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UMM CURRICULUM COMMITTEE

MEETING # 7 Minutes

December 6, 2007, 8:00 a.m., Behmler 130

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

Absent: None

Visiting: Bert Ahern, Brenda Boever, Dorothy DeJager, Tom McRoberts, David Roberts, David Swenson

In these minutes: Revisit proposal to remove 48 credit limit in a discipline, Report by the First Year Experience Disappearing Task Force

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Guyotte asked for approval of minutes from November 15, 2007.

MOTION: (Gooch/Rudney) To approve the minutes from November 15.

VOTE: Motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

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

Guyotte welcomed David Roberts and Bert Ahern to comment on the proposal to eliminate the 48-credit limit in a discipline. It was passed at the October 25 meeting of the Curriculum Committee and forwarded to the Executive Committee for consideration at the November 28 meeting of the Campus Assembly. After a long energetic discussion of the Assembly, it was tabled. Guyotte stated that he thought it appropriate that the Curriculum Committee take it up once again to decide whether to send it back to Executive Committee or to leave it on the table.

Roberts explained his support of the proposal by stating the benefit of removing redundant, superfluous requirements, such as the 48-credit limit. UMM's main degree requirement representing breadth is satisfied by the requirement of 60 credits outside the major. The other virtue of the proposal is the freedom it would allow students who are different from one another in terms of plans and interests. Because of the nature of some disciplines, some majors require more than 40 credits in practice. Physics requires 58 credits with an additional 18 credits outside the major discipline from mathematics courses. Most science majors are like that. It seems strange that an occasional student is not allowed to take more than 48 credits in a discipline. Art history requires 40 credits in art history plus additional credits in studio art. In the Social Sciences, economics and management major requirements are split between the two disciplines, so the 48-credit limit does not impinge on them. Roberts added that he would be happy with students who choose to limit themselves to 48 credits, but would advocate for those who would like to take more than 48 credits to strengthen their major.

Bert Ahern then shared his opinion that the committee should either keep the proposal tabled or withdraw the proposal. Ahern urged the committee to authorize a complete review of the General Education program and make changes appropriate from that careful review. UMM did not arrive at our current General Education requirements with accretion here or there but the overall pattern came through careful study and has been revisited on a regular basis. One of the questions to ask is if UMM students are doing what is expected of a B.A. degree. Ahern cautioned the committee against moving from what has been a system where 40% of the credits applying toward the degree can come from one discipline to saying that 50% of the credits toward a degree can come from one discipline. That is a significant shift from breadth to depth.

Hinds stated that there is a real difference among divisions. Science and Mathematics feels that this would be an important and positive move. Humanities and the Social Sciences are of the opposite opinion. Disciplines were set in concrete decades ago. We now talk about supporting interdisciplinary majors and the creation of them on this campus. We need to look at this issue outside the division structure.

Strand stated that she agreed with the proposal because students should have the freedom to choose what they want the 20 credits of elective courses to be. Korth added that requirements are best stated in positive terms, e.g., what UMM wants our students to do and what can be achieved by that. Taking 60 credits outside of a discipline is stated in a positive way. Telling students what they can't do with the 20 credits of electives seems like a strangely negative statement. If we really mean 72 credits must be outside the major, why do we say 60?

Roberts stated that he began contrasting breadth and depth and found that there is some blur. In the math world there is a big split between applied mathematics and pure mathematics. The math discipline at UMM aims for some breadth and includes classes such as history of math, which is more history than math. The 40 credits required in the math major are not 40 credits of math focused in one direction. There is breadth already built into the major.

Thoma asked why the 48-credit limit was placed on a discipline rather than on a major. DeJager answered that majors were purer in 1960, and the tradition has continued. Rudney stated that she would be in support of the original proposal. The idea of choice makes sense but a danger that might come with a trend toward requiring the 12 elective credits to be in a discipline for a major is that students may not be able to complete a major in four years.

Guyotte asked for a straw poll which reaffirmed the previous vote of approval. He then announced that the committee would meet again on December 10 at 2:00 PM to revisit this agenda item. Ericksen stated that it appeared the discussion was not tied to a deadline and asked why it couldn't wait until spring semester. Guyotte responded that there were other agenda items that would require an additional meeting anyway, so a decision on whether to defer the agenda item to spring semester could occur at the next meeting.

3. Report by the First Year Experience (FYE) Disappearing Task Force

Dave Swenson, chair of the FYE Disappearing Task Force gave a report on the First Year Seminar (FYS) portion of the FYE. Swenson stated that it became clear from discussions and surveys that FYS is the biggest concern of FYE. Since FYS falls under the overview of the Curriculum Committee, the task force will put together notes and a report for the Curriculum Committee to review. The task force will also suggest that other institutions' best practices be considered. The task force's hope is to build a roadmap to guide the Curriculum Committee. Swenson distributed a handout which shared thoughts from consultant Randy Swing, who visited UMM fall semester and is an expert on the first year experience. Swing interviewed faculty, students, and staff on campus and found the largest complaint to be that there is inconsistency between the sections of the course. Students are frustrated because for some it is a blow-off class and for others it is significantly more work than expected. Swing recommended full analysis of the syllabi of the course. He also challenged the concept of the necessity of the FYS. It's the opinion of the task force that FYS is important but could be changed to small group discussions in critical thinking. Swenson shared some key points that were obvious to the task force:

It is clear that the common experience piece of the FYS is not a common experience.

Everyone overwhelmingly hates the jamboree.

The Convocation relates to some sections of the course, but not all.

First year students don't feel they are challenged in the way seniors do.

Faculty can't develop a rigorous course because so many things have been added to FYS.

Ukura stated that the task force is trying to come up with ways to connect students in ways not related to FYS. There are ways other institutions do magnet courses, writing requirements, and designated first year courses that fit with the General Education program.

Gooch commended the task force on doing a good job. Lawrence added that the task force received comments from a lot of FYS students. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data goes back three years and includes questions such as "do you feel you were challenged the way you think you should?" A record number of students are not getting through the first year. Olson-Loy added that the NSSE data covers three years: 2002, 2004, and 2006. It shows that we may not be teaching our first year students how to be successful students. Students think they will do well and will have an A or B average. Then they discover that they did not know how to study in high school.

Haugen stated that Randy Swing believed a successful first year seminar should not be mandatory because it lessens faculty enthusiasm and reduces the commitment of the students. Guyotte responded that sometimes it is necessary to have a program that everyone takes but not everyone wants. The Curriculum Committee must keep in mind that there are concerns it needs to address if it decides to continue the FYS program. If it decides not to continue the program, it must decide how to address the goals of the program without offering the FYS.

Ukura noted that when looking at best practices two distinct camps appeared: one focused on academic rigor and another on a common course. Others offered a type of university 101 college transition class teaching students how to be students. UMM falls in the middle of the two camps. We are trying to do both and it might be better if we split them out in some way not tied to FYS.

Swenson stated that the task force will bring its report to the chancellor at the end of January.

Meeting adjourned at 9:00 a.m.

Submitted by Darla Peterson