

Minutes for the January 31, 2005 meeting of the Curriculum Committee Meeting

Members present: Ken Rousslang, Christine Smith, Joyce Tamashiro, Lori Ricigliano, Jim Jansinski, Suzanne Barnett, Michael Nanfit, Bill Barry, Lisa Wood, Brad Tomhave, Carrie Washburn, Rich Anderson-Connolly (Chair), Carlo Bonura (Secretary)

Minutes were approved for the January 24, 2005 meeting of the Committee.

Connections sub-Committee report:

The Connections sub-Committee moved approval by the Curriculum Committee of the following two courses for the Connections core rubric:

1. Science, Technology, and Society (STS) 314 - Cosmological Thought, proposed by Jim Evans (Physics)
2. Environmental Studies (ENVR) 322 - Water Policy, proposed by Daniel Sherman (Environmental Studies) and Barry Goldstein (Geology)

Both of these courses have the advantage of being Science in Context courses in the old core curriculum, which assures multidisciplinary origins and delivery. STS 314 was team taught previously and benefits from that experience in meeting the Connections expectations of multidisciplinary perspectives and engagement of the interdisciplinary process. ENVR 322 also meets these expectations, and it will be team taught, accentuating the disciplinary mix inherent in the course.

The motion passed unanimously.

Barry began the discussion of the Committee's role in the assessment review of the two kinds of first-year seminars. One element in this review process is to discuss the evaluation process used by faculty teaching seminars. Barry said that he would draft notes from the two dinner meetings of seminar faculty and forward them to the two sub-committees (not only on the dinner meeting but also responses to survey questions handed out at the meeting).

Jasinski asked how many surveys have been returned? Barry responded that about a quarter had been returned. The task of the Committee was not only to interpret the material but to decide how to use it. Best thing about the assessment process is to force faculty to think about assessment.

Wood commented that the experience of a transfer course is very different from that of a first year class. Barry said that the experiences of those faculty who have taught transfer courses is in fact of special interest from the point of view of evaluation. Are there special challenges for this special category of seminar?

Anderson-Connolly summarized the Committee's discussion from the prior meeting regarding the regulation of freshman seminars.

Primary questions related to:

- 1) freshmen registering for transfer courses
- 2) postponement of the "first-year experience"
- 3) cap on enrollment for first-year seminars

Focusing on the issue of an enrollment cap, Wood argued for an upper limit stating that it is unfair to students to be shut out of classes. She suggested that the cap be between 17 and 20 students.

Barnett responded that the Committee should have the opportunity to raise limits if there were a particularly large class, but that setting a cap at 20 students would not allow for a balance of class sizes across seminars.

Barry reminded the Committee as it revisits these issues that there is a question of whether the Committee will open up these entire questions for review or merely look to faculty will. Enrollment limits were originally mandated by faculty and the Committee may not have the power to change them.

Tamashiro suggested that for a student who really wants to be part of a class who is number 18 and is not allowed to take a class may enter a different class and influence the balance of a class that they have not chosen.

Washburn noted that it was interesting that this problem only occurs in the spring not the fall

Barry stated that class size is most important to SCIS seminars and that the importance of class sizes was threaded through all the faculty discussions of the nature of this seminar. This is a problem (of limited enrollment) that students face all throughout their career. The Committee has to draw a line to preserve class size. He argued that it would be a mistake for the Committee to set cap at 20.

Barnett asked how many seminars are over 17 students. Barry responded 11 seminars are currently over enrolled (with 21 students being highest) and two seminars have under ten students.

Wood said that some faculty may not be able to say no to students requesting an add code and that setting a cap would be beneficial to take the pressure off faculty.

Rousslang other classes (aside from these seminars) also feel the pressure of students requesting add codes and that first-year seminars are not unique in this regard.

At this point Barnett moved for the Committee to adopt a “hard cap of 17 for freshmen seminars.”

