

COUNCIL ON ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT (CAA)

MINUTES, JULY 27, 2005

LC-31J; 1:00 – 2:30 PM

Present: Marjorie Pryse, Sue Faerman, Richard Collier, David Dai, Bill Lanford, Malcolm Sherman, Barbara Wilkinson

Sherman began the meeting by referring to the first three paragraphs of the revised draft of the addendum that was sent to the committee prior to the meeting, and Szelest's follow-up email comments on it. Sherman agreed with Szelest's suggestion to replace the first three paragraphs with the following: "As charged under the faculty bylaws and in accordance with its responsibilities for ensuring that the University meets external assessment mandates, the Academic Assessment Council, in addition to the periodic reviews of undergraduate major programs, shall evaluate the manner and extent to which a reviewed academic unit's undergraduate courses serve those undergraduate students whose majors are located outside the department, school or program." It was agreed that the document be revised to delete the second and third paragraphs and substitute Szelest's suggested text. Collier added that in the interest of shortening the addendum, a later paragraph omit an unnecessary mention of SUNY.

During the last meeting, Faerman asked us to consider softening the section on courses held in large lecture classes. There is no inherent shame in offering courses to large numbers of students, and in some circles it's even considered a good thing. It does, however, imply an assessment of the room instead of the teaching. It was agreed that the sentence be deleted. Collier suggested that in the addendum, the third paragraph on page two be substituted with the paragraph suggested by Szelest in his email. It reads as follows: "The Council will establish a schedule for the review of those programs and courses which are not formal degree granting programs, as outlined below. This generally includes courses that would not naturally be folded in with a program review of a major (such as the Portuguese courses and minor, which, might be assessed along with the Spanish major)." It was also noted that the second sentence in second paragraph of page two seems unduly apologetic.

The committee turned to the third page of the addendum, the topic of assessing the minor. Lanford suggested that by looking at the student experience of majors, departments would assess other graduation requirements such as General Education. If students are successful, it would also indicate the success of service courses outside the major. The committee is interested in gathering information on department assessment of their non-majors, and that these questions should be part of the department assessment. If department assessment were to include all courses taken by their majors, however, departments such as mathematics would be part of most assessments. It was felt that General Education problems should be known. Data on graduation delay as a result of General Education requirements may be obtained. Advisement Services would also have some information, as they currently suggest taking Chemistry at a community college. It was suggested that one way to obtain this information is from students. Reflecting back

on the program reviews that were read during the past year, few if any departments included a student focus group. This might be due to past guidelines regarding the collection of student perspectives as part of the program review. In the future, department program reviews could be required or encouraged include information from student focus groups. They would be lead by someone outside the department. Wilkinson suggested that they be lead by a CETL assistant. Seniors from the department would be invited. It should be kept in mind that some departments are very small, resulting in difficulty maintaining anonymity. Essentially, this part of the department assessment would be done outside the department. The focus group requirement should be added to the program review guidelines.

The committee returned to editing the document. Collier suggested that the fifth paragraph on the second page be cut. Sherman suggested that the seventh paragraph on the second page is awkward.

Faerman explained that when a department such as Information Science & Policy (ISP) reviews their undergraduate major and describes a sequence that includes a math sequence, the Mathematics department needs to say something about service courses in their review. Collier added that focus groups would be good for ISP because students take courses from linguistics and psychology. Departments can say something about service courses in their descriptions of course sequences. Even if the course is considered standard, something should be said because there may be issues that are not addressed in a review of the major. Lanford said that a student focus group may get at these types of issues, if current majors are asked the right questions. As an example, a senior course was taught by a faculty member who prided himself on having high standards. After conversations, the professor left the university. Such unusual issues should be addressed. These courses may be included in the review of either department, or both, but we'll need to be clear about it in this document. Students taking a given course often do so for different reasons, and this information is available from the SIRF. Sherman mentioned that self-study documents will likely not include information on all of these things. Wilkinson suggested that departments can work toward complete documents. Collier added that department reports will be more complete.

Sherman returned to the addendum, minors section. Collier referred to Szelest's email regarding a PeopleSoft query. While an appropriate query will reveal a student's major and minor, this information may not be current. There is a question as to whether the major and minor are current or at the time the course was taken. The query may also identify transfer students.

Sherman announced that the committee would not meet again until September, but would communicate by email to take one last look at the document and approve it. It would then be effective Spring (January) 2006. Should it be passed through the Senate? Probably. It should be reported to the Senate. The Senate will decide whether it wants to give feedback or debate the changes. Who decides how it's reported? There is not a definite answer. Faerman commented that our council's charge is somewhat ambiguous and may be viewed as not including authority over both procedure and policy.

Collier asked if we can begin to do focus groups starting in the fall. Wilkinson responded that it is possible for people to be trained and ready to do this.

Sherman agreed with Collier's email suggestion that the term "Carnegie units" be changed to credits in the minors section. Lanford said that departments might find it difficult to locate comparable programs at other universities for the minors offered, and if there are too many things to do, departments might object. Faerman suggested that descriptions of minors need coherence. Students must be able to say there was some coherence. Lanford agreed that this would be desirable. Sherman suggested changing the words to "may choose" in the addendum. The next meeting will be scheduled in the fall.

Respectfully submitted by Barbara Wilkinson