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Assessment of Student Learning Minutes
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DATE: December 2, 2005

SUBJECT: Assessment of Student Learning Committee Minutes

PRESENT: Katherine Benson (Chair), Therese Buchmiller, Mark Fohl, James Togeas, Nancy Helsper, Nathan Swanson and Cassie McMahon

ABSENT: Donna Chollett, Paul Myers and Matt Senior

Benson called the ASL meeting to order at 4:03 PM in the Prairie Lounge. Benson welcomed our new committee member, Therese Buchmiller, to the meeting; introductions followed.

ASL Minutes 11/4/05

Benson asked for corrections/additions or approval of the ASL Minutes dated November 4, 2005. Two revisions were noted for the minutes. Motion: (Fohl/Togeas) to approve the minutes as amended; unanimously carried.

NCA Report

Members agreed to post the revised NCA report to the ASL Website; a revised copy of the NCA Report will also be sent to Dean Schwaller.

SUB-COMMITTEE REPORTS

GenEd/Importance of Liberal Arts Sub-Committee (Nancy Helsper)

Helsper said GenEd will need to request permission from Assembly to administer the Importance of Liberal Arts Survey. The ASL discussed the timeline for administering the survey; Benson said because FYS is emphasizing the importance of Liberal Education, she would prefer the survey be administered earlier. Fohl noted he is serving on a committee with James Morales; and said a packet of information will be sent to registered students during the summer. Fohl suggested talking with Morales about including the Importance of Liberal Education Survey in this packet. Helsper said the Pre-test will include 25-30 questions; members discussed whether it would be sent out as hard copy or electronically. Members agreed it would be beneficial to have feedback in July/August from incoming students, but voiced concerns about compiling the information if it was administered by hard copy. Helsper said setting up a portal to administer the pre-survey has been discussed; the website could be included in the information packet to incoming freshman. Fohl said he would discuss Importance of Liberal Education Survey with Morales at the next meeting. Benson asked the ASL committee for permission to send the survey to Assembly for approval. Motion: (Fohl/Buchmiller) The ASL Committee will send a memo to the Executive Committee for inclusion of the Importance of Liberal Education Survey to the Assembly agenda.

Helsper distributed documents for the committee members for review. Helsper said in spring 2005, 350 graduating seniors were asked to take the UMM general education survey, via the Web. Helsper said 152 students completed the survey, a response rate of 43.4%. She noted the response rate is slightly less than in 2002, 2003 and 2004; but this may have resulted because the \$5 bookstore coupon incentive is no longer offered. Helsper said on the survey, students indicated on a scale of 1-5 whether they believe they have achieved the goals of the gen ed categories, and also on a scale of 1-5 scale, how important they believe each of the gen ed categories is. Helsper said we have been doing the survey for five years, noting 2001 was the pilot year for the survey. Because not all data were collected, it is not included in the report.

Helsper said during the past three years, responses have been studied in additional ways:

- Looked at the division of students' majors
- Looked at the number of years spent at UMM (1-3 years, 4 years, 5 or more years)
- Looked at the number of UMM foreign language courses taken and how they affected the responses to achievement and importance
- Questions for the Foreign Language gen ed category.

Helsper said the trends in responses indicated 25% of the students rate their achievement of the gen ed goals below “moderate,” and 40% of the students rate the importance of gen ed below “moderate.” Helsper said the GenEd sub-committee is not concerned with the results because a review of the responses by Division of major reveals that students find areas outside of their major less important and achieve them at a lower rate. Helsper noted this could reflect a difference of temperament in students or a passion for their major.

Helsper said because we must do another interim assessment report to NCA, the sub-committee recommends the gen ed survey be continued in its entirety for the next couple of years, and suggested alternating it with the NSSE survey after that.. Helsper said the sub-committee does not recommend any changes to the survey at this time. Helsper said the gen ed survey does not give us feedback that allows us to improve student learning, but believes there is value in reviewing the survey data periodically and to make note of dramatic changes in the way student respond to the questions.

