

COUNCIL ON ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT (CAA)

MINUTES, SEPTEMBER 26, 2005

LC-31J; 1:00 – 2:30 PM

Bruce Szelest, Maria Brown, Joel Berkowitz, Marjorie Pryse, Sue Faerman, Bill Lanford, Sean Walmsley, Malcolm Sherman, Carol Jewell, Kristina Bendikas, Olimpia Pelosi, Barbara Wilkinson

Sherman began the meeting with a welcome and an explanation of the purpose of the council, and its operating policies and procedures. External authorities require that all departmental degree programs, both graduate and undergraduate, be assessed on a seven year cycle. The council receives and reviews departmental self-study documents and external reviewer reports. The council plans to expand the scope of these reviews to include minors and service courses. The documents submitted by departments and the reports of external reviewers are kept in Wilkinson's office and are available to faculty and administrators who request them. Off campus requests for these documents will be processed with a slight time delay. Last year the Council was divided into two committees (whose titles are only roughly descriptive), a qualitative committee and a quantitative committee, each of which receives half of the mandated departmental assessments. We will likely continue this arrangement. Because this council has existed for only one year, things are less settled than with other councils.

To start the academic year, introductions were made and meeting times discussed. It was decided that the council would meet on Mondays from 1:30-3:00, on days when no Senate meeting was scheduled. The council will likely meet monthly.

The council next heard the quantitative group report on the Chemistry self-study document and external reviewer report. Sherman asked whether this report was sent to the Dean. Lanford responded that it had not, that it is a draft. Lanford commented that the council needs to be careful about including external reviewer suggestions in the report, so it doesn't appear as if the council is taking a stand on the substance of recommendations as opposed to whether the self-study covered the required ground. Sherman noted that the weaknesses were understated, but that the comments would serve to alert the dean to look at specific portions of the self-study document deserving of particular attention. Pryse asked what was the point of reviewing the external reviewer report if we don't include any comments? Faerman explained two potential roles the council might adopt: one that would focus on the process of assessment, and the other on the outcome. The former may be addressed by asking whether the Chemistry Department is working on programs during the seven years between reviews. The latter may be addressed by asking whether there are discrepancies between the report and what we know. Brown asked whether the council focus is to be on the process? Lanford replied that the role of the council is not to evaluate the program, but to point to significant parts of the assessment and to make sure the assessment was done properly. The Chemistry Department's assessment of student learning is based on student's scores on an external exam sponsored by the American Chemical Society. The Chemistry self-study document

doesn't indicate how few students become senior chemistry majors. Few students, therefore, take the exam. Lanford explained that the exam is nationally normed, that there are several ACS exams, and that it represents a far more rigorous measure of student learning than is used or available in other departments. Retention is identified as a problem in the weaknesses section of the CAA report, and in the Chemistry Department's self-study document. Sherman returned to an earlier question about how the external evaluators were chosen. Szelest explained that five to six names were provided by the department and that Pryse and Faerman make decisions based mainly on securing external reviewers whose experience covers the programs offered. Faerman suggested adding a second paragraph to the CAA report, stating that the department needs to focus attention on the learning environment in order to address retention. Sherman suggested that this is conveyed under section D of the report. Lanford added that another option would be a follow-up by the assessment office to find out why there were so few majors. Faerman drew a parallel to the General Education Program's learning outcomes and assessment of engagement, using either the campus Student Experience Survey or the NSSE. She suggested that the Chemistry Department should look into this. Concern was expressed that the tone of the report is so positive as to overshadow items C and D under the weaknesses section. It was suggested that the quantitative committee take out the complementary language. Lanford responded that in terms of thoroughness and frankness, the self-study document is exceptionally well done. Sherman added that the report first complements the department to build them up, then slips in the weaknesses. Berkowitz explained that when the other group reviewed self-study documents and external reviewer reports, they focused on how well the department assessed the programs. Lanford mentioned that the lack of retention issue was addressed in the external reviewer report, and suggested hiring a Science Education staff person to address the problem. It is not our role to support this suggestion in our report. Sherman suggested adding a recommendation for the department to look at student engagement and retention. Brown asked about the format of the CAA reports. Lanford asked whether the Chemistry report was similar to the others. It was suggested that the Senate be added to the list of recipients of our reports. Faerman suggested that each report include wording to indicate that the focus will be on the assessment process, and that we rarely take stands on substantive issues. Brown said that other reports focused on areas that were missing from the self-study document.

Sherman moved to the addendum document. Paper copies were then distributed to council members. Sherman explained that this was a joint project of several of last year's council members, with an appendix supplied by Collier. While many hands were involved, the effect was mainly to make the document shorter and clearer. The purpose of the document is to require departments to assess the effectiveness of instruction of minors and service courses. At a previous council meeting, it was agreed that the section referring to "LC courses" be removed. Szelest explained that this realization that minors and service courses needed to be included for review came out of reviewing self-studies such as Chemistry and languages, the bulk of whose teaching is directed toward non-majors. This document will go to the Senate as a report and will be woven into the assessment template.

Sherman asked, when will 2005-2006 program review self-study documents be ready to be read? Wilkinson responded that the first is likely to be ready in a month or two, and that the rate of submissions will increase as the academic year progresses.

Walmsley noted that self-study documents assess the majors when undergraduate programs include majors and minors. But in the case of a joint minor, in which department's self-study are they to be assessed? No general answer was given. Faerman commented that Sociology, for example, has both a major and a minor program. Presently, little attention is paid to the minor program and students. Journalism was a minor in the English Department, but operated quite independently. Lanford suggested that every student has a major and it may be possible to get at everything by focusing only on majors. It might be good to assess minors, but we haven't mastered majors yet. Berkowitz added that in Judaic Studies many more students are minors than are majors.

Pryse suggested adding "asks reviewed academic units" to the second paragraph, before the bolded text. Sherman asked whether the council approved the addendum with the proposed changes. The council would then send it as a report to the Senate. Szelest proposed a modification to the second paragraph of the Phase-In section. The assessment of the minor would become effective beginning with the 2006-2007 program reviews. Lanford suggested that we submit it as a report to the Senate, and say we are unsure we have the authority to adopt it. Sherman suggested that we replace "proposes" with "plans" in the text. The original document was likely written by Joshua Smith, who was the former Director of Assessment. Faerman asked whether the Provost's Assessment Advisory Committee was the place to make this decision. Sherman argued that the CAA has the authority to determine both the scope of the assessment and the procedural rules. Sherman asked for a vote on the addendum document. Eleven approved. One dissented.

Sherman moved to the numbers of faculty on the committee. Due to two faculty members being unable to participate on the committee, we currently have the minimum number of faculty members. We may wish to seek a quantitative social scientist to join the council. Would anyone like to recommend someone?

The next meeting was scheduled for Monday, November 7th from 1:30 – 3:00.

Respectfully submitted by Barbara Wilkinson