

Minutes of the University Core Development Committee, Thursday, May 20, 2010.

The committee met in McMahon Conference Room (Gasson 105) at 3:00 p.m.

Members attending were Patrick Byrne, Michael Clarke, Clare Dunsford, Catherine Read, and Arthur Madigan. Also present were Darren Kisgen (CSOM) and Patrick McQuillan (LSOE), who join the committee as of July 1.

The main business of the meeting was to discuss our understanding of the Cultural Diversity core requirement, i.e., of the characteristics that a course needs to have to fulfill the Cultural Diversity requirement, and in particular how this applies to summer courses proposed by the Office of International Programs for Cultural Diversity credit.

There seemed to be widespread agreement in the group that OIP's three-week summer courses need to incorporate a component of preparation for the overseas experience and a component of follow-up to that experience (as many such courses already do). There also seemed to be agreement that there is a distinction between an experience and a course, i.e., that even the valuable experience of visiting a foreign country is not necessarily a careful study of that country's culture. Still, members pointed out that many OIP courses are more than visits to a foreign country; they give students an experience of immersion in the culture.

Discussion turned to the part of the 1991 Task Force Report that indicates that the typical Cultural Diversity course should be non-United States and non-Western European. As one member pointed out, interpretation of this point has been controversial from the start. This member said he could well envision how studying in certain parts of Europe might give students a new perspective on suburban life in America and so accomplish the purpose of the Cultural Diversity requirement. Further, he saw some importance in the arguments that certain facets of European culture were significantly different from our students' culture and that studying in a European university milieu might well give students an experience very different from his or her own. Another colleague, however, reminded the committee that this requirement was made in response to an American history of discrimination by ethnicity and race. Yet another colleague pointed out that some students are currently advocating for a required course on diversity over and above the current Cultural Diversity requirement. From their point of view, allowing courses on European cultures to count for Cultural Diversity would be a step backward.

Discussion then moved to the role of a historical dimension in Cultural Diversity courses. One colleague cited the 1991 Report's formulation: "A critical component of a liberal education is the capacity to see human experience from the point of view of others who encounter and interpret the world in significantly different ways." To understand the point of view of others involves knowing why those others see the world the way they do, and that generally requires understanding their history. Another colleague agreed in general, but pointed out that the Report mentioned historical understanding as one of several ways in which a course could fulfill the requirement. This colleague preferred a

broader formulation: Cultural Diversity courses should include some serious academic analysis of the culture in question.

It was suggested that Cultural Diversity courses, including those proposed by OIP, could stand to be more rigorous. Colleagues noted that lately the committee has been receiving more proposals from OIP. This surfaced the question whether the committee could give OIP some guidance about the characteristics that these courses should have to count for Cultural Diversity.

In the ensuing discussion there seemed to be agreement on the following guidelines for course proposals from OIP: (1) they need to include a detailed syllabus; (2) they need to show how the course will give students an engagement with the local culture; (3) they need to include significant work in preparation for the time overseas, as well as significant work (e.g., a term paper) synthesizing the overseas experience; and (4) the evaluation of the students' work needs to be clearly related to the focus on engagement with the culture.

Discussion then turned to different types of course offerings and whether and how they might count for Cultural Diversity. First to be discussed were foreign language courses. Here a colleague pointed out that Boston College's own language courses have never been counted for Cultural Diversity credit. While the experience of learning a foreign language is recognized to be deeply informative, the committee has held that a Cultural Diversity course needs to do more than simply meet the Arts and Sciences language requirement. One colleague thought that an advanced course taught in (not simply about) a foreign language could well be approved for Cultural Diversity credit.

Next to be discussed were courses in studio art. The sense of the group was that the committee has not approved courses in studio art for Cultural Diversity credit.

Last to be discussed were courses with a global or international focus, such as the courses lately proposed by Economics for Cultural Diversity credit. The sense of the group was that a global or international focus would not automatically qualify a course for Cultural Diversity credit, but that a number of such courses might well qualify (e.g. courses studying how First-World investment affects cultures in Africa or Asia). The key point is that the course should actually be about a foreign culture or cultures, not simply about how Americans or Western Europeans view that culture or those cultures.

In the few minutes remaining, the committee began to discuss PS 072 Memory (Elizabeth Kensinger), which had been proposed for Social Science core credit. It proved impossible to complete this discussion at the meeting. In an email ballot subsequent to the meeting PS 072 was approved for Social Science core credit for academic year 2010-2011.

The meeting adjourned at about 4:05 p.m.

These minutes were edited by Arthur Madigan, S.J. on September 13, 2010.