

COUNCIL ON ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT (CAA)

MINUTES, JUNE 28, 2005

LC-31J; 1:00 – 2:30 AM

Present: Marjorie Pryse, Sue Faerman, Richard Collier, David Dai, Kristina Bendikas, Malcolm Sherman, Bruce Szelest, Barbara Wilkinson

The committee meeting began with a discussion of the draft Addendum to Procedures for Joint Review of Departments' Undergraduate Courses. Sherman suggested we develop a list of data to request from Institutional Research. Collier noted that there are service courses and certificates and other concentrations that don't have majors, such as Journalism and Portuguese. Should we have courses that are never up for review? Languages, Literatures and Cultures, for example, have several courses. In previous years, the university looked at Spanish separately from Italian. This is not a problem, but over time all courses offered should be reviewed. Another example is Education, which has graduate programs but offers undergraduate courses. In order to provide the language for revising the draft, it was suggested that in addition to majors and minors we add courses that form sequences that students take. It was suggested that someone should be looking at courses that begin with the letter "U". Faerman suggested that priority be given to sequences that affect large numbers of students. For example: 400 students are taking Project Renaissance courses, hundreds of students are taking Organic Chemistry. Perhaps a shift in focus to courses instead of students would help. We could look for impact on large numbers of students. Sherman asked about identifying students' majors based on course enrollment information. Collier noted that students must have previously declared a major in order for this information to be available. The second sentence of the draft could be revised to begin with, "such courses fall into ...", then list the categories.

It was suggested that the next time departments come up for review, they could include the courses in some or all of the categories. Wilkinson could request such information in the guidelines she sends to departments being reviewed. Wilkinson said that minor changes in wording in the guidelines and the outline would be needed. Collier asked about the relationship between English and Journalism. The last two Journalism hires were the chair's decision. One of these new hires is housed in Communication, not in English. English is scheduled for a review in two years, we could ask that the self-evaluation include Journalism. Faerman stated that there is nothing in our guidelines that requires assessment in the minor. Dai asked, if there are independent programs, should they do separate reviews? Faerman responded that at the undergraduate level, there is only assessment in the major. We also have assessment of graduate programs. We have combined them. But things are happening in programs besides the major. It was suggested that courses be broken down into major, minor, General Education, and courses in which a majority of enrolled students have majors outside the department (with a statement explaining). Project Renaissance and Presidential Scholars are not currently being assessed. These reviews may not require external reviewers. Sherman suggested that the Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning could do this.

External mandates exist for the undergraduate major, and a MOU with SUNY at the graduate level. The university has extended the external mandates. If a self-study by Journalism was

added to the schedule, the reports would be sent to SUNY and we would notify Middle States. We can go beyond the SUNY mandate. The charter lists other areas. The bulletin lists minor programs. Some accreditations, such as ACSB, don't look at minors. The ACSB accreditation is very prescriptive, so minors would need to be reviewed separately. Minors would not have to be done on the same schedule as majors. For example, they can be done during the same year or in the following year.

Sherman asked Szelest what data can feasibly be provided by Institutional Research. We can inquire now and return to this issue next fall. Some students haven't declared a minor. How do we categorize students? Szelest responded that the basic review questions are: What are the learning objectives? Are students achieving these objectives? We could look at grade distributions. Sherman suggested asking what the minor as a whole achieves, rather than focusing on single courses. Szelest responded that student major and class level are available through PeopleSoft. Most departments are able to get this information. In addition, student evaluations would provide information on some additional items.

A past suggestion by Faerman that the university make minors optional received negative response, years ago when the idea was floated. So, given that minors are being required there is a need to assess them. What guidance do students receive in deciding on a minor? This is an additional reason for assessment of the minor. For example we could do a query, identify students with a given minor, and conduct a focus group. Departments should think about their minors. Bio-ethics, for example, has a good proposal but we don't know whether students are achieving the goals. There is a need for direct assessment of the learning outcomes to find out what students are learning. Assessment in the major gets at some of these, but information on the minor experience is needed. Where they don't overlap, direct assessment is needed.

Some majors and minors are not well structured, they require only a number of units. For example, Psychology requires Introduction to Psychology and five APSY courses. There may be a larger institutional goal for minors, such as elective courses outside the major. Maybe specifying a number of courses or credits is a reasonable requirement for a minor. Majors plus minors usually add up to a total of 54 credits, but if the major requires 54 credits then no minor is needed.

Sherman suggested that Collier and he revise the draft that was distributed at the meeting.

Continuing with the discussion, it is not clear who has the authority to say what the purpose of the minor is. It may not be appropriate for us to impose a purpose. UAC input would be appropriate. We merely propose to ask departments how the minors function, to identify the structure. For example, Statistics minors effectively take all four upper division statistics courses that are offered, while Sociology minors may take four out of 40 courses. What we hope to achieve in self-study is more than coherence, we also hope to improve teaching. The process is used to strengthen delivery of these courses. UAC should have a role in this. There is an additional problem: some courses are not offered enough to serve even the majors. Art is not offering service courses. How do we assess this?

The questions included in the draft that was distributed at the meeting are worthy of attention. We need to be careful with the potentially punitive nature of some questions. For example, Communication has a large student to teacher ratio. Reporting the number of Lecture Center courses may be a sensitive question for them. There is no more difficult minor to complete in four years than Communication because there are too few seats in required courses. Also, Psychology restricts the number of majors by imposing a course grade requirement. The School of Business years ago felt it was unwise to expand to meet the then current demand, so restrictions were imposed, including a minimum average in a few key courses. There are two reasons: supply and demand issue – ¼ of students are business majors nationally, and the quality of the upper level courses is compromised by the presence of students unable to do well in a foundation courses. They have shown that students can't make it in the major if they can't do better than barely pass these courses. When students are turned down as business majors, they need to find another major. In many cases, such students transfer to other institutions. English doesn't restrict the number of majors, and it's one of the largest departments on campus. We can pull out parts of the notes from this meeting to take to the UAC – 2 to 5 key issues. And notify the UAC about minors before September.

The next meeting was scheduled for July 27th – 1:30 – 3:00.

Respectfully submitted by Barbara Wilkinson