

COUNCIL ON ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT (CAA)

MINUTES, MARCH 2, 2006

WEST SEMINAR ROOM, CETL; 3:30 – 4:00 PM

Maria Brown, Scott Tenenbaum, Ginny Goatley, Bruce Szelest, Sue Faerman, Bill Lanford, Malcolm Sherman, Carol Jewell, Olympia Pelosi, Barbara Wilkinson

Wilkinson distributed the minutes from the last meeting, December 5, 2005. A few changes were recommended. Tenenbaum moved that the minutes be approved as amended. Jewell seconded and the amended minutes were approved.

The council turned its attention to the exchange of email messages between Sherman and Dewar regarding a possible assessment of Project Renaissance. There was some confusion because the emails seemed to imply that an already complete assessment awaited review by the council,

but Wilkinson explained that the review was in the beginning stages.

Faerman stated that preliminary analysis had been done by Institutional Research on data that included retention rates and feedback from students. The statistics show positive things; e.g., that the four year graduation rate of PR students is higher than the six year rate for all students.

Tenenbaum asked for a brief history of Project Renaissance. Faerman explained that it originated through a grant from the Hewitt Foundation.

PR is an interdisciplinary program, team taught by professors and doctoral students, whose students take half their gen ed credits in PR courses. PR is a residential program; the students live together.

During its second year Project Renaissance expanded to 400 students.

The teaching model changed to include some sequential teaching. The program is open to all students, although Presidential Scholars are discouraged because students cannot simultaneously participate in two residential programs. Acceptance is first come – first served. In year three, pre-med, pre-business tracks were developed, and courses were linked with those in relevant. PR courses are currently taught by non-tenure track lecturers. Social science and pre-law tracks have been added.

Sherman commented that some who were part of the program are critics.

Faerman added that some are not. Sherman suggested that the academic substance should be assessed, and that now that the grant is over there are no faculty involved.

Faerman added that it is important to look at outcomes of the program, such as graduate rate and time to graduation information. Tenenbaum suggested that there is enough history to have the program assessed. Lanford suggested that a one-page summary of the program be prepared for the council, including information on who teaches what.

Faerman pointed out that the email message we received contains one piece of information that was said twice in two separate occasions, but was said by the same

person. It was suggested that a representative from Project Renaissance attend the next council meeting.

Stefl-Mabry explained that the research on cohorts show a positive effect on academics. Faerman explained that there are 400 students in Writing Intensive seats in Project Renaissance. Sherman suggested that we examine grade inflation in Project Renaissance, because some have suggested that students receive higher grades in their Proj. Ren. courses than in their other courses. Faerman suggested that in addition to the Proj. Ren. Director, Steve DeLong, maybe Leslie Saint-Vil could attend the next council meeting because he has been doing some analysis.

Lanford pointed out that because of the controversy, broad input is needed to avoid the perception that it was a closed shop that rubber stamped Proj. Ren. Sherman asked whether a report would go to EPC.

Sherman asked the council to turn its attention to reports of self-studies. Tenenbaum began to discuss the Art Department program review. The quantitative group saw its main role as assessing the self study for clarity and completeness. Tenenbaum stated that the self-study was well written. The department was doing a good job while struggling with funding. Students seemed appreciative of the time faculty devoted to them. As the self-study was written in 2003, it was asked whether updates are available. Lanford commented that the report includes a comment about the issue of diversity in the department. Tenenbaum responded that the self-study indicated that it was likely that the department made earnest efforts but were not successful. Lanford added that such a statement about diversity in the report might raise questions. Tenenbaum agreed that it might be unwise to highlight this statement. Lanford commented that the gender balance could also be examined. Sherman responded that Art History is about fifty percent female. Faerman asked about the context of the external reviewers' comments. Did the students complain about a lack of sufficient diversity in the department? Tenenbaum responded that they did not. Sherman suggested that the statement hints at an accusation. Lanford suggested that the two sentences be deleted which was accepted by the Council.

Sherman commented that the document was impressive for describing the role of Art and visualization in liberal education and contemporary culture. Lanford noted statements in the report referring to the inadequacy of the department's physical facilities (e.g., broken windows and poor ventilation). He commented that since the department has a new Sculpture Studio, it might not be the right time for them to seem to be complaining about their core space. Faerman suggested that their situation was similar to that of the Chemistry Department, whose building has serious deficiencies even though there is now a new Life Science building. Sherman observed that all programs could benefit from building updates.

Tenenbaum asked who reads council reports and how they are used.

Lanford said that the department could use this report to argue for more resources when the meeting with the CAS Dean. Tenenbaum responded that he wants to give the Art Dept. the ammunition to do this. Lanford responded that we need to look at the bigger

picture. Tenenbaum responded that this was up to the Dean. Sherman said it would be ineffective to say this too often. Lanford suggested that the second sentence be deleted. Brown said that Music and Theatre are in the same situation as Art, the facilities are in the same condition. Faerman commented that the Art Dept. needs space to do its work. Sherman asked whether the report was approved with the modifications discussed. The report was approved.

Before turning to Women's Studies Sherman raised the issue of whether council members can be present when reviewing their own department. It was suggested that such a member could either not attend such a meeting, or could attend in order to be able to explain or clarify issues, but not vote.

Re Women's Studies Szelest recommended that the third paragraph include a recommendation that the department include direct assessment measures.

Faerman believed that the department was assessing students through portfolios, but that these were not included in the self-study document.

Sherman commented that undergraduate students are effectively employed as TAs, for which they receive academic credit, but no pay. Some other departments rely on undergraduate TAs from time to time, but in this department it is a policy. Lanford asked whether this policy was appropriate. Faerman explained that Women's Studies majors must learn skills to facilitate discussions, and the students are simultaneously taking a course to discuss the skills. Lanford said that having students pay tuition to do this is a policy issue. Faerman responded that facilitating training is okay, but that treating this as a monetary issue is not okay. It was suggested that there be undergraduate guidelines as to appropriate procedures, similar to those for graduate students teaching graduate courses. Sherman suggested this issue be passed on to the UPC. Faerman noted that the Women's Studies self-study document has been particularly well done, and we should say more about that. Sherman suggested we bring this report back at the next meeting.

The French studies report will also be available for the next meeting.

Possible dates are March 30th and April 4th, with a beginning time of 2:45. Steve DeLong's availability will be considered in scheduling the next meeting. The quantitative group volunteered to review the Biology self-study and external reviewer report.

Respectfully submitted by Barbara Wilkinson