Minutes of the University Core Development Committee, Wednesday, February 27, 2013.

The meeting came to order at about 1:05 p.m.

Present were Nasser Behnegar, Laura Hake, Arthur Madigan, Suzanne Matson, Patrick McQuillan, Catherine Read, and James Weiss.

Also present were Brigitte Libby (Classics), Franco Mormando (Romance Languages), and Michael Resler (German Studies).

The greater part of the meeting was a discussion (in line with our E1A form) with our visitors about the assessment of their core offerings. Classics, Romance Languages, and German Studies offer relatively few core courses. The three departments are in a fairly early stage of developing assessment plans for core offerings; one visitor admitted that he was surprised to learn that departments needed to assess their core offerings. The discussion was wide-ranging and surfaced a number of issues.

* The need for departments to sample both student responses and student product.
* The need for a certain volume of student responses and student product in order to draw worthwhile conclusions. Here Suzanne Matson indicated that English would be willing to cooperate with other Literature departments.
* The serious administrative understaffing in some of the small departments. This impedes department activities, including assessment.
* The need for assessment to identify and tackle issues of a manageable size.

Various colleagues and visitors also made a number of points such as the following.

* Assessment does not need to consider all the core goals at once; assessing one goal, or even part of one goal, could be enough.
* Assessment will not be useful if departments cherrypick their students’ best work. They need to try to gather a representive sample.
* What NEASC really wants to see, and expects to see, is evidence that we are using data to make improvements.

There was discussion of who should receive reports of what the departments are doing by way of assessment. Associate Dean Michael Martin is in general supervision of assessment. The UCDC is glad to receive material from the departments about their assessment activities for inclusion in its report on core assessment. We want to put people’s good work on record.

It was agreed that the departments of Classics, German Studies, and Romance Languages would send the UCDC their plans for core assessment as these are further developed. Our visitors left at about 1:50 p.m.

The remainder of the meeting was devoted to discussing a situation that has arisen in History. History core moderator Julian Bourg has informed Arthur Madigan that History proposes to create a number of courses under the common title of Globalization and seeks approval for History core credit for these courses. In response Arthur Madigan asked Julian Bourg why these could not be multiple sections of a single course under a single course number. The answer was that this is impossible under the university’s current system, because each of the courses has discussion sections.

Colleagues questioned this rationale, citing examples of courses with multiple sections and discussion sections, and arguing that a single course number would be preferable and that multiple course numbers might make it harder to tell whether individual courses were trying for and meeting the learning goals.

Colleagues advised Arthur Madigan to check with Louise Lonabocker about what can and cannot be done under the university’s current system. [Louise Lonabocker has since confirmed Julian Bourg’s account. The discussion sections are tied to specific Globalization courses, not spread across the whole range of Globalization courses, as is the case for, e.g., Principles of Microeconomics.]

A colleague suggested that we consider how strict the guidelines for these multiple Globalization courses are, and whether they are strict enough to allow us to approve the Globalization courses as a group.

A further complication is that the faculty who will teach some of the Globalization courses have yet to be engaged, and so no syllabi are available for these courses; but History would like students to sign up for the courses in spring registration.

All things considered, it was agreed to approve the Globalization courses for History core credit for one (1) year, with the understanding that Julian Bourg will send the syllabi (when available) and the appropriate cover sheets with a view to continuing approval.

The meeting adjourned at about 2:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by

Arthur Madigan, S.J.