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Curriculum Committee Minutes

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## **UMM CURRICULUM COMMITTEE**

### **MEETING # 10 Minutes**

**February 26, 2008, 3:00 p.m., Behmler 130**

**Present:** Roland Guyotte (chair), Escillia Allen, Ferolyn Angell, Van Gooch, Michael Korth, Judy Kuechle, Pareena Lawrence, Jenny Nellis, Gwen Rudney, Nate Swanson, Laura Thoma, Kim Ukura, Nancy Helsper, Jeri Mullin, Clare Strand

**Absent:** Harold Hinds, Sara Haugen

**Visiting:** Brenda Boever, David Swenson

*In these minutes: First-Year Experience (FYE) Disappearing Task Force Report, Educational Development Program (EDP) Subcommittee*

### **1. FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE (FYE) DISAPPEARING TASK FORCE REPORT**

[Please note: It may be helpful to note that the following people also served on the FYE Disappearing Task Force: Gooch, Ukura, Boever.]

Guyotte welcomed guest David Swenson, chair of the First-Year Experience (FYE) Disappearing Task Force, and asked him to report its recommendations regarding First-Year Seminar (FYS) and to field questions from members of the Committee. Guyotte asked Swenson if the Task Force had presented its findings to other campus committees. Swenson replied that he had not been invited to do.

Swenson explained that the report consists of nine pages plus supporting materials. The report represents a full semester of work by representatives of a core group of people. The report consists of recommendations on how to improve programs related to the FYE. Best practices were considered as well as the campus history of the programs.

The Task Force found that FYE has been trendy in higher education lately. UMM's first mandatory attempt at addressing something for the first-year students was in 1967. We were far ahead of the groove. Strand stated that it wasn't a required class in terms of students registering for it and getting grades. She added that in 1961, UMM offered an orientation class which carried several different titles, one of them being "Study Skills." Guyotte responded that we still offer such a class titled "Learning to Learn."

Swenson went on to say that the Task Force divided into three subcommittees which focused on 1) institutional data, 2) best practices, and 3) FYS. Based on the resulting data, a series of recommendations were created. First and foremost, the Task Force agreed that to be successful, the FYE Committee needs a coordinator or point person who is accountable for and has the authority to make sure programs are developed and supported. The FYE Committee and its programs would involve developing pedagogical approaches to address first-year students' needs. The coordinator position should report directly to the dean. Swenson stated that in a time of budget constraints, it might be difficult for Morris to create the structure that would require hiring a coordinator. Even so, the Task Force recommended it because they believe that it is essential for recruitment and retention of first-year students.

Swenson stated that the report's recommendations also address residential life and other common experiences that could be reviewed or created at UMM. The Task Force believes that the U Portfolio system could be better utilized by students. Other recommendation included using upper-class students in mentoring roles, and creating a "Cougar Compass," which would highlight essential functions that students have to complete before they start at UMM. It would be a manual that would become the first-year student's guide and could include things like the student code of conduct that they might pay attention to if it were presented in a more meaningful way.

The topic that came up in almost every discussion of the Task Force, was the First-Year Seminar. Towards that end, the Task Force looked at it historically, as it currently exists, and separated into its various components, keeping in mind how it relates to the Strategic Plan. Many of the recommendations could be possible but might not be feasible. Most immediately, based on overwhelming negative opinion by faculty and students, is the recommendation to eliminate the FYS Jamboree and the FYS convocation speaker. These two components did not appear relevant to all sections of FYS

and have required a huge expenditure of funds.

The Task Force recommends that FYS faculty develop a teaching methodology that would better connect with students. The Task Force has found that our current model is very faculty driven and pertinent to our student body and our institution. However, the expectations of the faculty should be made clear. The Task Force recommended a lab to accompany FYS to remove certain activities from the classroom portion of FYS and allow other staff members to address those needs. An entire FYS class could meet on a regular basis, or it could divide into labs that would be independent of the classroom. Basic study skills and socio-relationship pieces are necessary for FYE, but not necessarily something that all FYS faculty members are able or willing to teach.

The common theme in FYS was questioned by the Task Force. Universally, the Task Force understands and supports the need to address diversity, but it does not believe that FYS should be the only place in the curriculum where that is addressed. Lawrence asked if the Task Force was suggesting that FYS be changed to add general education requirements as a means of expanding its purpose. [At present, FYS is a GenEd requirement itself.] Swenson answered that the pros and cons of doing it was discussed. Changing FYS from a two-credit course to a four-credit course would create difficulties in faculty teaching loads and coverage. The Task Force believed it was an excellent idea but was not sure how feasible it would be. The Task Force noticed that a common argument of FYS students is “Why do I have to take this? And, could it meet some general education requirements?”

