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UMM CURRICULUM COMMITTEE

2008-09 MEETING #21 Minutes

April 22, 2009, 8:00 a.m., Behmler 130

Present: Cheryl Contant (chair), Mark Collier, Janet Ericksen, Van Gooch, Michael Korth, Judy Kuechle, Pareena Lawrence, Alex Murphy, Dennis Stewart, Brenda Boever, Clare Strand, Nancy Helsper

Absent: Donovan Hanson, Sara Haugen, Mike McBride, Axl McChesney, Gwen Rudney

Visiting: Jayne Blodgett, Jeri Squier, Jeff Ratliff-Crain

In these minutes: First Year Seminar Discussion; Continued discussion of Student Learning Outcomes.

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION (Ericksen/Gooch): to approve the April 15, 2009 minutes.

Motion passed by unanimous voice vote with one correction noted.

2. FIRST YEAR SEMINAR DISCUSSION

Contant welcomed Assistant Dean Ratliff-Crain and asked him to begin the conversation about First-Year Seminar (FYS) and the First-Year Experience (FYE) by sharing some background and context, in preparation for next year when he will return with suggestions and ideas for conversation.

Ratliff-Crain began by reminding the committee of the work of the FYE Disappearing Task Force whose report was released in January 2008. A lot of the ground work has already been done by that group, including a visit by Randy Swing who spoke to the campus about FYE programs on other campuses. One observation he made was that academically the FYE and FYS are too often inappropriately equated. FYS is a component of FYE. Another observation is that UMM does a lot of things with first-year students, but not in a coordinated way. Ratliff-Crain stated that when he looks at what UMM is currently doing for first-year students, he found components and some level of communication between them, but no core goals and reasoning behind how they connect. FYE and FYS are the starting points.

The FYE does not begin at student orientation or at the beginning of fall semester classes. The FYE begins at the point the student commits to UMM. The registration process is explained to students before they come on campus to register. The orientation process is explained to students before they come to campus for orientation. The students are told what will happen their first semester, and throughout the year. This is a critical time for new students in terms of transition academically, socially, and emotionally, and it affects the freshmen/sophomore retention rate. What happens the first year sets the stage for how the student will succeed in subsequent years. From their first experiences with UMM up to Thanksgiving is a critical time period because conversations between students when they go back home over the Thanksgiving Break impacts retention. There are a lot of reasons to look at the FYE.

The FYE Disappearing Task Force had a number of recommendations regarding the FYS, although they did not set out to look at the FYS *per se*. The Curriculum Committee's focus is to look at courses and content, but there has not been a thorough review of FYS in quite some time. Much of feedback the FYE Task Force received was regarding the FYS. Programs like the FYS have a limited life span. In Ratliff-Crain's experience at UMM, such programs last about four years and then they fall apart. FYS has exceeded the lifespan of its current iteration. There is evidence to suggest that the experience is important for the connection to the college and academic experience for students. The task force concluded that UMM needs something like the FYS, and a task force or sub-committee should look at the development of the FYS for the next iteration, keeping in mind UMM's goals, culture, and resources. Historically, FYS has had ideals that have not necessarily reflected the culture and structure of the campus. That needs to be taken into account. Also, any such course needs a sunset period. If history of the FYS shows that the course needs to die out and resurrect every four years, then it should be planned in that way and a structure should be put in place to ensure that it is done. UMM has a history of waiting until the current FYS iteration is dead and rotting before a decision is made to replace it.

The FYE Disappearing Task Force made a suggestion to eliminate the Jamboree. That was done this year. They also suggested creating lab sections and eliminating or re-evaluating the current Human Diversity theme. Those changes could not be implemented within the current structure because they would affect resource issues and the general education program. The general education program needs to be looked at as well. FYS does not stand alone, but needs to be reviewed in the context of GenEd.

Beyond FYS there are numerous academic roles that have been lax. UMM has a lot of information to offer students, but it is difficult to locate on the Web if they don't know where to look. Also, it is assumed that students know about the importance of the general education program in the curriculum, or that they know about the FYS. That isn't the case. They hear about the FYS and the general education program the day they come in for registration. They are introduced to them as a *requirement* and that is it. No explanation is given to students as to the importance of the courses and how they fit in the liberal arts education. The current Web pages make it very hard to find that core information, and could be better.