Anderson-Connolly restated the motion saying that faculty would not be able to add students at their own discretion, although the university may need shift the enrollment cap in the case of larger than expected entering first-year classes.

The motion was restated:

A hard cap of 17 students per class for first-year seminars, prohibiting faculty members from adding students at their own discretion while allowing the administration to add in the case of larger than expected entering first-year classes

Tomhave advocated an enrollment limit instead of hard cap.

Barnett reminded the Committee that faculty signed on to cap seminars at 17 rather than having administrators determine what class sizes would be (*contra* the notion of a “limit”). Barry also suggested sticking to a hard cap.

Barnett then suggested the wording “as a matter of policy,” reasoning that if “policy” is not in play then the Committee would have room to change the maximum number of students per class.

Rousslang worried that such wording would be painting a picture of faculty not being able to exercise control over enrollments. Barry responded that the faculty had already determined this cap in the Faculty Senate meeting.

Barnett's motion passed (one abstention, one opposed, nine in favor).

The conversation then shifted to whether freshmen could petition into seminars designed for transfer students.

Barry said that it may be more important to keep students in the same groups in fall semester than in spring semester.

Barnett argued that there is a great awkwardness in mixing groups that essentially have different experiences. Specific seminars (freshman and transfer) are intended for specific groups.

Wood stated that she is a proponent of mixed aged courses. Seminars are different when they are mixed. Seniors mentor younger students and interaction helps new students bringing different kinds of college experiences into conversation allowing students to share different perspectives. Barnett responded that (student class) diversity is important in all classes except seminars.

Anderson-Connolly stated that the question of a wavier is really the issue. Will the Committee allow students to petition? Is preventing freshmen to enroll into sophomore classes a violation of a sacred rule (established by the faculty) or if a student has a good reason to petition should it be allowed?

Barnett asked whether the issue of petitions at this moment was an issue for the registrar. Tomhave responded that the number was very low.

Barnett reminded the Committee that there is no need for a motion if there is no desire to change this rule.

Anderson-Connolly reaffirmed that the question is related just to freshman entering sophomore classes and that there is no issue of sophomores entering freshman seminars.

Barry reminded the Committee that the faculty voted on the enrollment cap at 17 students, but never on this issue.

A question from Wood clarified that it is the Academic Standards Committee that is petitioned.

Anderson-Connolly asked if space in a seminar is full there would be no basis for a petition at all.

Tamashiro also asked whether there would be time to file a petition. Anderson-Connolly answered that for spring semester there would still be enough time.

Barnett argued that classes should remain divided. The integrity of the program as the faculty intended is most important; therefore, if the Committee would allow spring semester petitions then it should also be allowed in the fall semester. Although, as Anderson-Connolly pointed out "as a matter of course it would never happen."

Barry suggested that a reaffirmation was needed from the Committee. A motion would clarify the administration's interpretation.

Rousslang suggested that it may work just to let faculty decide on a case by case basis. Those faculty who believe that mixing is acceptable then would be allowed to accept different students.

Barry stated that the consideration is the students not the faculty. In the faculty meeting determining this issue previously there was a general consensus to keep sections pure.

Wood offered the motion: “freshman students would be able to transfer into transfer sections on an ‘as-space available’ basis only with the permission of the instructor and after successfully petitioning to the ASC.”

Barnett suggested that it is the quality of liberal arts education that is most important and that such quality in this case is premised on the separation of these two populations. Allowing petitions would mean that there was no principle to maintain (in either fall and spring semesters).

Woods stated that having students go to the professor for a petition would discourage the transfer of students.

Rousslang restated his original argument that faculty who wanted to keep courses singularly focused on either freshmen or transfer students would be able to under this motion.

The motion passed with three members of the Committee voting in favor, three members opposed, four members abstaining and the Chair (Anderson-Connolly) breaking the tie with his vote in favor of the motion.

Minutes prepared by Carlo Bonura.