

Minutes of Curriculum Committee Meeting, 1/26/2011

Members Present: Terry Beck, Derek Buescher (chair), Hallie Conyers, Alyce DeMarais, Kent Hooper, Tatiana Kaminsky, Alisa Kessel, Amanda Mifflin, Emelie Peine (acting secretary), Brad Reich, Jonathan Stockdale, Brad Tomhave, Randy Worland, Steve Zopfi

Call to order: Derek Buescher (8:05 am)

Approval of minutes from the 12-01-10 meeting is moved; unanimous consent to approve minutes.

Working Group Reports

Working group 1: nothing to report

Working group 2: nothing to report

Working group 3: nothing to report

Working group 4: nothing to report

Working group 5: Members indicate that the review of the math department is in progress. Group chair Alisa Kessel also indicates that independent study reviews will be incorporated into future program self-studies, and that the self-study questions should include questions about independent study.

Kessel also followed up on a discussion from the last meeting in which the committee discussed revisions to the independent study contract. It was agreed at that meeting that reviews of independent study criteria and guidelines would be incorporated into self-study questions as part of departmental 5-year reviews.

Two substantive discussions followed regarding **independent study and thesis** and **diversity in the core curriculum**

Independent study

1) CC considered whether or not students who complete the equivalent of a senior thesis as an independent study (IS) in departments that do not require a thesis should have the option of a 491 or 492 designation on the transcript that identifies the IS as a senior thesis.

2) CC determined that the main difference between an independent study and a thesis is that the former is primarily a reading list selected by the student and

involves familiarizing the student with a topic or body of work not sufficiently covered by other course offerings. A thesis, on the other hand, is a rigorous academic endeavor that requires original, independent research, culminating in a substantial written analysis of data and/or literature (depending on the field).

3) CC determined that in some departments that do not field a senior thesis class or have a senior thesis course designation do have students who complete substantial original research as part of an independent study. The committee wanted to afford those students the opportunity to have that research acknowledged on the transcript via a course number and title that incorporated the term “thesis.” However, there was concern that different fields have different criteria and standards for “thesis-level” work.

4) There was consensus that the IS Thesis option should only apply to departments that do not already offer a senior thesis seminar.

5) Some concern was expressed that if the thesis designation is adopted, IS students would lose the ability to indicate the substantive focus of their work in the course title. However, other members of the committee felt that *in the case of a thesis* the specific topic is less important to graduate schools and employers than the indication that the student has done in-depth, independent, original research. Non-thesis independent studies could still indicate content through the course title.

6) Final consensus: IS Thesis option should be offered to students that engage in substantial independent research projects within majors that do not offer a senior thesis seminar. Broad guidelines should be adopted indicating baseline requirements of IS Thesis work. Alisa Kessel suggested that these guidelines may include wording like “substantial, original research, data or evidence collection (loosely interpreted), and an oral presentation component,” but CC did not settle on specific language. The Working Group will attempt to draft some guidelines.

7) Alisa Kessel offered the idea that a seminar could be offered that pulls IS Thesis students together from different departments to provide a supportive, collaborative context for thesis writers whose departments do not offer a thesis seminar.

Diversity as part of the core curriculum

1) CC discussed the possibility of adding into the core another component: questions of diversity; understanding and exploring issues of diversity as part of the college experience. Many of Puget Sound’s northwest peers have a diversity requirement, in different formulations. Pomona has a “discourse and power” requirement. Dean Kris Bartanen talked about this as part of the Fall Faculty

Conversation. Race and pedagogy as well as reviews are pointing to this. We have a diversity curriculum, but there's no requirement that students actually take these courses. Adding a new requirement in is impossible, and there may maybe things we could cut (connections), but maybe we could piggyback, or cross-list other core courses to fulfill a diversity requirement (as an "overlay"). CC began simply discussing the general possibility of having a diversity core requirement and how we would actually do that.

2) Some members questioned whether language courses would count towards the requirement, and if so, whether the requirement would essentially be redundant, since the university already requires foreign language study as a graduation requirement.

3) This led to a broader discussion of the general problem of determining which courses would count toward the requirement and how that would be determined. There was consensus that this would be a difficult conversation, because different students and faculty would have different meanings of diversity. Amanda Mifflin shared her experience as an undergraduate, where the "multiculturalism" requirement could be met by nearly any course offered, but that students had to write a paragraph justifying fulfillment. Alyce DeMarais pointed out that an audit of classes containing diversity content has been conducted and that list could act as a guide.

4) There was general concern that this requirement would shift enrollment numbers towards certain core classes and away from others.

5) What our peer institutions do: Derek Buescher estimated that 60% of our peers have some diversity component. The way that they execute it is very different. Some allow it to be double counted. For some it's aspirational—they want students to think about taking those classes and that's enough. Some have a stand-alone component. Many of our peer institutions have specific language in the core requirements about diversity.

6) Terry Beck raised the issue of how this lines up with our mission statement. He argued that though we promote civic understanding and participation, students can go through their education here without ever encountering difference. Learning to deal with difference lines up really well with who we say we are. This was also the response to a question about whether diversity is a single thing that our peers do that we're unreasonably highlighting (as opposed to math or English requirements)—it isn't just an isolated requirement. We are living in a diverse world and we have an obligation to train our students to be able to function in that world. It is not just a matter of looking like our peer institutions.

7) There was general concern about coming up with a definition of diversity that is neither too broad nor too narrow, so that the list of courses that meet the requirement does not lead to enrollment problems for courses not on the list.

7) CC expressed general positive consensus that this topic should be pursued further. Next steps include:

- a) looking at the list of courses that are currently considered to include diversity content and determining how many students never take any of the classes on that list (Brad Tomhave?)
- b) looking through departmental reviews to see how departments themselves are determining diversity (Derek Buescher?)

Move to adjourn. Meeting adjourned at 9:05.