College of Arts and Sciences
Educational Policy Committee

Minutes
March 12, 2009
McMahon Conference Room

Attending:
Clare Dunsford, Robin Fleming, Paul Gray, Stuart Hecht, Bill Keane, Pamela Lannutti, Nick Lessin, Michael Martin, Tom McGuinness, Tim Mulvey, Ibby Nathans, Clare O’Connor, Bill Petri, David Quigley, Harry Rosser, Akua Sarr, Rein Uritam, Barb Viechnicki

Dean Quigley called the meeting to order at 4:04 PM.

The minutes of the February 5th meeting were considered. Clare O’Connor asked that they be adjusted to reflect the Committee’s concern about the amount of Biology required of students in the Theology Department’s proposed Bioethics Minor. The minutes were approved subject to that change.

Dean Quigley then made several announcements.

1. Conversion to the credit system is on schedule for Fall 2010, and everything must be in place by the end of the upcoming Fall semester. He asked the Academic Affairs Subcommittee to consider possible issues and report to the Committee. He also suggested that departments need to be encouraged to consider the consequences for their major and core programs.

2. The Dean expressed concern about the level of faculty participation in the e-syllabi program. He is considering sending a request to all faculty to take
part. Some committee members suggested that guidelines from the Dean as to content and detail might be helpful. The Dean agreed, and noted that the University Core Development Committee is designing a template for core courses.

3. The Dean noted Fr. Leahy’s recent letter about the effect of the nation’s economic difficulties on BC, and noted that the Provost will soon be sending a letter commenting on the academic consequences. He suggested that the Committee will need to think about the fundamental commitments of Arts and Sciences as we move forward.

Stuart Hecht, reporting for the Honors Subcommittee, commented on two proposals for independent majors, neither of which has been approved.

1. A student proposing a major in Sociology and Urban Planning has a low GPA, but is improving, and the subcommittee felt that more performance data from the student was needed. More crucially, the proposal contained an insufficient number of upper division courses. The subcommittee suggested that the student revise the proposal to address that issue, and reapply.

2. A proposed major in Chinese Culture was deemed to contain too many language courses, and too many not taken at BC. Since the student is currently a junior, the concern is pressing. Some Committee members suggested alternatives, such as a History major with a minor in Asian Studies.

Clare Dunsford, for the Academic Affairs Subcommittee, reported on the Inclusive Education Minor proposal from LSOE.

This proposal has been seen before, and had been returned with a request for more information about the field component of the minor. The response improves the proposal significantly, and the subcommittee is inclined to recommend approval, after obtaining answers to several questions of detail, including:

- How many hours will a student actually spend in the field?
- Will there be direct contact with students?
- Should the field observation take place after any course, or should a particular course be required?
Dean Quigley asked if the Committee felt that the minor would be popular. Several committee members, including student members, felt strongly that it would be received enthusiastically.

The Dean then asked if the Committee wished to raise any other items, and there were three responses.

1. Stuart Hecht noted that, so far, only one department chair has responded to the proposed Syllabus/Contract for reading courses. Few changes may be needed, and it will be brought forward for final approval at the May meeting.

2. Grade compression/inflation surfaced again. Bill Petri noted that the current senior class’s mean GPA is 3.47, and that in the wake of the previous report, grades actually dropped. Some discussion followed of the reasons for the phenomenon, and possible methods to address it, such as making relative grading data available to faculty. Dean Quigley pointed out that there is a university committee currently studying methods of assessment in connection with the university’s accreditation, and concluded the discussion by noting that assessment will be a major topic of discussion for the Committee next year.

3. Stuart Hecht raised the issue of requiring graduating seniors to complete a capstone thesis or take a concluding test, possibly as a requirement for graduation with honors. The Dean pointed out that this would require significant resources, but again is a topic to be considered with assessment.

Dean Quigley reiterated the importance and urgency of the Academic Affairs Subcommittee report on the transition to a credit based system.

The meeting adjourned at 5:06 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
William J. Keane