

Minutes of the University Core Development Committee, Monday, February 13, 2012.

The committee came to order in Gasson 315 at about 1:10 p.m.

Present were: Nasser Behnegar, Patrick Byrne, Clare Dunsford, Arthur Madigan, Patrick McQuillan, and Marc Muskavitch.

The minutes of the meeting of January 24 were approved with the addition of Clare Dunsford to the list of those in attendance.

In the light of a message and revised syllabus from Prof. Larysa Smirnova, RL 466 Francophone Sub-Saharan Cinema was approved for Cultural Diversity core credit.

Discussion then turned to Barbara Walvoord's visit of February 8-9 and especially to the UCDC's lunch meeting with her on Wednesday, February 8. Discussion of things Walvoord had said led the committee to reflect on its role in learning outcomes assessment of departmental core offerings. Catherine Read pointed out that the UCDC's task was not itself to assess departmental core offerings, but rather to oversee the departments' own assessment of their core offerings. Beyond agreement on this point, a number of concerns surfaced. Marc Muskavitch noted that Barbara Walvoord had said or implied that the university should have a director of assessment with time off for this purpose. The university does not appear to be moving in this direction. Patrick Byrne noted that the 1991 Task Force report envisioned a more expansive role for the UCDC and its director than was currently the case. Clare Dunsford recalled the longstanding lack of sufficient resources in support of the core. Catherine Read remarked that the UCDC is supposed to be doing faculty development, but that we cannot do that as we are currently set up. James Weiss recalled that in its E1A form the UCDC has requested an expansion of its membership so as to cover its new workload.

Arthur Madigan recalled two issues that had surfaced in discussion with Walvoord: should the UCDC commit itself to examining core course syllabi? And should the UCDC commit itself to examining samples of student work? Nasser Behnegar suggested that examination of syllabi was appropriate when courses were first proposed for core credit, but not in the triennial reviews of departmental core assessment. This opened up a general discussion of what the UCDC was and was not planning to do by way of overseeing departmental assessment of the core: read one-to-two page summaries of departmental assessments, read syllabi, read cover pages accompanying syllabi. James Weiss thought that reading about two or three different core programs from individual departments would overwhelm us. He thought that the plan of visiting departments on a three-year cycle was unworkable, due both to the sheer amount of work involved and our lack of specialized disciplinary capacity.

Clare Dunsford recalled something that Barbara Walvoord had suggested à propos of item 4 on the UCDC's E1A form: that we should not collect too much paper; that we should ask departments for one to two pages on their assessment procedures; that for an individual core course we should ask for one page plus a cover page. James Weiss cited Walvoord to the effect that we should not second guess the departments. We may not even need to see syllabi. We should just ask departments to tell us how their core courses address the goals of the core. Patrick Byrne cited the case of CS 074 as a reason why it is good for us to see syllabi: syllabi change and we need to check with departments that courses are still meeting the core goals. Along a different line from James Weiss, Byrne thought that the UCDC has and claims sufficient disciplinary competence to judge whether courses in the disciplines do or do not meet the core goals. Catherine Read proposed a middle position: that faculty and departments are free to vary the details of syllabi, provided that the basic course description and objectives remain the same.

Here Arthur Madigan noted the possibility of the UCDC's receiving core course syllabi from the departments but reviewing them not exhaustively but on a test basis. He also recalled Associate Provost Donald Hafner's position, more than once expressed to the committee, that approval of a course for core credit should be understood as a renewable license, a license to be reviewed in the UCDC's review of departmental core offerings. Patrick Byrne noted that Hafner's position seems to be different from Barbara Walvoord's position in this matter; Walvoord did not speak in terms of a three-year renewal of core licenses. He suggested that the UCDC has the autonomy to decide what position to take. Clare Dunsford asked whether Walvoord was asking the UCDC to do what it used to do, namely, to visit, say, four different departments each year and examine their syllabi. Catherine Read agreed but added the point about taking steps to solve problems or difficulties identified in the course of assessment. Clare Dunsford thought that this would involve the UCDC in faculty development, which we are not equipped to do. James Weiss recalled Walvoord as acknowledging that in this respect Notre Dame's program had better resources than ours.

At this point discussion began to focus on the question whether and how we ought to revise our E1A statement in the light of what we had heard from Barbara Walvoord. A great many suggestions and observations were offered. Patrick Byrne did the service of summarizing a number of points on which it seemed we are agreed or close to agreement. [The material in square brackets places these points in the context of the current E1A form.]

(1) The UCDC's review of departments' core assessment will take place on a three-year cycle, i.e., there is no annual review of assessment over and above the three-year review.

(2) For the triennial reviews, departments will be asked to provide summaries of their core assessment activities, but invited also to provide syllabi and cover sheets for their core offerings. [Clarification of section 3 of the E1A.]

(3) This invitation would be with a view to helping the UCDC understand the department's reports on assessment, not as part of a re-approval process.

(4) The UCDC will not review samples of student work. [Deletion from section 3 of the E1A.]

(5) The UCDC will provide assistance to departments in the development of their assessment reports. [Addition to the E1A, perhaps to section 4.]

There appeared to be broad support for these ideas, but also a question whether ideas (1)-(5) required amending the E1A form or whether we could leave the form as is while allowing (1)-(5) to guide our practice. We agreed not to vote on (1) through (5) at this point.

Marc Muskavitch suggested that to gauge the magnitude of our assessment task, it would be good to know the numbers of core courses (different courses, not different sections) department by department. It was agreed that Arthur Madigan would approach Louise Lonabocker about this.

The meeting adjourned at about 2:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by

Arthur Madigan, S.J.