee then returned to General Education, and to the proposals drafted by Prasch for changes in the system of general education (appendix 2). After some discussion of the mechanics of implementing proposals, the logic of piecemeal change, and the approval sequence that would be required for any changes, focused on opportunities to engage the broader faculty and get feedback at each stage, Prasch reiterated the logic behind the three proposals before the committee: first, in terms of a

revised skill set, that skills would most likely be an aspect of any general education program, whatever final shape it took, but that to be properly assessable they needed to be defined, and that faculty opinion suggested they needed to be simplified as well; second, that given a range of pressures for more upper-level general education, as against the broadly established norm that only introductory courses be designated as general education, it was imperative to establish definitions for what might constitute upper-level general education; third, that thematically organized general-education courses might present an alternative to an undifferentiated smorgasbord approach on the one hand and more difficult-to-implement core courses on the other.

Discussion then turned to mechanics for implementing general-education changes. Bowen asked if there was a need for a new committee, and whether it should be a subcommittee or an autonomous ad-hoc committee. Munzer reiterated the need for a wide range of distribution of ideas for feedback, and insisted that three dimensions must be considered: representation of programs with associate degrees, involvement of those involved in distance education, and consideration for transfer students. Nobo suggested that open meetings and solid two-way communication between the committee and the broader faculty would ensure good feedback. Munzer suggested calling for a committee with three members from Arts and Sciences, and three from the schools. The question was raised whether the committee could establish a committee, or whether it would have to go through Faculty Senate; Munzer suggested that it needed to go to Faculty Senate, and Nobo suggested that she draw up a proposal.

Discussion then returned to revision of the skill sets. Chorba pointed out the difficulties of meddling with the present system, given that the present system was politically acceptable and changes would open the door to departmental politics. Prasch noted faculty discontent with the existing system, nationwide trends favoring developmental approaches to general education, and the need to address upper-level general education because of the needs of transfer students. Nobo proposed a variant version of skill 4, “interpretive and analytic skills,” which, after some discussion and a bit of tweaking of language, read:

“4) Critical, analytic, normative, and interpretive reasoning.

“Students must demonstrate a variety of interconnected reasoning skills in the construction and critique of both factual and value judgments. They must know how to establish or corroborate factual claims and to analyze and assess the soundness of deductive arguments and the strength of inductive arguments built on those claims. They must know how to analyze and assess arguments establishing or using normative principles in ethics, aesthetics, jurisprudence, statesmanship, and other normative or value-laden human concerns. They must know how to assess the form, and interpret the content, of the creative expression of ideas in art, architecture, literature, music, and performing arts.

“Reasoning in these terms can be assessed by evaluating how well students, in their written or oral presentations, assess the information presented to them or construct their own arguments, positions, or theses.

“All general education courses in the humanities and social sciences should include this aim.”

Camarda noted that the definition of “mathematical and scientific reasoning” might need similar revision; Prasch acknowledged that he had anticipated as much. Camarda volunteered to work on an alternate version of that skill.

Chorba raised the issue that the proposed set of skills eliminated “listening sensitively,” but that listening was fundamental to his field of media studies. Prasch pointed out that “processing information” necessarily entailed listening.

Nobo proposed that anyone with further suggestions for changes in the phrasing of the skill sets bring such proposed changes to the next meeting, scheduled on 31 March. Munzer volunteered to write up a proposal to develop a new subcommittee. The meeting was adjourned.

Appendix 1:

Procedures for Implementing Curriculum, Academic, and Administrative Changes

Curriculum Changes

Department Approval (If applicable)

Division Approval (If applicable)

Unit-Level Curriculum Committee Approval

Unit-Level General Faculty Approval

Approval Notification to AVPAA by Unit via Curriculum Change spreadsheet (Course and Program Changes/Additions/Deletions). AVPAA makes course changes to Banner Catalog and files spreadsheet of changes for printed catalog updates.

