University Core Development Committee
October 31, 2000
Gasson 105, 1:30-3:00 p.m.

Minutes

In attendance were the Chair, Richard Cobb-Stevens, Patrick Byrne, Clare Dunsford, Maggie Galvin, John Heineman, Kathleen Mahoney, Ourida Mostefai, and Dennis Sardella.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the conversation we had with the focus group of students convened at our last meeting. However, two pieces of business were introduced first:

1) The German Department had submitted a course for approval for Literature core. All agreed that the course covered too narrow a time period, and returned it unapproved to the department.

2) The English Department wants to withdraw core credit for Introductory College Writing, a course taught in the College of Advancing Studies in the summer. Richard will advise the Chair, Paul Lewis, to work this out with Fr. Woods independent of the Committee.

The rest of the meeting was devoted to a lengthy discussion of academic advising and of certain themes that had emerged in the students' comments.

John Heineman noted how many students had mentioned the inadequacy of academic advising and offered peer advising as a solution, but he noted the students' lack of information and general confusion, suggesting that peer advising is not a good remedy. He urged that we send a message to the Dean about the need for better advising.

Peer advising was defended by Ourida Mostefai, at least in the Romance Languages Department, and by Maggie Galvin, who noted its effectiveness in the Premed Office. Pat Byrne said he thought there was a role for peer advising by seniors, but they need to be well trained and supervised. Subsequently, Heineman admitted that peer advisors could be better in the major than in the core. Mostefai noted that the summer Orientation leaders are effectively peer advisors, and suggested that we recognize this fact and train them better. She also thought it would be good to have the core discussed at Orientation, as it used to be.

Dennis Sardella reported that he hears from students frequently that advising is a disaster and also that faculty members don't care, which disturbs them more than inaccurate advising. The problem with faculty advising, noted Sardella, is that you need to be a generalist to know the core, and most faculty are not generalists. Heineman objected strongly to the use of professional advisors in the proposed advising center;

furthermore, he felt an advising center would promulgate the "student affairs mentality" of our orientation program.

Other comments about advising included Mostefai's observation that the Cornerstone Advisement Seminar is a good model of advising and Heineman's suggestion that advisors be given the names of their advisees before school starts, so the advisor can direct the choice of courses during the drop/add period.

Following Cobb-Stevens' recommendation that we move from the topic of advising to a consideration of the students' remarks on the core, Pat Byrne offered three areas of concern he had gleaned from the focus group:

1) The natural science core—students had asserted that the social science core had more choices, but Byrne thought that to be untrue.

2) The writing core took a beating and we need to address those complaints.

3) The history core is too western, and students said they have studied European history in high school.

Kathleen Mahoney observed that, from her professional study of the history of curriculum, some things never change. She predicted that multiculturalism was going to persist as a driving force in students' criticism of curriculum, and noted that we need to "sell" the core better, to do a better job of public relations. Maggie Galvin agreed, stating that we appear as if we are restricting students' access to other cultures; we need to better convey the truly ecumenical nature of the core. Dennis Sardella also agreed, asserting that if the core is to succeed, it must appear to be more than the study of "dead white guys" and be made more deeply multicultural. Galvin thought it would be effective to emphasize the core as a "quest."

Heineman noted that there is no reward for teaching the core, adding that in the past five years his department has not even discussed the core. Mostefai observed that since freshmen don't know how to make the best use of the core, we could try to teach them how to engage with faculty teaching in the core.

Heineman introduced a new topic, saying that he was interested in those students in the focus group who suggested that we introduce levels in core courses. Years ago the History Department had an "intensive" core course for those who had a strong high school background in history and wanted a challenge. Pat Byrne voiced a strong objection to creating levels in the core.

Submitted by Clare Dunsford