

Minutes of the University Council on Teaching
Wednesday, January 27, 2010
Sue Barrett Recorder

Present: Sue Barrett, Colleen Griffith, Chris Hepburn (Chair), Jackie Lerner, Paula Mathieu, Bob Murphy, Rita Olivieri, Ginny Reinburg Akua Saar, Pete Wilson

Guests: Provost Bert Garza, Vice Provost Patricia DeLeeuw, Vice Provost Don Hafner, Kit Baum, Marc Landy, Brinton Lykes, Sarah Ross, Stephanie Leone, James Morris, Joe Quinn

The minutes of the December meeting were accepted.

At this meeting, the UCT had as guests several faculty members who have been involved in interdisciplinary teaching. They were invited to tell us about their experiences with teaching courses that involve more than one department and/or school. They were asked especially to discuss any problems or roadblocks they see to more interdisciplinary teaching at BC and to give suggestions about how BC and in particular the UCT can encourage more interdisciplinary teaching.

While everyone present expressed enthusiasm for interdisciplinary teaching, they also mentioned impediments, especially the fact that departments are not rewarded for developing these courses because they do not receive full credit for the numbers of students taught.

Sarah Ross spoke about a course she co-taught with Stephanie Leone and Franco Mormondo. She did not experience any roadblocks because the course was already established when she joined the collaboration, but she thinks that some faculty do find departmental resistance and that departments could be encouraged to participate.

Marc Landy pointed out that it would be more important to encourage deans' offices to count such courses in such a way that departments would not be disadvantaged. For example, the course in Environmental Law, which has been taught by law students for several years, has not been counted as a Political Science course in terms of the number of students served.

Kit Baum brought up the example of faculty taking on voluntary overloads to teach their capstone course. To get beyond this situation, the university needs to provide funds, not just encouragement.

One way to get around the problem of counting students is to double the number of students in a course, which is not ideal. Everyone agreed that there should be a way to allow departments more flexibility.

Paula Mathieu asked how student writing is affected when faculty from different disciplines have their own expectations for papers. Brinton Lykes said that students in

her interdisciplinary course would collaborate on papers with others from outside their area and that all the faculty members would read them. Each student would then write an individual final paper.

James Morris asked that we make a clear distinction between interdisciplinary and interdepartmental courses. It is when more than one department is involved that the difficulties arise. He also suggested that the UCT should encourage shorter, smaller types of collaboration, with faculty coming in for 2 or 3 classes, for example.

Joe Quinn liked the idea of using TAM grants to encourage interdisciplinary teaching. Another model would be to have students working with others from different majors.

Bob Murphy gave the example of a group of faculty planning a course, which would then be taught by only one person.

Chris asked us to assume that the accounting problems could be overcome and to think about how we might encourage faculty to come together and discuss ways to collaborate.

Paula talked about the Common Room retreats, where faculty from across the university come together for a weekend. Stephanie mentioned the McMullen Museum of Art and Brinton mentioned service trips, where many faculty spend time together. Another good idea would be a central web site devoted to "Interdisciplinary Courses."

One more model is for students to take courses in two different disciplines and then take a seminar that combines them. This already happens to some extent in the International Studies Major and Human Rights Program. Colleen Griffith told us that the School of Theology and Ministry has many joint programs, such as one with Social Work, where students take courses in both schools and then do joint internships and take an interdisciplinary seminar. Students say they would like even more interdisciplinary work.

Ginny Reinburg asked us to take a step back and think about the intellectual and ethical goals of encouraging interdisciplinary teaching. Why do we, as a university, want to encourage this? All agreed that this question deserves attention. Some preliminary answers were the attractiveness to students and faculty of courses such as PULSE and the potential for a strengthened core. Brinton suggested that the UCT can be very helpful in articulating the goals of interdisciplinary projects.

Chris thanked the faculty guests for sharing their experiences and insights with the UCT.

Members of the TAM/TAME subcommittee for this year will be Paula Mathieu, Chris Hepburn and Bob Murphy.

Meetings for the semester will take place from 12 to 1:30 on February 24, March 24 and April 28.