The preregistration materials that go out to students from separate offices such as ORL and Admissions, will now be integrated into a new student guide as one single resource. Again, because of a number of reasons, no academic information is included in it. It's about registration, but not about courses and programs. Ratliff-Crain is now talking with Admissions about the goal of moving the resource guide to the Web and including the academic information as part of that resource, so the information is brought more upfront in communicating to students.

Students who have been accepted with conditions have been notified of the conditions for enrollment (e.g., no more than 14 credits and take the Mastering Skills course). These students receive the information and come in for registration. The adviser is given the sheet with conditions and relies on it to register the student. The plan was to help the student be successful, but what was missing was the dialog with the student. Another issue has been matching the students' needs with the appropriate courses. If, for instance, a student has a term with no exams, the Mastering Skills course would not be helpful that term. This year the students will receive one-on-one assessment and assistance in registering for appropriate courses. A screening discussion tool will be used to place them. Also, a mentoring program is being developed for undecided students who are academically unprepared. They will be paired with better-prepared students.

Orientation has become a much better experience with the coordination of ORL and Student Activities over the last two years. Academics are not represented in Orientation. Beyond Orientation, the FYE is a work in progress. There is FYS and not a lot of other organized tools. ORL does some programming geared for first-year students. There are a lot of courses commonly taken by first-year students that might be used to connect students back to learning and how to read and study.

The ACE office is now two years old. It was established to better connect students to opportunities in a one-stop setting. The MAP program is geared toward juniors, and the UROP is available for upperclassmen, but students need to connect to research activities during their freshman and sophomore years. The Twin Cities is currently investigating opportunities for students along those lines.

Classes don't have an identity at UMM, i.e., students do not think of themselves as the class of 2011. Most residential liberal arts schools do have that identity. Last year there was a freshman event that was moderately attended, and there was a pancake feed at the end of spring semester. But nothing is done in the fall. This year the student break was geared toward first-year students by completing a photo op and reinforcing class identity. There must be other things that need to be done.

These have all been random ideas in many aspects as a way of identifying the FYE in the context of where we are at. Ratliff-Crain attended the Transformational Leadership Program (TLP) in the Twin Cities. It is a training program on how to bring about change. They apply research methodology to the way decisions are made. Much of what is done in committees and task forces is to throw out the best ideas and opinions of the members. The program is training people to do better decision-making based on more carefully structured approaches. What he hopes to do is bring about small groups of people to take pieces of the FYE and FYS and start to analyze and work through some parts. The goal is to better coordinate them.

Contant stated that conversations about FYS have included throwing it out, abandoning it, trying to find some suitable replacement, or changing it to a small class setting. There have also been conversations about building FYS around the four themes of UMM's mission statement, to ensure students would have some understanding of one or more of the themes. She agreed with Ratliff-Crain that the current FYS has met its useful life in its current iterations—mostly by practice rather than by decision. Most instructors have moved away from the Human Diversity theme. That is just one element of the bigger FYE concept. The first year is a big transition for students, but if students are given a good start their first year, their success can be ensured. The FYE is a work in progress: Ratliff-Crain's work through the summer and early in the fall will involve people in conversation, dialog and debate. The current FYS will continue in fall 2009 with an expectation that it may not continue in the same iteration in fall 2010.

Stewart asked if UMM provides a similar experience for transfer students. Ratliff-Crain answered that the experience is less developed for transfer students. If they come in the fall they take part in orientation as much as they want. He is working with the director of student activities to develop more parallel events since transfer students are coming in at different places than new students. Transfers in the spring don't have as much. Strand stated transfer students work individually with Admissions or the transfer specialist. Transfers have a special registration that's geared toward them. Ratliff-Crain added that UMM is moving toward an increased number of transfer students. From the get-go it must be recognized that their needs are different. Boever stated that there is a new student orientation program offered at the beginning of spring semester, which is poorly attended by new students and seldom by transfer students.

