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MINUTES--1996-97 CURRICULUM COMMITTEE MEETING #20
April 15, 1997; 3:00 p.m.; Behmler Conference Room

Present: Ballou, Bauer, Davis, Farrell, Frenier, Hansen, Imholte, Kissock, Korth, J. Lee, Schuman, Thielke, Vickstrom, Whelan

Absent: Ellis, M. Lee

Guest(s): DeJager

SPRING QUARTER TIMETABLE:

Schuman distributed copies of a handout showing the preliminary timetable for consideration of semester proposals during spring quarter versus the actual progress of the Curriculum Committee. Schuman did not want to be dictatorial and force a premature decision; on the other hand, he didn't want to be lacking in leadership vitality in pushing the group toward a decision. He could simply continue to schedule more and more CC meetings. He suggested that members not repeat their own arguments or those of other members in order to move the discussion along.

REVIEW OF ADJUNCT COMMITTEES:

Schuman assumed that most CC members had seen his electronic mail about the review of adjunct committees being requested by Campus Assembly. He has asked that the CC be allowed to deal with that issue next year and to continue the review of semester proposals this spring. If that is not acceptable, the CC may have to hold a Saturday retreat to deal with adjunct committee reviews.

CONTINUED DISCUSSION OF THE COMMON EXPERIENCE PROPOSAL:

Schuman indicated that the CC had discussed the theme of the proposed common experience course during the last meeting on this topic. There was lots of discussion about the theme of diversity: Should "diversity" be interpreted as broadly as possible and include all types? Or should a middle ground be taken where the theme is limited to "human diversity"? He suggested moving the discussion on to format issues.

Format:

Schuman noted that the proposal calls for a discussion-based, small group format for first-year students. Instructors would choose a specific topic within the theme and students would register for any of the sections.

Whelan commented, based on his experience as Inquiry coordinator some years ago, that there is ambiguity built into the course. In the past, there was never a clear cut directive about whether transfer students must take the course. Schuman said that is a good question. Do we intend that first-time freshmen will be required to take the course? His memory is that most transfer students did not have to take Inquiry, at least in the last few years. Thielke said transfer students with 15 credits or less were required to take Inquiry. Lee noted that the common experience is supposed to serve as an orientation to college. Schuman suggested that first-time, first-year students plus transfer students with less than 16 semester credits be required to take the new common experience. Whelan said an exclusion of transfer students would cause a split in the class with students who are not required to take the common experience thumbing their noses at those who do have to take it. He expects that there will be more and more transfer students. Lee hoped that students would want to get into the common experience course.

Schuman wondered if CC members could act on the assumption that we are talking about first-year students and transfers with a small amount of credit and then do the fine-tuning later.

Thielke noted that when Inquiry went into effect in 1988 we didn't have the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum (MNTC). Now, if a student transfers in with the MNTC completed, the common experience would not be required. In general education, the student would still be required to fulfill the 90 credits of liberal arts, the foreign language requirement, and the advanced course requirement.

Kissock proposed that students transferring in with 30 semester credits or less would be required to take the common experience course. That avoids splitting the class. DeJager noted that, for Inquiry, students were exempted if they had credits earned after graduation from high school. Lee was concerned about the number of sections that would be needed.

Kissock said he agreed with the discussion-based and small group features of the proposal. He also agreed with the 7 1/2 week and 2-credit format, but thought that sections should be available both semesters so that more faculty could teach the common experience. Lee said the survey showed that most people agree with the small group, discussion based format.

Staffing--

Schuman wondered what CC members thought about the idea of having voluntary faculty participation and individualized syllabi. He thought those aspects were crucial to the success of the course. What has to be worked out is how much of the course is individualized. Imholte said the more individualized the sections, the more students will complain. Vickstrom thought the problems students had with Inquiry was due to the fact that all sections were supposed to be the same. It would be better if no one had the expectation that sections would be identical.

Thielke wondered how individualized the sections would be. For students transferring out of UMM, the new institution will want to review the syllabi to determine how the course will transfer. Will we keep the syllabi on hand so copies can be sent with students? Schuman thought that would be possible. Lee said the Common Experience Task Force looked at many options and narrowed the possibilities down based on feasibility. Thielke said she was not opposed to the proposal, in fact she supports it. However, students will be requesting copies of the syllabi and it would be easier for us to ask for them up front.