Boever stated that the Task Force also looked at the idea of creating magnet courses in each discipline which would provide ways to study in a specific discipline, research tools, and research expectations. Swenson added that the Task Force is aware that such courses would affect faculty teaching loads, with the burden much stronger in some divisions than others.

Strand suggested that students ask “What is the purpose of the Liberal Arts and what role does this piece contribute to the Liberal Arts,” instead of “Why do I have to take this and can I check it off the list?”

Swenson stated that linking FYS with other courses was discussed. At other colleges where it was linked to courses, the FYS had a much stronger approval rating among students. A common link is with a college writing course. It bridges the two courses, provides greater writing support to faculty, and provides greater content for students in the college writing course. Strand stated that a third of UMM students exempt out of college writing. Ukura asked why students are allowed to exempt out of college writing. Strand answered that it is because we don't have faculty to cover all of the sections. Swenson stated that linking college writing courses to FYS would require assistance to FYS faculty members who are not trained in evaluating and critiquing writing. Nellis recalled having discussions about that in past years. Kuechle added that it was discussed at a Fall Faculty Retreat. Guyotte pointed out that, having recently read the written comments by students rating FYS, the most severe comment was about how hard the instructor was on the student's writing.

Boever stated that we have a lot of the pieces of a really strong FYE already in place it's just not cohesive and obvious. Swenson added that it appears that all of the FYE events or programs are scheduled during the fall semester. There is very little focused on first-year students in the spring semester. Strand commented that annual planning is a spring event. Lawrence answered that annual planning comes too late in the spring to have an affect on students who are leaving. Those students make up their minds about leaving by February or March.

Boever stated that some colleges use a system where students are assigned the instructor of their FYS course as their adviser. Such a change would have to have the support of divisions and faculty. Now we have many majors that are lockstep and if a mistake is made in planning, it could cause the student to stay an extra year. Guyotte added that it would also entail a greatly increased advising load for faculty. If one teaches two sections of FYS with an enrollment of 17 in each section, it would add 34 students to whatever upper-division advisees that instructor might have.

Thoma stated that requiring faculty to advise all students in their FYS sections might detract faculty who might otherwise have offered to teach FYS. Faculty members are attracted to FYS for various reasons. From a student perspective, Thoma added that she would prefer an instructor who was very enthusiastic about teaching.

Strand stated that the concept of having a lab and the difficulty of scheduling them might be challenging. Lawrence answered that they would not be labs in the traditional sense. The idea was that there are a whole series of things we would like students to experience, but they don't go for it or don't show up. If a credit was attached to an experience or event, and if it was made mandatory in order to gain the credit, students would come. Ukura added that similar things are being done now in some majors, such as mandatory attendance at concerts or lectures. It could be set up where there is a choice of events or experiences from which students choose four things over the semester that would count as their lab credit outside the classroom. Boever stated that it is just a suggestion that they would do it outside a class time. Music has a concert attendance requirement for majors.

Nellis stated that she recognized the things brought up in the report as things we have tried at some point in the past. We did them, and it didn't work. She added that she taught FYS and enjoyed it enormously. The course was very much related to the visual arts and students were required to attend 10 or 12 events on campus. They had to turn in 3x5 cards telling what event they went to and answering several questions about the event. The class had discussions about the events the students attended. It worked very well. On the other hand, some students choose not to participate, no matter how it's presented to them or how appealing the offer is. At some point we just have to decide whether we want to continue FYS and realize there will always be a fairly vocal percentage of students who don't get it. Nellis stated that she teaches those students anyway, knowing that she is teaching them for the future, i.e., they don't like it when they are doing it, they don't give good evaluations of the course, they complain the whole time they are taking the course, but she tells them that this is for their good and by the time they are a senior, they will get it.

Angell asked if the lab idea would address the questions students have who don't have a clue how to study, what academic choices to make, and where to go for help. There are a lot of resource questions throughout all this. Rudney stated that the lab recommendation could be a problem when some students already know how to do things that would be required. It would not make students any happier to force them to do something. She did like the suggestion that students would be offered a selection of things to select from. We have to wrestle with the fundamental issue regarding FYS that we need to have the instructors like it, be good at it, and have time for it.

Korth stated that the Task Force has done a good job of writing down issues. He noticed that the same issues are coming back after having been brought up ten years ago. We did not adequately deal with them then, and may not be adequately dealing with them now. There are contradictory goals and objectives. We need to identify the purpose, goals, and expected outcomes first. Only then will we be able to answer questions in a coherent fashion.