Helsper said the sub-committee recommends the ASL to move forward on other gen ed projects to meet the goals of improving student learning. Helsper said the NCA 2000 report indicated that we did not have gen ed goals and objectives for a majority of our gen ed categories. In 2003, the Curriculum Committee was asked to set up a gen ed sub-committee to define the measurable objectives for the 11 of 14 components of the gen ed that were missing them. Togeas served on the gen ed sub-committee. Togeas noted what the NCA wants must be embedded in the courses; and our planning as a group needs to take the next step in drawing in faculty on assessing students and tracking changes.

NSSE/Survey Results Sub-Committee (Katherine Benson)

Benson distributed documents to members for review and discussion. Benson said results of the UMM NSSE 2004 report yielded many comments and suggestions, including:

1. There was a “disconnection” between faculty and student perceptions, between student/student perception, depending on how the questions were worded
2. The opinion was expressed that pressure on faculty to achieve high ratings on the Student Opinion of Teaching (SOT) evaluations is causing some faculty to “dumb down” their courses.
3. Some NSSE items might not evaluate us correctly, e.g., high numbers of majors in Science and Social Sciences are taught to write concisely in these fields; not as many long-length papers in upper-division courses in these areas.

Benson prepared a set of five Tables with the benchmark items considered separately. She selected all individual items and looked to see whether differences were statistically significant or not, and if so, in what direction. Benson said these Tables yielded information about exactly where we need to target our efforts for improvement, if we want to be at the top of the COPLAC schools; and suggested the following:

1. first year students need more assigned papers of all lengths
2. first year students need courses that emphasize “synthesis” of ideas
3. More class presentations by both first-year and senior students.
4. Encourage first-year students to work on research with faculty outside of regular course requirements.
5. First-year students aren't doing enough “independent studies or independent majors.” Benson questioned if this is indeed a problem?
6. Senior students could use more electronic technology to complete assignments and hold discussions.

Benson said being at the top in comparison with the Baccalaureate Liberal Arts Schools will involve more extensive challenges for us if we decide this is our comparison group, but noted the list contained significantly lower scores compared to the COPLAC schools.

Benson discussed the following concerns with the committee and asked for input.

1. Survey a random sample of classes this year to see if faculty and students have a “disconnection” about how much work is required in those classes
2. Ask the Curriculum Committee to review the issue of what constitutes academic challenge and student engagement at UMM? Ask the Faculty Development Committee to sponsor retreats or programs about how to

challenge and engage students.

3. Benson asked if it is more appropriate to compare ourselves with COPLAC schools or the private, baccalaureate liberal-arts schools.
4. Ask the Faculty Affairs Committee to consider how the SOTs are used in faculty review; is there pressure on faculty to sacrifice standards to get a better evaluation?

Discussion of NSSE Survey results will be continued at the next ASL meeting, to be scheduled in spring semester.

Discipline Assessment Sub-Committee (Nathan Swanson)

Swanson said the Discipline Assessment Sub-committee met on November 21. Items discussed at the meeting included:

- Methods Disciplines are using for assessment, if it is accurate and timely
- Measurable outcomes by Disciplines, results to improve program
- Planned out course of direction for year, gathering data and contacting Disciplines that were identified as needing help
- Will request data from Disciplines by March 31

Swanson said the sub-committee is scheduled to meet on December 7.

Helsper noted that some of the Discipline Assessment plans are from 1998; they need to be updated. Swanson said the sub-committee will contact Discipline Coordinators via letter.

Spring Semester Schedule

The ASL spring meeting schedule was discussed. Pederson reported she has not received schedules from all members, but according to the schedules received; two possible times are available. Members are asked to reserve time on their calendar for Thursday morning 8:15 AM – 9:15 AM, and/or Friday afternoon, 1:00 – 2:00 PM. Benson said it is possible the meetings will have to alternate between Thursday and Friday to accommodate all committee member schedules.

Meeting adjourned at 5:03 PM.

Submitted by:

Linda Pederson