

University Core Development Committee

February 18, 2002

Gasson 105, 10:00 a.m.

Minutes

In attendance were Chair Richard Cobb-Stevens, Patrick Byrne, Clare Dunsford, Paul Gray, Maggie Kearney, Ourida Mostefai, and Sandra Waddock.

Agenda: meet with invited guests from Chemistry Department and afterwards discuss recommendations to be made about the natural science core

The **Chemistry Department** was represented by Dr. Lynne Batchelder and Dr. Neil Wolfman. Dr. Wolfman teaches one of the three sections of **General Chemistry**, which he termed a "midlevel" course, since there is a chem course for non-majors below it and an Honors Chemistry course above it for selected chemistry majors. General Chemistry is filled mainly with Biology, Chemistry, and Biochemistry majors, and premeds in all majors. The 100-145 students come from widely varying backgrounds, with about 20-30% having had only a lower-level high school chem course and another 20-30% who arrive highly prepared. The course also requires a lab and a discussion section (about 20-40 students meeting once a week for 50 minutes with a grad student).

Dr. Batchelder teaches **Chemistry and Society** for non-science-majors, with 245 students meeting 3 times a week, with no lab. She also noted the disparate composition of the class, with some students requiring the information she teaches just to be "good citizens," and others possibly requiring information that is more in-depth to prepare them to be "tomorrow's leaders." She feels she could do a better job if the course were broken into 2 groups and the curriculum tailored to their different needs. When asked about resources she might need, she said that currently she has a halftime T.A. (8 hours a week). Due to the size of the class she must give multiple choice and short answer exams. If she had two classes, she could use two T.A.'s for a class of 50 and 2-3 T.A.'s for a class of 150, and also add more writing to the syllabus. Currently she ends up giving a lot of A's because the students are not challenged; some of them have taken AP Chemistry already. Even with these drawbacks, however, she believes she is able to teach students how to analyze and interpret data.

The issue of the quality of lab instructors was raised: some noted that undergrads have complained to them about T.A.'s and T.F.'s who cannot speak English adequately to explain procedures or answer questions. A related issue is that grad students are sometimes poorly trained in teaching. The Chemistry Department provides little training to their T.A.'s, though each lab is supervised by Lynne O'Connell, the Director, who visits all labs twice during their meeting period.

A discussion ensued about the current tension at B.C. between a growing emphasis on research and the traditional value placed on teaching. The question was asked, "Do part-time instructors perform some essential function for the Department and the University, and if so, how should they be rewarded?"

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After the Chemistry representatives left, the Committee discussed possible recommendations to the Dean regarding the core natural science courses, including the following:

- Advocate for smaller courses: current large size is detrimental.
- Perhaps more T.A.'s are not the answer, but the role of adjunct faculty should be expanded. Part-time faculty should be legitimized in some cases by making them fulltime adjuncts with adequate pay.
- Advocate for more T.A.'s, but also make sure T.A.'s are well trained, and change admission standards to ensure that they have sufficient command of English. (TOEFL scores are not enough to predict language proficiency.)
- Though we are concerned about the long-term effects of a two-tier faculty, in the short-term, we need to support our part-time faculty. In short, we need to invest in teaching.

Submitted by Clare Dunsford