

COUNCIL ON ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT (CAA)

MINUTES, MAY 19, 2008

UNH 107, 11 A.M.

Members present: Henryk Baran, Michael Christakis, Peter Duchessi, Sue Faerman, Bill Lanford, Marjorie Pryse, Joette Stefl-Mabry, Bruce Szelest,

Members absent: Irina Birman, Seth Chaiken, Stacey Chen, Anna Politano, Bill Roberson, Man Kit Tse, Rose-Marie Weber

The minutes of April 24 were approved.

The Council reviewed the three reports of the GEAC. Discussion ensued about how to address the recommendations. No member of the committee was present during the discussion to answer questions about the reports. Bendikas offered to answer questions, but Faerman stated that a member of the committee should do so. Faerman moved that the discussion of the reports be tabled until the fall when a member of the committee could be present to answer questions. Over the summer strategies for the implementation of the recommendations will be explored by Faerman and Szelest with information for the Council in the fall. The motion passed.

The draft 2008-2009 schedule for the CAA and its committees was distributed by Bendikas for information. The draft schedule, Bendikas explained, was not to suggest an order of business, but to reflect what occurred this past year, and to provide a guide by which the Council and its committees could stay on track in the coming year, given a similar agenda. It was agreed by all that if business could begin earlier in the fall semester, the Council would be better able to manage its agenda. It was suggested that the orientation, which is on the schedule in August, may need to be delayed until committee members are recruited. Discussion ensued about why the Senate does not operate during the summer. Faerman recalled that orientations for Councils used to occur in May. Pryse maintained that although operating during the summer would be helpful, it is not practical. Duchessi stated that clearly, the desirable goal was to begin as early as possible in the fall. It was observed that it was difficult to staff committees and even the Councils because certain Schools or Colleges did not hold their elections until the fall.

Szelest then presented the Council with information about a proposal to move the SIRF surveys to an online process. He noted that doing so would save the university a significant amount of money (even with all costs factored in); that the results could be known much quicker, and the process would be more environmentally friendly. The greatest drawback to the online system appears to be that response rates tend to go down in online surveys. However, the literature suggests that although the number of responses may be smaller, the change in the overall scores appears negligible. This summer IR will be asking for faculty volunteers in the hopes of working out any bugs in the process and moving to pilot certain classes in the fall. Pryse pointed out that a number of departments give questionnaires in addition to the SIRF evaluation forms that allow students to write

narrative. Szelest said that there is a narrative option in the proposed online format which could be customized for departments, and eventually even for individual instructors. He noted that studies have shown that students actually spend more time filling in the narrative online than they do in the classroom. Lanford reiterated his concerns about the response rate. Duchessi asked whether the respondents would be less representative online. Would “complainers” and “brown nosers” be the students motivated to go online? Szelest explained that it would be the faculty’s responsibility to remind students and coax all of them to fill out the online surveys. Pryse expressed concern about that approach given that some tenured professors do not give out SIRFs now and have no incentive to do so. Bendikas asked about what incentives for students had been explored, for instance, releasing grades a couple of days earlier for students who complete the online SIRF form. Faerman said that she would object to any tie to grades, but would consider other kind of incentives for students, like the opportunity to win prizes. Stefl-Mabry pointed out that the administration of the SIRF forms was not helpful as a summative assessment. It would be more helpful if feedback was possible during the semester when an instructor could use it to address areas of concern while there was still time to adjust lessons. She also suggested that the form would be more helpful for students if it asked “What have you done to make the experience worthwhile.” Szelest noted that the software would allow for professors to gather information during the semester as well. Faerman then told the Council the story of “Parker Markers.” ☺

Bendikas distributed the Triennial Report for information explaining that it is a new report requested by SUNY from the campuses every three years to document how they are administering General Education Assessment, and particularly, how they are closing the loop. Szelest added that GEAR will review the reports with an eye to identifying best practices. Faerman suggested that the Triennial Report, in conjunction with the GEAC reports, be discussed in the fall by the Council as part of the larger discussion of General Education assessment.

The Council then received the draft notes of the PRC and GEAC pertaining to Project Renaissance. Discussion ensued about the contents and a few minor changes were adopted. A motion was made to accept the report as amended. It passed.

The Chair then asked the Council its opinion on sending the Program Review Committee reports to the School/College Dean. This had been done in the past, but was not the practice so far this year. Pryse asked when they had stopped being sent. Bendikas explained that she did not know if it had been done the previous year, but that it had not been done this year because the Procedures for the Joint Review of Undergraduate and Graduate Programs, which describes how the self-study documents are shared, did not include the School/College Deans as recipients of those reports. Stefl-Mabry suggested that such reports could keep the Deans better informed and might be beneficial for the programs, particularly for assessment if the Deans knew their assessment needs. Faerman noted that sharing the reports could be seen as helpful in closing the loop in a formative process. Lanford stated that departments need to know who will see the reports. Pryse moved that the PRC reports, including those already produced this year, be copied to the

appropriate School/College Dean, and that Procedures and the Practitioner's Guide be updated to reflect their inclusion. The motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 12:15 p.m.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Kristina Bendikas