Whelan said his experience with Inquiry was that the commonality had nothing to do with content; it had to do with process. St. John's University has a symposium where faculty choose their own topic. They agreed that the sections are common because of the writing, speaking, and discussion format for each. Are we talking about commonality being something different from content?

Farrell thought that more faculty would be attracted to teach the course if it is more varied. It would make life easier if the course were offered both semesters. One frustration with the previous common course was trying to get enough faculty to teach it. He hoped that the campus could look at a cycle of faculty to teach the common experience so the struggle to find faculty would not be constant. Schuman said he envisioned having trailer sections in the spring for transfer students.

Structure--

Schuman suggested dropping the phrase "once a week" from the sentence on structure. The requirement could be for 100 minutes of meeting time per week but leave it open so that faculty would have the option of splitting time slots that was suggested by Whelan at a previous meeting. Lee thought that would be acceptable. He was intrigued by the idea of mingling sections. He wondered if space would be a problem if that happened. Thielke said there would be no break time if one 100-minute slot was divided into two 50-minute slots. Schuman wanted to leave the door open to this possibility. Imholte thought splitting one time slot might interfere with other courses the students would take. KISSOCK said it was irrelevant for the CC to make a decision about this now. He suggested a 2-credit course that would be offered in both semesters.

Schuman said he was not comfortable drifting into both semesters. The fall semester offering is an important part of the CETF plan for students to take the common experience during their first term. Lee agreed. The impact on students is so great. There is also an economical aspect of the question, since there will be a limited number of convocations. If there are offerings both semesters, there will need to be two sets of convocations. Schuman noted that there is a "limp" in the curriculum if there are common experience offerings one semester and the next semester there are not. KISSOCK said the "drift" is to say there are trailer sections. The convocations could be videotaped. Frenier said there could be different speakers. KISSOCK noted that there would be a cost to that option.

Farrell thought the CC was spending a lot of time discussing administrative issues.

Whelan wondered if the common experience was supposed to be a half-semester in length. Lee said the CETF had originally discussed that option, but now the proposal is for a full semester.

Hansen said it would be nice to have the common experience offered in the first semester, but that might cause too much of a sacrifice (faculty would be excluded from teaching it). Imholte said the first semester aspect of the proposal was discussed thoroughly by the CETF and proposed because of practicality and the goals of the course. There was a lot of debate on this issue. Davis agreed. The CETF talked about this issue for a long time. She agreed that some students could trickle into the second semester.

Ballou said there seemed to be two issues involved. One issue is a policy consideration: Should this be introduced in the first semester? It is important for orienting the student. The other issue deals with resources: Can we give up the faculty needed to teach the course?

Whelan thought it very important for students to take the course in the first semester they are on campus. Inquiry was always offered in the fall quarter. If students don't get the common experience the first fall, then put them in it the next fall. Mooney noted that McGrath had reported to the CETF about retention studies which show that students make a decision about staying in college within the first seven weeks of the first term.

Schuman asked for a straw vote. How many CC members believe that the first semester requirement is an important part of the proposal? There were 7 in favor. Two members voted to offer the course either semester of the first year.

Schuman wondered if CC members wanted to vote on the 2-credit aspect of the proposal. Kissock thought the Committee would be able to move ahead with more straw votes. Hansen thought the credit issue was too important to deal with in the short time remaining. He comes down heavily in favor of a 4-credit course. There has been too much focus on what we can do rather than on what we need to do. A 2-credit offering is only half a course. Lee said his point was well taken. On the other hand, we need a program that will work. A 4-credit course would be impossible to administer. Davis said she understood Hansen's point, but having a 4-credit course will not solve the problems that Inquiry had. With this course writing is strongly encouraged but not required. Hansen said the course is not a common experience if that is true. He thought the topic was too broad.

Thielke said we would be able to house a 4-credit course for one meeting time per week only. Frenier said we could move it into both semesters.

Schuman said the Committee would not be able to finish the discussion on the Common Experience Proposal at this meeting. He proposed that the next two meetings be devoted to discussion of the General Education Program Proposal and discussion would return to the Common Experience Proposal next week.

NEXT MEETING:

The next meeting is a joint CC/GEC meeting about the General Education Program proposal on Wednesday, April 16, 3:00 p.m., Behmler Conference Room. There will also be a meeting on Friday, April 18, 9:00 a.m., Moccasin Flower Room.

Meeting adjourned 4:00 p.m.

Submitted by Nancy Mooney