

COUNCIL ON ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT (CAA)

MINUTES, MAY 6, 2005

LC-31J; 9:30 – 11:00 AM

Present: Malcolm Sherman, Maria Brown, Bruce Szelest, Marjorie Pryse, Sue Faerman, Deborah Bernnard, David Dai, Joel Berkowitz, Barbara Wilkinson

The committee began with a review of the minutes. Some felt that including names in the minutes can be helpful. Others appreciated the names being removed. It was suggested that future minutes be somewhere in between. A spelling error was found on page two. The corrected minutes were approved. A question was raised regarding appointments for next year. Sherman asked Wilkinson to send notes out to committee members with their appointment information. Wilkinson requested the appointment information to inform committee members whether their current appointment expires in 05 or 06.

Sherman stated that the Annual Report of the Council on Academic Assessment included a modification, the inclusion of Slavic and Eurasian Studies. Sherman hoped that next year will be easier, as we have developed a process and have the same number of programs to review. At the last quantitative meeting it was suggested that we revise procedures so that departments will focus more on essential information and sub-committees will not have to read 200 page reports. The committee turned to the Department of Chemistry report. At the previous meeting, it was agreed that the quantitative sub-committee include the comments from the external reviewers in the report. The first such comment was the suggestion to add a “Chemistry Education” staff position. It was stressed that the addition of such a person may decrease the responsibility for teaching felt among our faculty. The bigger issue is teaching within the department. It was suggested that more students would succeed if the courses covered the material slower. Some students now take the courses at Hudson Valley Community College. The situation may get worse next year since the U at A will be admitting some weaker students. This assumes, however, that the issue is the weakness of the students. Although this may be part of it, there may be other factors. It was suggested that each of the three comments made by the external reviewers, and included in the draft Department of Chemistry report, should remain.

The committee turned to the Department of Chemistry report. At the previous meeting, it was agreed that the quantitative sub-committee include the comments from the external reviewers in the report. The first such comment was the suggestion to add a “Chemistry Education” staff position. It was stressed that the addition of such a person may decrease the responsibility for teaching felt among our faculty. The bigger issue is the teaching within the department. It was suggested that students may benefit if the courses covered the material slower. Some students take the courses at Hudson Valley Community College. It is apparent that there are underlying issues to address. Next year, the Chemistry Department is admitting weaker students, so the situation may get worse. This assumes, however, that the issue is the weakness of the students. Although this may be part of it, there may be more at issue. It was suggested that each of the three comments made by the external reviewers, and included in the draft Department of Chemistry report, should remain.

The committee discussed the Chemistry Department involvement in the Life Sciences building. Is the Chemistry Department getting space in the Life Sciences building? Will this be dependent on their contribution of overhead funds? The function of the building seems to have changed since it was originally proposed in order to build chem. Labs that meet OSHA standard. It is now a life-sciences research building. The committee considered holding the Chemistry report until next year, But we decided that it is not the charge of the committee to follow-up on the department report or the external review. The dean would do this after meeting with the department. This issue will come up in their meeting. It was agreed to leave it for others to gather this information.

Szelest handed out the Procedures for the Joint Review of Undergraduate and Graduate Programs. It was noted that the term “undergraduates” doesn’t mean only majors. Faerman clarified that technically it does mean majors. It was noted that in consequence we fail to assess a large portion of the education that occurs. For example, only one undergraduate chemistry major graduated last year. Our current guidelines focus on expectations for Chemistry major, not on the department’s responsibilities for pre-meds and other students who take chemistry courses. It may be necessary to add a “service” section to our guidelines. Szelest suggested we work on this over the summer. Some suggestions on how this could be addressed followed. Instead of a separate section, this could be addressed with questions about the relationship between quality of the program for majors and service courses.

The committee discussed the ability of Institutional Research (IR) to provide information on FTEs for majors and non-majors. In lower division courses, students may not yet have declared a major. But it could be done for upper division courses. Szelest responded that even if it would be difficult for IR to figure out how to get these data, once done it would be easy to repeat. Could we get data on major feeder courses? It would be labor intensive for IR. It was suggested that each department could decide on one or two courses, and describe those courses. There are existing queries for this. Asking departments what they are doing for non-majors, and addressing student experiences would be useful for departments. They could look at a range of service courses and relationships with the major.

The committee discussed specific courses and programs. Psychology 101 is a service course. Criminal Justice restricts the numbers of majors, but not minors, so they are teaching many non-majors. In this situation, the minor is generating FTE, but the program review is not paying attention to this aspect of the quality of education. For some departments, this represents the bulk of teaching. It was asked how we give feedback to SUNY. We provide degree completion numbers. It was suggested that next year at this time we can write a report and present it at GEAR.

It was noted that graduate students are involved in teaching. This may be one place to assess Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) training. A problem, especially in Mathematics and Natural Sciences, is that GTAs speak with accents. Also, there are reports of GTAs being overly strict with rules and lacking compassion.

Sherman suggested that we meet in June to write something. It was suggested that we begin with Attachment A of the Procedures for the Joint Review of Undergraduate and Graduate Programs.

Szelest said we would put a new version on the website, and Wilkinson will email the URL. It was agreed that the next meeting would be on Tuesday, June 14th at 9:30 a.m.

Szelest announced that the Provost would send out a draft of the Periodic Review Report later today. Comments may be sent to him by Friday, May 27th. Sherman requested that the minutes be sent to him by early next week.

Respectfully submitted by Barbara Wilkinson