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UMM CURRICULUM COMMITTEE

2008-09 MEETING #22 Minutes

May 6, 2009, 8:00 a.m., Behmler 130

Present: Cheryl Contant (chair), Mark Collier, Janet Ericksen, Van Gooch, Donovan Hanson, Michael Korth, Judy Kuechle, Pareena Lawrence, Mike McBride, Alex Murphy, Gwen Rudney, Dennis Stewart, Brenda Boever, Sara Haugen, Clare Strand, Nancy Helsper

Absent: Axl McChesney

Visiting: Jayne Blodgett, Talia Earle, Elizabeth Thoma

In these minutes: Program Change to Environmental Studies Major; Continuing Discussion of Student Learning Outcomes.

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION (Rudney/McBride): to approve the April 22, 2009 minutes.

Motion passed by unanimous voice vote with one correction noted.

2. PROGRAM CHANGE IN ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES MAJOR

Contant explained that the proposed change is an addition of one course (Soc 3112) to the list of electives for the Social Sciences aspect of the Environmental Studies major.

MOTION (Lawrence/McBride): to approve the addition of Soc 3112 to the list of electives for the Social Sciences aspect of the Environmental Studies major.

VOTE: Motion passed (10-0-0)

3. CONTINUED DISCUSSION OF STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Contant stated that she was hoping that today's discussion would result in a first-draft proposal that can be used in the process next fall of gathering input from other parts of the campus. Two objectives are to agree on a set of learning outcomes that can be considered the first draft, and to come up with a process to measure them. AAC&U sent a mailing stating that 80% of college campuses in the country have learning outcomes, and 60% have a process in place to measure the learning outcomes.

Contant asked the committee members whether they preferred to come up with several sets of learning outcomes for discussion, or a single version. Lawrence answered that there should be one set. It will be modified and will be less complicated to have a series of modifications of one document. She added that as many campus venues as possible should have a chance to weigh in on them. Contant agreed and stated that she planned on bringing the discussion to discipline coordinators, division meetings, MCSA, and open forums with invited faculty, staff, and students. McBride stated that an open forum would be the best venue to solicit student opinions, as long as it is well advertised. Lawrence added that there is a better chance for good attendance if the advertisement targets a specific audience, such as students or staff, rather than just calling it an "open forum."

Ericksen stated that she anticipates that people will ask what these learning outcomes will mean in practice, and we should be prepared to answer that question. Contant stated that whatever is decided today can be worked on over the summer, to bring some context back to this committee in the fall, before the forums and campus discussions are scheduled.

Strand asked if it would make sense to send a formal request to committees such as the Assessment of Student Learning Committee, asking them to respond. Kuechle added that discipline coordinators should also receive a formal request.

Contant stated that input by the Student Support Services or Academic Support Committee would also be valuable if the agreed-upon document ends up with a co-curricular aspect to it.

Rudney suggested presenting the learning outcomes as a tree showing how it all fits. For example, we have our mission statement. From that we have broad goals, and then we get into more measurable things across many different constituents, and finally the course level. All of these things make up the assessment tree. Many times there is this other level where we have broader goals/outcomes that people can grasp and say it makes sense, and then the next level is where people ask how this is measurable. We need to be sure we can clarify it in our minds and be prepared to answer the question.

Collier suggested we create a Web page where we can put the current draft with a sign-in where people can use their X.500 number and give input. Rudney added that people need to understand that input can be heard and considered and respected, but it may not be included in the final result.

Strand asked if a task force will go to all of the forums and do the final report. Contant stated that the make-up of the task force will be determined in the fall. Some members going off the committee might want to help out on the task force.

Lawrence asked if this is a campus initiative only or if we are going to ask any external constituents like alumni. Strand stated that at the very least they could be told about the Web page and be asked to comment, although they would have to have an X.500 to do so. Kuechle stated that the chancellor's advisory group and the alumni board could look at it, but we should not ask all alumni to look at it. Stewart stated that if a truly external evaluation is wanted, the two groups mentioned are still connected with UMM. Lawrence mentioned that people must be familiar with UMM. Contant stated that it's hard to go to a national conference on higher education and not be hit with opinions or presentations on the topic. She asked if it would be worth the time to talk with a few schools on the telephone to get some input and feedback from external people familiar with higher education and learning outcomes.

Collier stated that it would be helpful to tie the discussion of learning outcomes to broader goals of a liberal arts education and UMM's specific goals. He suggested that the philosophy colloquium next year could have lunches with speakers about these issues. That's tangentially related to learning outcomes. We are raising questions about what we should be teaching and what students should be learning. Is that what we want to be doing? Strand added that our commencement speaker could talk about that. Collier answered that the timeframe might not allow that. Contant stated that she is afraid we won't have the learning outcomes in place by the 2010 re-accreditation site visit. We could have some learning outcomes and continue then to have discussions and amendments.

Haugen stated that we talked a little about needing to revisit the general education program. This is a building block. Lawrence stated that it's all about how you frame it. The GenEd program would fit right into the tree Rudney talked about. Already the team that has worked on this has analyzed the LEAP outcomes and those standards. We also have spent thousands of hours on the higher education standards, a set of external standards we can compare our institution to. We have that capability.