For Program Changes/Deletions/Additions – Additional Steps

Faculty Senate Curriculum Committee Approval

Faculty Senate Approval

General Faculty Approval

Board of Regents Approval

(AVPAA reviews BOR minutes to determine approval of program changes/deletions/additions)

Academic Policy Changes

Can be submitted through curricular channels or by individuals directly to Faculty Senate

Faculty Senate Approval

General Faculty Approval

Board of Regents Approval

(AVPAA reviews BOR minutes to determine approval of academic policy)

Administrative Policy Changes

Generally submitted by individuals to VPAT, VPAA, VPSL, or Dean of Enrollment Management

Policy Developed

Policy Discussed by Executive Staff

Policies Affecting Faculty Shared Through VPAA with Faculty Senate for Review and Comments

Comments Shared with Executive Staff

Final Policy Drafted

Submitted to BOR for Approval

(AVPAA reviews BOR minutes to determine approval of administrative policy)

University Catalog Updates

Organization and accuracy of University Catalog is the responsibility of the AVPAA

Sections of University Catalog are sent electronically to the unit responsible for it (e.g., Student Life sections to Student Life, Student Records sections to University Registrar, Academic sections to Academic Units, etc.)

Units make changes (turning on track changes feature) and return sections electronically

AVPAA checks proposed changes to ensure unit-level changes have been approved at appropriate level

AVPAA adds/changes/deletes approved academic/administrative policies.

Curricular/academic/administrative changes which have been approved at all levels except the BOR by the time of catalog printing are included in the University Catalog (with those items still requiring BOR approval including notation "Pending Board of Regents Approval"). Any changes approved after the printing of the catalog but before the end of the fiscal year (June 30) can still be effective the upcoming fiscal year and are noted in an online section of the University Catalog entitled "Addendums to XX Catalog."

Appendix 2:

Three suggestions on general education

[ok, I'm technically only supposed to be doing something about skills, but just back from this gened conference, I wanted to throw out some other ideas as well. We don't, of course, need to take all of them on at once—or any of them on, I guess. tp]

I. Revised skill sets

Background: Faculty surveys suggest significant dissatisfaction with the existing nine designated general-education skills, with particular discontent about the “listen sensitively” and “interpret and assess human values” skills. In addition, it has been suggested (but not empirically demonstrated) that students can complete general-education requirements without fulfilling all nine skills. And in addition, as the university moves toward more rigorous standards of assessment, that the existing nine skills lack any clear definitions has become problematic.

Proposal: In revising skills, the aim is to provide a simplified and clear system with measurable student-learning outcomes to facilitate assessment. The proposed alternative consists of five groups of skills; any general-education course should fulfill the requirements of at least two (although many will cover more); courses within selected divisions or departments, as noted below, necessarily must fulfill at least one of the listed skills to ensure comprehensive coverage of all for any student completing general-education requirements.

1) Processing information

Processing information entails understanding and demonstrating comprehension of written texts, oral communications, visual information, and/or mediated presentations (film, websites, etc.) that combine several of the above. When presented with such materials, the student must be able to demonstrate an understanding of the basic argument of the materials, their core content, their intended audience, and their

evident biases or subjective perspectives (or, to put it more neutrally perhaps, students must be able to identify the point of view of the material).

It can, I presume, safely be assumed that all general-education courses will fulfill this goal.

2) Communicative skills

Communicative skills involve the ability of the student to communicate clearly his or her ideas in written and/or oral form, and embrace as well the expression of creativity by students in the visual, written, or performing arts. In written and/or oral communication, students must demonstrate the ability to shape a central thesis, to organize an argument, to cite references properly, and to follow the rules of basic grammar and usage. In creative projects, students must be able to demonstrate the ways in which their creative work expresses ideas, an understanding of the form(s) employed, and an ability to employ the basic rules of their chosen expressive form(s).

Again, most or all general-education courses will likely fulfill this goal. It could be made a required element in any course approved for general education in the humanities and social sciences.

3) Mathematical and scientific reasoning

Students must be able to reason mathematically and understand numerical data, to understand scientific method, and to devise and interpret experiments that follow the rules and procedures of the science being studied. Standardized testing can provide an assessment measure for mathematical reasoning; performance in courses with laboratory components provide a mechanism for assessing a student's understanding of scientific method and experimental procedures.

All general-education courses in the natural sciences and mathematics must fulfill the appropriate portion of this goal; that students must take courses in both mathematics and natural science to fulfill degree requirements ensures that the entirety of this goal will be comprehended in any student's progress toward a degree.

