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UMM CURRICULUM COMMITTEE

MEETING # 4 Minutes

October 25, 2007, 8:00 a.m., Behmler 130

Present: Roland Guyotte (chair), Gwen Rudney, Barbara Burke, Janet Ericksen, Van Gooch, Michael Korth, Pareena Lawrence, Ferolyn Angell, Harold Hinds, Escillia Allen, Nate Swanson, Laura Thoma, Kim Ukura, Jeri Mullin, Clare Strand, Sara Haugen

Absent: None

Visiting: Brenda Boever, Dorothy DeJager, Len Keeler, Tom McRoberts

In these minutes: Proposal to eliminate the 48-credit limit in a discipline; report on Inventory of Student Writing at UMM, discussion of Learning Outcomes

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Guyotte asked for approval of minutes from October 11, 2007.

MOTION: (understood) To approve the minutes from October 11 (with change)

VOTE: Motion passed (10-0-0)

Discussion: Strand asked that DeJager's name be added to the list of guests in attendance.

2. PROPOSAL TO ELIMINATE THE 48-CREDIT LIMIT IN A DISCIPLINE

Guyotte welcomed guest Len Keeler and asked him to present his proposal to the committee. The proposal is stated as follows:

Eliminate the 48 credit limit.

In the catalog change *"No major program may require students to take more than 40 of the 120 credits required for graduation in any one discipline but students will be allowed to count up to 48 credits in a single discipline toward the 120"* to *"No major program may require students to take more than 40 of the 120 credits required for graduation in any one discipline."*

Keeler explained that currently, there are a 40-credit maximum imposed on majors for the maximum credits that a discipline can require and a 60-credit minimum of credits outside the major. Neither of these restrictions is influenced by the proposal. The 60-credit requirement outside the discipline of the major ensures the breadth necessary to achieve a liberal arts education. This proposal relates only to a 48-credit limit in a single discipline that can count toward the 120 credits required for graduation.

Keeler reasoned that the restriction does not influence all majors equally, and the breadth in the liberal arts is satisfied with the 60-credit minimum. The 48-credit limit and 60-credit requirement leaves 12 credits that students are forced to take in a discipline outside the major. He argued that the rule as written prevents students from taking advantage of all the available electives that a major offers.

Ericksen asked if someone could give a brief history of the 48-credit limit. Korth stated that the 48-credit rule has only been in existence under semesters. There was a 40-credit limit under quarters. The major program is still limited to 40 credits. Students cannot redesign a major to have more than 40 credits. Strand stated that it goes back to the early days of the institution. It was set in direct response to the distribution of the general education requirements when a student had to take 15 credits in each of the divisions to satisfy GenEd requirements. Guyotte added that it is one of those things that has been there forever and perhaps has been unexamined. Guyotte stated that people are known to take more than 48 credits in a single major. Music education is an exception—they can have 55. Gooch clarified that Music education is another rule, rather than an exception. Lawrence asked for clarification on whether the change as proposed will result in majors expanding because students always want their major to look stronger and better. Burke added that it suggests that there are additional topics that need to be addressed in the undergraduate program to better prepare students for graduate school.

Angell asked Keeler if the proposal is offered in response to a need in the Physics discipline specifically. Keeler responded that it was a broader response but that he did know students who took courses without getting credit toward graduation for them. DeJager responded that the Scholastic Committee receives requests from students asking for permission to waive the 48-credit limit. The decision has depended on the reason for the request. If an additional course was taken specifically to satisfy a graduate school entrance requirement, the Scholastic Committee has allowed the waiver. It is careful however to remember that the 60-credit requirement was created to provide breadth. If it does not, then the General Education Requirements should be changed rather than allowing more credits in a major discipline.

Rudney stated that the change would be fine unless we then start increasing requirements in the major, eating away at our GenEds. Thoma agreed that if a student wants to go more in depth in a major, especially in preparation for graduate school, it would be good, as long as the number of credits required in a major is not substantially increased. Keeler stated that the proposal simply allows students to choose whether it is in their best interest to take 12 credits in their major's discipline or outside of the major. It does not propose an increase in the required number of credits in a major.

Swanson stated that the UMM Strategic Plan encourages a culture of graduation in 4 years. One concern of getting rid of the 48-credit ceiling is there are students who then might stay around to pick up an extra major or minor that they may be only a few classes short of achieving. Burke asked Swanson if he was saying that people reluctantly leave this place and stay to pick up one more class or minor to keep from graduating. Swanson answered that for reasons such as preparing better for graduate school, marketability or employment some students now stay to pick up a class and might do so even more if the limit is lifted. Strand answered that there will be students who will think that way, but it might also help students graduate because they can stay at 120 and have more freedom with electives.

Gooch asked what needed to be done to move the proposal forward. Guyotte responded that if the Curriculum Committee endorses the proposal, it would then go to the Campus Assembly for approval. Strand added that if the Curriculum Committee chooses to move it forward, there might be some clarification about whether or not it affects current or future students and when it would be effective. Korth answered that since the rule is a loosening of restrictions and cannot harm any student, it should take place immediately.

Burke questioned whether the change may result in more upper-level courses being offered in some disciplines, causing overcrowding across campus.