Guyotte asked the Task Force members present why they didn't vote just to get rid of FYS. Ukura answered that the Task Force recognized there is something valuable about having students in at least one small class during their first year. UMM has a reputation for small class sizes. That is not the first impression when a student enters a large introduction class. FYS makes it true for first-year students. That promise would not be met if FYS were gone during the first semester. If there was a way to fulfill the promise without doing it in an FYS, we wouldn't need it. Guyotte added that there is a value in providing students with the opportunity to attend a small class with a senior faculty member their first year. Gooch stated that he has always liked FYS. Students comment on the specifics negatively in their evaluations, but the small class size and student interaction are positive comments from students.

Boever stated that one of the other things the Task Force really wanted to consider was that the students are provided with a common experience their first year and they are able to bond with a small group and a faculty member, giving them a sense of community and unity on campus.

Nellis stated that she wondered whether the place FYS went wrong might have been when it became a required course. She recalled a seminar model that was used years ago in which faculty were given an opportunity to teach a book or some topic of interest to them to a small group of students who wanted to be there. That was a better process. It satisfied the notion that the entire FYS class should do something that bonds or brings them together. Rather than make the recommended changes, she would be in favor of bringing back the old seminars. Instead of coercing faculty into teaching FYS, it could be presented as an opportunity to teach a small seminar on a topic they would like to share with students. It would not be mandatory for faculty members and they could choose the course content. When Inquiry started, it was a writing-based course. Faculty members were expected to grade writing whether they wanted to or not. Teaching the course was not fun for the faculty, and if it's not fun for them, it's not fun for the students.

Allen asked how large the FYS class size is. Strand answered that it is fifteen. She asked the students present if they took FYS, whether they felt they bonded with their classmates, whether they felt they experienced a sense of community, and whether they bonded with the faculty member who taught them. Ukura answered that she did take the class. It fit her major and was a good experience. Thoma also recalled having a good experience. Her class was pertinent because it covered life issues. She bonded with her classmates and instructor and had good discussions. She remembered thinking that this is what college should be. She added that she still talks to her FYS classmates. Swanson stated that, unlike the other students, he had a mediocre FYS experience. He is currently a good friend with one person from the class. He didn't take any other courses from the faculty member who taught the course. Overall, the experience was not something that he looks back on with nostalgia.

[Strand interrupted the discussion to collect the directed study forms so that she can have them redacted and returned to committee members because she did not want people to carry around forms containing confidential student information.]

Dave Swenson stated that one thing that FYE consultant Randy Swing said in his notes was that UMM may not need a FYS program. However, it should not be eliminated without finding another way to address the need to give students the skills they need to succeed.

Korth replied that Swenson had just stated one goal as giving students the skills they need to succeed. Dave Swenson added that another goal is to think critically and be prepared for a level of coursework students are going to be getting at UMM. We could eliminate FYS, but not without bringing the first-year needs into the larger curriculum. Korth answered that if we are not achieving those goals in FYS, we would not be harmed by dropping it. Dave responded that dropping it would not help retention. Korth replied that retention would be another goal to add to the list.

Thoma suggested having a discussion in the future about what common experience we want students to experience. We are encouraging people to be diverse and should also be sure we're not putting people into a box. As a student, Thoma went to a good high school where she learned critical thinking skills and found it repetitive and boring to repeat the training when she got to college. She went on to say that discrepancies between people's needs should be addressed without holding other people back. Thoma suggested that FYS be optional and highly encouraged, but not mandatory so that people should not have to take it or teach it. Guyotte cautioned that he has observed as a faculty member that students that come to the voluntary review sessions are often the ones who don't need it.

Strand stated that the Scholastic Committee is currently taking a look at the Learning to Learn class. Students who don't think they need it later find that they really do need it. We should make training information available to students in a format where they can move ahead if they already know the answer.

Thoma agreed that if the need is not apparent in the student's first year, training should be available in the second year. Guyotte added that some would say that our major and advising tend to bear this out. Our advising scores are higher in the major than in GenEd. Thoma stated that once a student develops good relationships with faculty members, they can help the student figure out things pertinent to the individual student. Faculty advisers answer questions but students often second guess that they know what's good for the student. Dave Swenson asked where the line is between what is the student's responsibility and what is the institution's responsibility.

Guyotte thanked Dave Swenson and the other members of the FYE Disappearing Task Force for their report and discussion with the Committee.

## **2. EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (EDP) SUBCOMMITTEE**

Guyotte asked for three volunteers to serve on this year's EDP Subcommittee. Kuechle, Gooch, and Allen volunteered. The deadline for EDP applications is March 28. The subcommittee will review the applications and present its recommendations at an April meeting of the Curriculum Committee.

Meeting adjourned at 4:02 p.m.  
Submitted by Darla Peterson