4) Interpretive and analytic skills (aka normative reasoning, or critical thinking)

Students must be able to demonstrate their interpretive and analytic skills by evaluating arguments in terms of their clarity, coherence, and content, by developing counter-arguments and marshalling evidence for the positions they take, by assessing the values that underpin arguments they are presented with or which they develop, and by synthesizing information from a range of primary and secondary sources. Critical thinking in these terms can be assessed in written or oral presentations by students, evaluating the extent to which they can critically assess information presented to them, shape their own arguments, and provide suitable evidence for multiple positions.

All general-education courses in the humanities and social sciences should include this aim.

5) Global citizenship

Students should understand, in political, historical, economic, and cultural terms, the nature and structure of the United States; its place both within a global community of nations and in the context of a globalized economic, political, and cultural sphere; and their own role as citizens within this national and international framework.

Establishing global citizenship as a general-education skill recognizes the growing importance of both a citizenship component in general education and a sense of the need to train students to perform in a world increasingly shaped by processes of globalization. Courses in United States and world history, anthropology and sociology, political science, geography, and economics contribute components to this understanding of global citizenship, and can be required to address such components to be counted toward general education. Requiring students, either in general-education courses or in courses in their chosen major, to have courses in at least three of these fields should ensure relatively comprehensive understanding of this aim (and is not unlike the present requirement in the natural sciences that general education requires coursework in at least two disciplines).

II. Criteria for upper-level general education

Background: There is increasing pressure for upper-level general education for at least two reasons: first, in the realm of ideas about how best to pursue general education, that pressure comes from the notion that general education ought to be pursued throughout an undergraduate career, often culminating in some sort of capstone, rather than be concentrated in out-of-major coursework in the first years (and this idea is consistent, clearly, with the direction of the WTE here at Washburn); second, and more narrowly, at least according to Nancy Tate, the new requirement for upper-level credit (45 hours) has increased pressure for general-education upper-level credits, and, as presently constituted, the General Education Committee is looking with more favor on such proposals (of course, this is just what Nancy Tate said, and perhaps it needs verification). At present, general-education options at the 300 or 400 level are very limited: one English course, one Philosophy course, half a dozen Art courses (all art history), a couple Modern Languages, one theatre, and none in the natural or social sciences. The problem is how to designate upper-level general-education courses, without just saying that any course counts (which seems to me to abandon the idea of general education, as opposed to specific disciplinary education, entirely).

Proposal: To be accepted as a general-education course, an upper-level course must, in the view of the General Education Committee, fulfill one of the following requirements:

1. It must have a strong interdisciplinary component, bridging the methods and approaches of multiple disciplines.

2. It must have a broadly foundational content, covering material of wide interest in the liberal arts.

No more than 50% of the courses listed in the catalog for any one discipline may be considered as fulfilling general-education requirements.

III. Thematic clustering for general education

Background: In discussions of alternatives to our present, semi-smorgasboard approach to general education, the usual suggestion has been core courses taken by all students. But core courses present difficulties of their own, in terms of delivery, staffing, disciplinary orientation, and possible turf battles. Thematic clusters suggest to me a less problematic alternative to the present approach, and one that can function alongside instead of entirely supplanting existing general-education courses.

Proposal: In addition to (and building upon) existing general-education offerings, students can be encouraged to take thematically linked groups of general-education courses, coordinating with their chosen Transformation Experience (and possibly recognized with some certificate upon completion). These can either be permanent clusters of courses for themes that have significant staying power, or more limited-term offerings with immediate resonance.

Examples of possible permanent clusters: Contemporary World (could include courses in geography, history, anthropology/sociology, political science, English, art history, among possible others, with scholarly or international travel WTEs); Our Environment (geography, biology, chemistry, history, sociology, etc.).

Examples of possible shorter term clusters: Electoral Politics in '08 (too soon, I know, it's just an example; courses in poli sci, history, communications, mass media, WTEs in scholarship or leadership); Understanding Evolution in '09 (*Origin's* 150th anniversary; biology, history, philosophy, etc.; scholarly WTE)