Murphy asked what Ratliff-Crain thought the perceived benefits of class cohesion would be. Ratliff-Crain answered that it would get students connected to the campus itself with a sense of group identify and community. Every campus has its own culture, for example, most people at UMM do not walk around thinking of themselves as cougars. How students respond to that is a little unclear. At the moment there is no reminder where students might be. We are trying to reinforce graduation in 4 years, and class identity might help in keeping students on track. Lawrence added that empirical studies show the four year graduation rate and retention rate of class identity is really high. Ratliff-Crain added that it is important for a lot of the students that they graduate with their class.

Ratliff-Crain concluded by requesting that the committee provide a clear explanation as to the reasoning for GenEd and the liberal arts core. Boever stated that the presentation that Contant made at the FYS convocation in August was a good explanation of the liberal arts. Contant thanked Ratliff-Crain and invited him to stay for the related discussion of student learning outcomes.

3. STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES (Continued Discussion)

Contant explained the changes in the revised version of student learning outcomes in the agenda packet. The first page stays the same. Page two includes the following changes: an addition under #1 of the words "in-depth study in a particular field" and under #3, "understanding of" was replaced by "an awareness of." Collier stated that it is weaker to say "awareness" and should remain "understanding." Even "understanding" is too weak and should be reconsidered. Cheryl stated that the last page comments on the process and effect of the learning outcomes on the campus. She provided four options of how the learning outcomes might be presented to campus assembly.

Contant stated that, in the interim, Korth sent out a document to the committee members regarding some suggestions for changing the learning outcomes. Korth explained that there were now two different proposals on the table to clarify. As he looked at the LEAP learning outcomes with modifications made in the course of the committee's discussions, he found many of them to be difficult to implement in a simple fashion. They should reflect what faculty members expect students to know, understand, or do. Many items on the last page of his version are simpler, clearer, and make better learning outcomes for that reason. He stated that he would urge people to consider adopting it or something like it.

Collier asked what LEAP is. Contant explained that in 2002 a group of university leaders, faculty and accrediters developed the initial version. Their argument at that time was addressing the context of higher education. There was a divergence between liberal arts colleges and big public institutions that have programs at the undergraduate level. They found that there were essential learning outcomes out of every educational process and they as educators thought the

learning outcomes were something very important to delineate. Also, liberal arts responsibilities are placed in high value in our culture. The learning outcomes were produced in a publication called Greater Expectations. Then they went through another iteration in 2004, 2005, and in 2006 somebody said if we are moving away from vocations, and liberal arts is about non-vocational learning, what do employers think about the learning outcomes? A study was done to see if employers thought they should be replaced with vocational outcomes to be of value to employers and society. The survey results and questions are on Korth's proposal in the box. The results of that survey suggest that employers corroborate the learning outcomes as being important to them. That's the history of LEAP. It is not unique to the liberal arts, but it is central to liberal arts colleges.

Lawrence stated that she disagreed with Korth because the learning outcomes are too specific. There are only a few courses that could meet them. Ericksen agreed that current courses would need to change significantly to address the learning outcomes in Korth's version. If that version were approved, it would require a much more clearly defined set of courses everyone would be required to take. Korth answered that he expects it will change the GenEd program. UMM's GenEd program should not control the learning outcomes. Lawrence commented that Korth's version seemed much more specific and not as articulate. Korth stated that he found it interesting that in order to test the learning outcomes, there was a need to make them specific. This is how they were made specific for that testing. Collier commented that he was worried about the way LEAP is pushing toward. The idea that it is necessary to change UMM's criteria to satisfy employers is going so far away from the liberal arts education. UMM moved away from the Twin Cities version because they did not capture UMM's unique perspective. Contant clarified that the employers' surveys were done to determine if the LEAP learning outcomes were antagonistic to employers, not to validate them. Much to the surprise of the academic community, employers were less interested in skills needed in the first year on the job and more interested in career-based, life-long skills that the liberal arts education offers. That was the purpose of using the employer survey. It was not used to let employers suggest or determine the outcomes.

Gooch stated that if he were on an assessment committee, he would find the original version more difficult to deal with. He could easily answer the questions that Korth presented.

Contant stated that language and arts are lost on the version that Korth presented. She concluded that the committee is not yet ready to vote. The timetable can be modified once the learning outcomes are brought forward.

Adjourned 9:05 a.m.

Submitted by Darla Peterson