

University Core Development Committee

March 15, 2000

Gasson 105, 2:30-4:00 p.m.

Minutes

In attendance were Professor Richard Cobb-Stevens (Chair), Professor Patrick Byrne, Dean Clare Dunsford, Professors Nancy Fairchild, Rob Gross, and George Madaus. Professors Judith Clair, Robert Kern, and Dennis Sardella were unable to attend.

The agenda of the meeting was to examine the core offerings of the Psychology Department, which was represented by Professor Gilda Morelli. The following is a summary of the discussion.

Professor Cobb-Stevens asked whether the Psychology Department could offer more courses to satisfy the Social Science core, and Prof. Fairchild seconded this request, noting that School of Nursing requires its students to take psychology. Prof. Morelli explained that the Psychology Department has a high number of majors, about 850, and a small number of faculty, 17-19, and thus feels that it cannot offer the kind of writing-intensive courses that the core demands. Introductory Psychology (PS 110-111) used to be offered for core credit, but with an enrollment of 230 students, not enough writing could be assigned. Introductory Psych. is now open to non-majors, but does not fulfill their core requirement. Majors can fill the social science core requirement by taking PS 110-111, but must take additional Psychology courses before they actually receive core credit.

Prof. Cobb-Stevens asked about the number of graduate students in the department, which Prof. Morelli explained was not sufficient to assist in large, writing-intensive core courses. The Department has a total of twenty Ph.D. students, taking four or five a year; in their first year, they are research apprentices, in years two and three they are teaching assistants, running labs for Statistics courses, and in their fourth year they are teaching fellows, teaching electives.

Prof. Morelli suggested that perhaps the Department could offer a General Psychology course for core credit and have faculty teach it based on their own areas.

Prof. Cobb-Stevens asked if Psychology would consider devoting attention to the components of a core course as defined in the Task Force report, as the Sociology Department did some time ago. Asked by Prof. Morelli what aspects of a core course might be missing from the syllabi of the three Psych core courses distributed to the Committee, Prof. Byrne pointed to elements mentioned in the Task Force report, e.g., a history of the discipline and some inclusion of diverse cultures.

Prof. Morelli summarized the issues the committee had raised: 1) how can the Department better teach its core?, and 2) how could it teach more core courses?

Prof. Byrne remarked that all three core Psych courses are very specialized and do not give students a broad exposure to the field, and Prof. Madaus agreed. Prof. Morelli asked if Psychology were the only department to be open to this charge. Prof. Cobb-Stevens recalled that Theology and Sociology both revised their core offerings to make them less specialized, and English also rethought its core a few years ago.

More discussion followed regarding the feasibility of fourth-year grad students teaching core courses or hiring part-time faculty to teach either the core or the required Statistics course, or full-time faculty team-teaching core courses. One of the charges of the UCDC is to make recommendations to the administration regarding resources, and Prof. Cobb-Stevens noted that the committee might be helpful in this regard in aiding the Psychology Department in staffing more core courses. Prof. Morelli added to the two issues that she would take back to her department the problem of classes with extremely high enrollments.

After Prof. Morelli left, the committee conducted a bit of business. Dean Dunsford brought up two questions raised by Dean Joseph Quinn at a previous meeting to be addressed by the committee: 1) What large core lecture courses are taught by part-time faculty or teaching fellows?, and 2) Which core courses have a non-Western component? Dean Dunsford offered to request statistics from Louise Lonabocker to answer the first question, and Prof. Cobb-Stevens offered to poll the Chairs on the second question.

The March 29 meeting was cancelled, and the committee will meet again in April.

Submitted by Clare Dunsford