Gooch stated that he was really worried about sending it out to all of the people and expecting a nice coherent document as a result. We at this table can't come to an agreement. All of the people are going to look to see if their program is in there, kind of like a pork barrel. A mess may come out of this.

Lawrence asked if this has to be unanimously approved by the campus. Contact answered that it did not. She asked what alternative Gooch would suggest. He answered that the alternative is to have a Web site requesting input, and then this committee bringing it to campus assembly for a vote. Having it go to individual groups that are going to only look at parts that are really important to them, is not helpful. Collier answered that the same thing will happen at a campus assembly meeting.

Contant stated that if that happens, it would be sent back to the curriculum committee and we would work on it again. There would be a paper ballot vote between two alternatives. One would be to not have learning outcomes, which she feared would be the winner. Rudney stated that it isn't about gathering fresh, new input. It's about explaining to people

what's been done already and people will understand it isn't about starting from scratch, but getting them to understand the purpose and assessment issues so they aren't surprised. They can think better about them with structure and information. The work of the Strategic Task Force provided a good model.

Haugen stated that we should start with the assumption that not everyone will know why we are doing learning outcomes. Lawrence added that we should also have a timeline. Contant agreed and added that we need a single, negotiated text. The first proposal will include the purpose and framework at the beginning.

Collier stated that the committee could vote on the two versions before it (the LEAP version and the Korth revision), or we could come up with a compromise. Stewart stated that a third option would be to go with the original Twin Cities version. Collier stated that a fourth option would be a revised Twin Cities version. Stewart added that a fifth option is to not have a learning outcomes document.

Collier stated that a possible avenue of compromise is to incorporate some of Korth's suggestions into LEAP as further ways to measure. Lawrence suggested that Korth summarize critical things that are different between the two versions. Korth answered that they were all mapped in the LEAP document. His intention was not to propose these as a final document, but to show that LEAP document outcomes weren't really outcomes. He had rephrased them as outcomes as he saw them described in the LEAP document. He stated that he would like to see clearer phrasing on what is being measured and what students will do or know, not what they are going to study.

Ericksen stated that when she looks at integrated learning, it doesn't say what they are going to do. We could leave the phrase vague in the learning outcomes but be more specific in the measurements. Korth answered that if you leave the learning outcomes in the former stage, then it requires another document to translate that into measurable learning outcomes. It's almost like writing a GenEd program. Ericksen stated that the first two areas are clear. "Knowledge of" is clear. Korth replied that it is too big and broad. What do we want them to know? Ericksen answered that should only be articulated in the majors. Korth stated that we can measure that a student has a major. Then why doesn't it say have a major? Lawrence answered because the purpose of a major is to have in-depth knowledge. There is something to say about articulation of ideas. Ericksen added that the goal is two-sided. We don't just have a major. We have a major and a GenEd program. A lot of schools don't have that. We have a major as well as breadth. If we start listing everything that Korth suggests, we have to go to every major and list what students get out of a particular major. Collier stated that it would be too specific and leaves out philosophy and other disciplines. This would just capture a very limited number of classes. We have to be broad or have a really comprehensive list and everyone will want their class included in the list too. Korth answered that the list can certainly be added to. He added that he didn't create the list. He just culled the list out of the LEAP document. Contant clarified that the list was in the questionnaire that was sent to employers, not out of the LEAP document. Korth replied that all he did was make use of that to compose this list. You can add more or extract some, but the way they were expressed was better.

Kuechle stated that she had thought the biggest difference was #3: environmental stewardship. Collier responded that we added the last bullet: Life-long learning. Contant stated that these are not value-based statements. They are the classic reasons for a liberal education. They prepare students for living in a world and functioning in that world, but preparing you for the world is not necessarily liberal or conservative. McBride stated that because students have awareness doesn't imply that they are going to act reasonable or ethical. We aren't attaching positive or negative values on this statement. We just hope students have an understanding.

Ericksen stated that we wondered if there is a better way to capture what Contant is trying to say in #3. Is there a way to capture that category #3 is a foundations core for extending education beyond the 4-years or applying what a student has learned. Collier agreed that our biggest goal is #3. Contant stated that when she looks at #3, she sees it as the role of an individual in society. Helsper noted that we used to call it "being a good citizen." Lawrence stated that perhaps we should stay away from social responsibility. But the role of an individual in society is less stigmatized and value-oriented. Collier stated that you can just require these things, remove the weakening of it, and call it an understanding of the role of the individual in society.

Stewart stated that Korth's point about #3 made him think that could be moved under intellectual and practical skills. Lawrence answered that this one says there are the roles of an individual in society. All are broad, but some you have to

state because they are important. Contant stated that she has an engineering degree and her learning outcomes were focused on #1 and #2. She hadn't even started to think about #3 until the last ten years. That's the distinction she would hate to lose a direct statement that a college education is much more than gaining knowledge and skills. It's also about understanding how one fits in society, influences it, impacts the future, and continues to learn as the world becomes more globalized. Stewart answered that he would not eliminate it. He would just move it to #2.

MOTION (Ericksen/Lawrence): to go forward for campus conversation with the proposed learning outcomes (with #3's heading changed to "An understanding of the role of the individual in society, including...")

VOTE: Motion passed (6-1-2)

Adjourned 9:04 a.m.

Submitted by Darla Peterson