MOTION: (Gooch/Hinds) To approve the removal of the 48-credit limit of credits in a single discipline that can count toward the 120-credit graduation requirement, effective immediately upon approval by the Campus Assembly.

VOTE: Motion passed (11-0-0)

3. REPORT ON INVENTORY OF STUDENT WRITING AT UMM

Guyotte asked the Division Chairs to orally report on their collecting of a writing inventory. He had asked each division to ask their discipline instructors to supply a list of what types of writing instruction are given in each class, as well as the length of required writing assignments. Ericksen stated that she was still waiting for one Humanities discipline to respond, but the results contradict the assumption that students don't do as much writing on this campus as on other campuses. One of the uses of the results is in the college writing course, where students don't see the point of the class and say that they will never have to write again. The multi-page list of the writing required in courses proves that writing skills would be helpful in many other classes beyond college writing. Ericksen asked people to consider other uses to which the lists can be put. Ukura stated that she hadn't thought of an essay test as writing. Taking an essay exam might be an example to use in college writing, e.g., this is how to prepare for an essay test. Lawrence reported that over 150 courses in the Division of the Social Sciences required writing including short papers and long essays. Rudney reported that Education Division courses include requirements such as writing analysis, curriculum planning, a research paper, and much writing in field experiences. The inventory in the Division of Science and Mathematics also listed over 50 courses with a significant writing component.

Burke asked whether UMM, as an institution, considers tests a different beast from other types of writing. Guyotte

recalled that between the 1980s and 1990s UMM had a requirement for W courses which the Twin Cities campus also developed and retained. In those courses instruction in writing is supposed to be a part of the course, as opposed to simply writing. When UMM had the W courses they required at least 3 pieces of graded written work in which one could be an essay exam.

Burke asked why in exit interviews seniors report so little evidence of writing. Guyotte stated that the NSSE survey shows that UMM students report writing less than other cohorts. Strand recalled that when we were developing the General Education Requirements for semesters, it was recommended and accepted that the majors would be expected to incorporate writing into their courses rather than have the W requirement.

Ukura stated that, from a student perspective, maybe there is a difference in a student's mind between short papers and long papers. Perhaps short papers (fewer than five pages) aren't being considered because some students put them off, write them quickly, and buff them up at the last minute. Perhaps long papers that take time and revisions are more memorable and therefore influence how students respond to the question. Burke stated that some majors require a huge paper in lieu of a final exam. It is common in her major at the end of every junior and senior level class.

Guyotte asked how the Curriculum Committee might serve the campus by reporting or following up on what was found. Hinds stated that a concern was raised that the NSSE survey results suggest there is a problem, but the reports given today demonstrate a quantitative if not qualitative measure that our students are doing a substantial amount of writing. We have an answer. It is evidently an impressive answer. Haugen added that the newest reports on NSSE show that our numbers have improved in most areas.

Ericksen stated that the length of papers was an arguable point because she firmly believes that a 2-page paper is a lot harder to write than a fluff-filled 6-page paper. We should not be concerned about the length of the paper. Swanson stated that the amount of writing students are doing justifies a discussion of further support of writing on campus. Perhaps an expansion of the writing room is warranted.

4. LEARNING OUTCOMES

Guyotte stated that UMM must be able to connect what we do with what students achieve in a more explicit way. The Office of the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost has listed 7 Learning Outcomes which are included in the meeting materials. They are as follows:

Proposed Undergraduate Learning Outcomes

At the time of receiving a bachelor's degree, it is the University's goal that its students:

1. Can identify, define, and solve problems.
2. Can locate and critically evaluate information.
3. Have mastered a body of knowledge and a mode of inquiry.
4. Understand diverse philosophies and cultures within and across societies.
5. Can communicate effectively.
6. Understand the role of creativity, innovation, discovery, and expression across disciplines.
7. Have acquired skills for effective citizenship and life-long learning.

Burke suggested that UMM modify the list to reflect our uniqueness. Guyotte stated that the Curriculum Committee is the logical place for that discussion. If we are to bring something forward to the Campus Assembly so that it can be incorporated into the next catalog, there are some items that we should add to this. We are talking about making promises that we have to deliver upon.

Lawrence stated that she had some ideas about how we might modify the list. The majority of the items measure skills. She suggested splitting them into categories and expanding on how the results will be measured. Burke agreed that we have to have concrete measurable outcomes. Guyotte stated that the first 5 learning outcomes listed are easily quantifiable, but items 6 and 7 are not. He asked for volunteers for a subcommittee to review the list and come up with some alternatives to bring back to the committee for consideration. Burke, Lawrence, and Swanson volunteered.

Strand stated that the list is coming from the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost and appears as if it is an all-University goal list. Guyotte responded that these learning outcomes were endorsed by the Twin Cities Campus Assembly. External forces such as the Higher Learning Commission are interested in this sort of thing. These are fairly global kinds of skills. A broader application of these goals is expected of us but not legislated for us. Guyotte asked the subcommittee to report back to the Curriculum Committee in early December.

Guyotte stated that the agenda for the November 1 meeting will include a proposed new major in environmental studies. Pete Wyckoff will be a guest at that meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 9:00 a.m.
Submitted by Darla Peterson