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Curriculum Committee Minutes

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**UMM CURRICULUM COMMITTEE**  
**2009-10 MEETING#12 Minutes**  
**February 24, 2010, 8:00 a.m., Behmler 130**

Present: Cheryl Contant (chair), Clare Dingley, Janet Ericksen, Mark Fohl, Sara Haugen, Nicholas Johnson, Michael Korth, Pareena Lawrence, Mike McBride, Dave Roberts, Gwen Rudney, Jeri Squier, Dennis Stewart, Elizabeth Thoma, Tisha Turk

Absent: Talia Earle

Visiting: Jayne Blodgett, Nancy Helsper, Jeffrey Ratliff-Crain

*In these minutes: Review of Capstone Courses*

**1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – February 17, 2010**

MOTION: (Thoma/McBride) to approve the February 17, 2010 minutes with a minor correction. Motion passed by voice vote.

**2. REVIEW OF CAPSTONE COURSES**

Contant stated that the capstone course topic was brought forward by the student members of the committee and asked them to share their concerns. Thoma and McBride explained that the agenda topic was suggested because there are workload differences among capstone projects, which led them to question the purpose of the capstone projects and whether it is necessary that they all have an equal student workload. Unequal workloads and credits for students can also have an effect on the faculty workload.

Contant added that there is also a concern about workload differences, not just a lack of consistency and credits offered but also differences in student workload per credit hour. Dingley stated that the social science major and European studies major are the only majors that do not explicitly define a capstone. Lawrence stated that part of the strategic plan was making an effort to offer a capstone for each major. Helsper added that there was a push from the Assessment of Student Learning Committee to use capstones to aid in assessment.

Roberts asked the students whether they thought that students' general perceptions toward capstones are positive or negative. McBride answered that it varies by discipline. He hadn't compiled a list of student views, but believes there is no real consensus.

Ratliff-Crain stated that the word *capstone* suggests a different connotation of what is coming at the end, rather than a varied culminating experience. Contant stated that a culminating experience is a broader category that would include a senior thesis, capstone, internship, etc. Roberts added that the distinguishing feature of it in most of the science majors is independent work by the student. Contant asked whether it then makes sense to have difference levels of credit hours. Roberts answered that it is fine if different credit hours are offered for different experiences. The problem occurs when there is different workload per credit. That's not fine. Contant stated that clarifying this will be extremely helpful.

Contant stated that if she asked faculty in each division whether faculty are given workload credit and how much, the answers would be all over the map. Ericksen agreed and stated that in art history the capstone project is done as an overload and faculty don't get credit for it. Ratliff-Crain stated that the psychology senior seminar requires students to produce a review paper and independent work. The faculty member involvement includes significant time and mentoring. As a contrast, the liberal arts for the human services major senior project is an internship where most of the work and activity is happening off campus. Faculty are more involved at the beginning and end of the experience. It is not included in the workload of faculty. Lawrence added that capstone projects in gender, women, and sexuality studies (GWSS) and American Indian studies majors are not counted as workload credits because they are too small. The capstone projects need some consistency. Turk stated that it seems to differ in whether or not it is a class, or an individualized directed study style project. In English, the research project is a class that is rotated among the faculty so

the workload is fairly consistent.

Contant stated that it helps to understand differences in whether there is face time on a scheduled basis or an independent exercise. It has to do with the work product in terms of workload (e.g., internship versus final review paper) and course content, as well as anything else that dictates faculty workload: Korth added that there is also an oddity of counting faculty workload for small courses. Thoma stated that with directed study-based courses, faculty workload will vary, depending on how much the individual student is willing to put into the project.

Roberts stated that he thought it would be helpful to have an appreciation of the magnitudes that are involved. His work on senior seminars in the mathematics major is about 25% of his teaching for the year. It is a lot, and there are probably many faculty members in similar positions. These are not students who drop you an email when stuck. These students come by weekly, and substantial preparation is required. Contant added that even under independent study projects there are a variety of models. Some involve writing a paper and sending weekly drafts as in a tutorial model of instruction. Other factors are the number of students enrolled and the number of majors per year.

Rudney stated that the capstone project is essential for education majors. Supervising students is one credit per student and the number of hours involved is carefully looked at. The capstone experience is very different from other majors. The culminating experience is student teaching for 10 credits. They then come back for a capstone where they make a public presentation and submit a portfolio. It is a final capstone.

Contant stated that she could surely understand how different majors can come up with different credit hours for the culminating experience. Helsper noted that some disciplines had to be concerned about how many credits were required for the major, to ensure that they don't go over the maximum limit of 40 credits. Contant suggested a need to be consistent across disciplines may not be necessary. There is however a concern that work expectations of students taking the same number of credits or the same course with different instructors vary significantly.

Ericksen asked it if would help if, in the future, a statement was put in the beginning of the course catalog stating that almost all majors have some sort of culminating experience determined by the major. Then students looking at a major would know that there is not an expectation that they are all the same. Roberts agreed that some language in the catalog would be helpful, but added that there is a marketing opportunity that is being missed. Many schools heavily advertise that in the senior year a student will work with a faculty member on year-long research project. Squier stated that when students look at the online catalog they are looking at a particular major. The perfect place to put senior culminating objectives is under the major requirement objectives. Lawrence suggested adding a link to a general statement. Contant suggested asking each major to provide a one-paragraph description of its culminating project or experience for inclusion in next year's catalog.

Contant stated that a quick inventory should be done to determine what constitutes our current capstone experiences. Then, a comparison should be made of one-semester versus two-semester courses and in-class versus independent or one-on-one. Ratliff-Crain asked if the assessment committee has collected that information. Helsper said they had not explicitly done so; however there are examples of capstones on the committee's Web site.

Turk asked for clarification regarding the perceived disparity in student workload. If credits are based on hours of work per week, then can the number of hours a student is working each week be determined? Most courses don't do the assessment form for senior projects. Contant answered that there is not a uniform way of determining the hours students or faculty are putting into the course McBride asked if there is a senior survey given out to everyone before they graduate. Ratliff-Crain answered that it is given in the spring semester but isn't universally completed. Contant added that it is about the college experience satisfaction and may not have a question specific for the culminating project. We do a survey of seniors regarding general education. Perhaps we could alter that survey to include questions regarding the culminating experience and major. Unfortunately, surveys are taken mid-semester, before the capstone project is completed. Rudney noted that the typical expectation for hours per week is an estimated average. It depends on how quickly the student reads or completes assignments. The faculty member doesn't give less reading assignments to a slow reader.

Contant stated that she sees the next steps as follows:

1. Draft a statement that will go into the catalog including a description and general purpose and approach of culminating experiences.
2. Do an inventory of our culminating experiences in terms of all majors, what their culminating experiences are, what type they are, how long they last, and credit hours associated with them.
3. Consider how to assess the experience.
4. Integrating aspects of pulling the pieces together to fit with number 4 of the Student Learning Outcomes.

Contant stated that the committee will look at directed studies and internships next week. She would like to review them in terms of purpose, outcomes, structure, and effort per credit hour from student and faculty member. The forms should be reviewed and a better understanding of the purposes and accomplishments of directed studies is needed.

Adjourned 9:02 a.m.

Submitted by Darla Peterson