

MINUTES
Liberal Arts Core Committee
December 7, 2007
Student Involvement and Activities Center Meeting Room,
Plaza level, Maucker Union

Present: Maria Basom, Ken Baughman, Adam Bentley, Jerry Caswell, Donna Hoffman, Siobahn Morgan, Frank Thompson, Lori VanHooreweghe, Donna Vinton

Guests: Ken De Nault, Earth Science
Nalin Goonesekere, Chemistry

I. Call to Order:

Morgan called the meeting to order at 8:10 A.M.

II. Meeting with members of the Category 4 Review Team

Two members of the Category 4 (Life and Physical Science) Review Team were on hand for a discussion of the review process. At this point data from the review questions have been gathered by various members of the review team and this information will need to be compiled together in a report. Morgan encouraged the review team members to use this opportunity to bring to light any issues that have arisen, since the report is not only for the Faculty Senate but will also be presented to the Deans of the respective colleges.

De Nault was interested in knowing what data the LACC wanted to see included in the report. Thompson mentioned that the reviewers should address what are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to the quality of the program. Baughman also mentioned that information from student outcomes assessments (SOAs) should also be included and may include information about how the various strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats were identified. In particular what do students gain, or do not gain, from courses in this particular category. What activities/instruments are used for SOAs in the category or subcategories?

De Nault mentioned that the original intent of some of these courses has probably changed, since they were written nearly 20 years ago and wondered if these should also be updated. There is always a difficult balance in teaching science courses, since some view science courses as a lot of memorization, while others see it as a way for students to learn about the process of science. Quality issues were also discussed such as the number of adjuncts used teaching the courses. Grade inflation was another issue that was raised – does it exist? SOA could be used to address what the focus in the courses should be – the process of science, or the memorization of terms and facts. SOA requirements can help define what the aims for the courses should be, and this could help to identify what is important for the courses as a whole – what aspects amongst these courses is common and could be used in SOA? The review teams should consider ways in which the category as a whole could be assessed, rather than individual topical/course assessments.

De Nault wondered how this could be done, in particular there could be additional overhead involved in determining SOAs in each course, depending upon what specifically is needed in reporting the SOA information. Should the individual courses be assessed, and if so, what information from this assessment is requested for the report? Baughman stressed the collective nature of the report – individual courses or individual instructors are not what are being reported upon. The report can be used as a vehicle to point out issues that need to be addressed, such as the need for more faculty lines, equipment, instructional needs, etc, to help improve the quality of the courses. The previous review (2002) included a survey for students that addressed some of issues about science content and science concepts that were taught in the courses in the category – such a survey could be used again to measure whether these courses are accomplishing their goals.

Goonesekere asked about the previous review and whether that could be used as a model. Morgan mentioned that the previous report also included Capstone, but it could certainly be used as a framework or guide for the current report. Also the reviewers may want to see if the previous report's recommendations or issues were addressed and if not to bring those up in the current report. Goonesekere mentioned that in the previous report a common comment from students was that the course material seemed to be rather remedial – could that issue be addressed? Morgan responded that was an appropriate item to address, though some students, as Baughman noted, tended to choose a familiar topic or course due to its perceived ease. De Nault mentioned that perhaps more should be done to encourage students to do some of the core courses early in their college careers, such as math and writing, rather than letting students put them off until the end of their academic careers. It was noted that this was a problem in several areas, not just in math and writing courses. Bentley noted that often students would shy away from challenging or unfamiliar topics for fear of a drop in their GPA, and that is why students often put these courses off to as late as possible.

Baughman wondered if the review team had met with the SOA subcommittee of the LACC. Baughman mentioned that the assessment process should be collaborative across the category. For example, are syllabi for different sections of the same course reviewed regularly? Are there common tests, projects, assignments across sections of the same course? Do faculty discuss with one another what is being taught in different sections of the same course? Is there consensus about the course outcomes amongst the faculty that teach these courses? It might be easier to find common ground in the subcategory rather than in the category as a whole for student learning goals.

