

Minutes of the University Core Development Committee, Tuesday, March 13, 2012.

The meeting came to order at about 2:05 p.m. in room 102 of Gasson Hall.

Present were: Nasser Behnegar, Patrick Byrne, Clare Dunsford, Judith Gordon, Arthur Madigan, Suzanne Matson, Marc Muskavitch, Catherine Read, and James Weiss.

The minutes of the meeting of Monday, February 13, were approved with several corrections.

Recalling an earlier discussion, Patrick Byrne suggested that the wording of the cover pages for Social Science core courses be discussed at some point.

Discussion then turned to a request from History for History core credit for a new or new-titled course to be taught by new post-doc hires. Patrick Byrne noted that the request comes to us from our former colleague Franziska Seraphim, who certainly understands what a core course is supposed to be. He proposed that the committee approve these courses provisionally for 2012-2013, with the understanding that during that year History would submit a proposal, syllabi, and cover sheets for regular approval. This was agreed to.

Discussion then turned to the question of whether / how to amend the UCDC's E1A form in light of Barbara Walvoord's visit. Arthur Madigan recalled the five (by his count) points that had emerged in our discussion on February 13.

(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.]

He asked whether these should be handled as formal amendments to the committee's E 1 A form or simply as guidelines for the committee to employ in practice.

Discussion began with item (4). At first the group thought of deleting the reference to reading student work from section 3 of the UCDC's E1A form, but then it seemed better to leave the reference in the text but to make it clear that it was the departments, not the UCDC, that reviews student work.

Discussion then turned to item (1), the planned three-year cycle of UCDC reviews of departments' assessment of their core courses. Colleagues expressed concern about how much work this would add to the committee's current responsibilities. We considered the possibility of delegating some of this work to subcommittees and otherwise streamlining the process. We agreed unanimously to lengthen the cycle of visits to departments from three years to four years. We also agreed provisionally to visit Psychology and the Social Sciences in the fourth year, but left open the possibility of modifying this in the light of results from Louise Lonabocker and Kathy Winarski about the numbers of core courses in the various departments.

Arthur Madigan noted that we need to include Computer Science among core departments to be visited, presumably in Year 2 along with Mathematics. He also distributed some suggestions from J. Joseph Burns for modifications of the UCDC's E1A form. We did not discuss these suggestions.

Colleagues also thought that the committee needs administrative support and that the office of the provost ought to provide this support. It was agreed that colleagues would share with Arthur Madigan their ideas about the kinds of support required, and that he would draft a letter for the committee to send to the provost requesting the necessary support. It was also suggested that we place on the agenda for our April meeting a request to administration for an additional member or two on the committee as well as a staff assistant for the committee.

Finally, we briefly discussed how we might assist departments in preparing for the assessment of their core courses.

The meeting adjourned at about 3:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by

Arthur Madigan, S.J.

Appendix 1: section 3 and the beginning of section 4 of the current E1A form.

3. Other than the GPA, what data/evidence is used to determine whether graduates of the program have achieved the stated outcomes? See attached description of what might constitute direct or indirect evidence of the achievement of learning outcomes.

Other data considered besides student GPAs include: core course syllabi (including

cover pages explaining how courses address both general core goals and the goals of particular core requirements), departmental reports of core course assessment, samples of student work from core courses (gathered by departments), samples of student work from Capstone courses, samples of student theses, publications, and other creative work, and samples of student responses from university-wide senior surveys.

4. Who collects and interprets the evidence and what process do they use to make recommendations for improvement? When does this occur?

The University Core Development Committee (UCDC) is responsible for overseeing assessment of the undergraduate core. The primary locus for this assessment is the individual core departments. The UCDC is responsible for encouraging, monitoring, and supporting departmental assessment of core courses and for keeping the dean, provost, and other officials informed about the state of the core.

It is understood that departments will regularly gather syllabi from their faculty and that syllabi for core courses will be accompanied by cover sheets explaining how the courses are designed to meet both the general core goals and the more specialized outcomes proper to the various core requirements

Appendix 2: the three-year cycle from section 4 of the current E1A form.

The UCDC plans to review core departments on a three-year cycle:

Year 1: English and other departments servicing the Literature core, Writing, History, Fine Arts, Music, and Theater.

Year 2: Mathematics, Biology, Chemistry, Earth and Environmental Sciences, Physics, Psychology.

Year 3: Philosophy, Theology, Honors and other interdisciplinary programs, Economics, Political Science, and Sociology.

Appendix 3: the four-year cycle from section 4 of the revised E1A form.

The UCDC plans to review core departments on a four-year cycle:

Year 1: English and other departments servicing the Literature core, Writing, History, Fine Arts, Music, and Theater.

Year 2: Mathematics, Computer Science, Biology, Chemistry, Earth and Environmental Sciences, and Physics.

Year 3: Philosophy, Theology, Honors, and other interdisciplinary programs,.

Year 4: Economics, Political Science, Psychology, and Sociology.

Appendix 4: excerpt from section 4 of the current E1A form.

For these triennial reviews the UCDC considers not only the departmental reports on core assessment but also the syllabi for core courses (with their accompanying cover sheets explaining how the courses are designed to meet both the general core goals and the more specialized outcomes proper to the various core requirements), samples of student product gathered by departments from the core courses, and samples of student responses about the core courses, also gathered by departments.

Appendix 5: excerpt from section 4 of the E1A form as revised in light of discussion.

For these quadrennial reviews the UCDC considers both the departmental reports on core assessment and the syllabi for core courses (with their accompanying cover sheets explaining how the courses are designed to meet both the general core goals and the more specialized outcomes proper to the various core requirements).