The next step for the review team is to gather together the information from the various departments into a report and submit it to the LACC by March 1. The LACC will then provide input to the review team concerning the report at a meeting before April 1 and a final report would be submitted by May 1. Morgan may provide cookies at the next meeting with the review team, so long as she can find someone more competent than herself to bake them (she's not that good at baking).

III. Approval of November 16, 2007 Minutes

Bentley moved and Hoffman seconded the approval of minutes for the November 16, 2007 meeting. A few corrections were noted in the minutes, and the minutes were approved 5-0-1 (5 for, 0 against, 1 abstention).

IV. Announcements

A. At the last Faculty Senate meeting all of the new courses in the curriculum packages were approved, which included all of the new Capstone courses as well as some new LAC courses in other categories.

B. Meeting times for next semester seem to be limited to 8-10 on M, W or F based upon teaching schedules. Morgan will get feedback from all of the LACC members about their preferred meeting times and will continue to work on it. It is likely we can start meetings at 8:15 AM. There was discussion about the need for meeting each week and getting the agenda out earlier.

Thompson moved that the LACC should meet once every two weeks, on a schedule similar to the Faculty Senate, and if there is a need for an additional meeting, then an emergency meeting could be called. Hoffman seconded. Discussion followed. Thompson withdrew the motion.

V. New Business

There was no new business.

VI. Old Business

Thompson mentioned the resolution that was passed by the Department of Philosophy and Religion and the College of Humanities and Fine Arts that dealt with the Status Report and Proposal that were distributed to the LACC by the LAC Design Team. Thompson would like to request that the proposal be withdrawn. Thompson proposed (1) that the LACC not go forward with any process for input on the draft of a LAC revision prepared by the LAC Design Team, which has been widely circulated on campus and that no further action should be taken to move consideration of this document forward. (2) The LAC should look at designing a process for a faculty driven and controlled process of LAC revision that must also be based on recognized leading research into best practices for a) such curriculum revision and b) liberal arts core general education. Hoffman seconded the motion. Discussion followed.

Thompson mentioned that the document is likely doomed to failure since no faculty will embrace it due to its lack of faculty input and the lack of a process in how the document was produced. Bentley agreed with the perception that the document is viewed negatively, but he would like to see parts of it to still move forward, in particular the "Cornerstone" course. Vinton mentioned that the intention was to have input from faculty in the spring semester to help revise the proposal, and that the document could be viewed as a "starting point" for such conversations. Thompson noted that due to the controversy a great deal of time will be

wasted in addressing the issues associated with the document and nothing will be produced in the end. Baughman noted that not all faculty have viewed the documents from the LACDT and that the LACC has not yet looked at the documents in detail.

Bentley also noted that he has had communications from a variety of individuals that believed the LACDT proposal was going to go forward regardless, and that this concern may be a driving factor in the CHFA resolution.

Baughman moved to divide the question into two separate motions – which are labeled in the original motion as (1) and (2). Basom seconded the motion. Discussion followed. Thompson requested that the votes be recorded individually. Voting for the motion to divide the question: Baughman, Bentley, Basom. Voting against the motion to divide: Caswell, Thompson, Hoffman. Tie vote – Morgan voted for the motion. Motion passes.

Voting on the first motion which was “that the LACC not go forward with any process for input on the draft of a LAC revision prepared by the LAC Design Team, which has been widely circulated on campus and that no further action should be taken to move consideration of this document forward.” Voting for: Thompson, Hoffman. Voting against: Baughman, Caswell, Bentley, Basom. Motion fails.

Voting on the second motion which was “The LAC should look at designing a process for a faculty driven and controlled process of LAC revision that must also be based on recognized leading research into best practices for a) such curriculum revision and b) liberal arts core general education.” Voting for: Baughman, Caswell, Bentley, Thompson, Hoffman, Basom. Voting against: none. Motion passes.

VII. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn the session was made by Hoffman, and seconded by Bentley. Motion passed. The meeting adjourned at 9:45 a.m.

Next Meeting – 8:15 AM, January 18, 2008 – in the SIAC meeting room.

Respectfully submitted,
Siobahn Morgan
LAC website: <http://www.uni.edu/vpaa/lac/index.shtml>