

MINUTES  
Liberal Arts Core Committee  
September 29, 2006  
SIAC Meeting Room, Maucker Union

Present: Ken Baughman, Jerry Caswell, Cyndi Dunn, Siobahn Morgan, Jean Neibauer, Phil Patton, Lori VanHooreweghe, Donna Vinton  
Guests: Jerry Ridenhour (Mathematics), Syed Kirmani (Mathematics), David Landis (Curriculum & Instruction)

I. Call to Order:

Chair Morgan called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

II Discussion of Course Proposals

Discussion of 230:186g *Studies in Central Asian Cultures and Languages*

David Landis described his course which arose from a study abroad program in Kazakhstan. It has been offered only once before, with 5 students. They learn about the languages, history and the cultures of Kazakhstan. Dunn asked about the required readings, to which Landis replied that there are no set required readings for the course – students are to select readings that are appropriate to the topics that they are interested in and to make use of those for their research paper. Typically students would need somewhere between 5 and 10 resources for their paper. There would be other readings once they arrive in the country, which would be provided by the native instructors in Kazakhstan. The writing assignments include a pre-trip research paper and a follow-up paper after the trip, along with a journal.

Dunn asked about the method of assessment in the course – how do you assess how well students are retaining the material that they have been given. Landis responded that this is done through daily meetings with the students and discussions, but there are no formal evaluations. The language skills are also evaluated by the student's daily interactions with the people. Again, there is no grading on this aspect of the course. Participation is what is generally being assessed.

Baughman asked about the student class (Fr., So., Jr., Sr.) that participated in the previous offering of the course. Landis believed that they were mainly sophomores. Baughman suggested that the course may actually fit into the new Capstone Experience group (Category 6) rather than the Non-Western Course (Category 2B). Baughman asked about opportunities for students to share what they have learned in their research to others. Landis mentioned that in the pre-trip meetings students would have the chance to share information about what they have learned in presentations to the rest of the class.

The general intent of the Non-Western Cultures category was then mentioned. Dunn brought up the point that the role of the NWC courses is to do something similar to the Humanities course, but explores those aspect of culture and civilization in a non-western culture (which no doubt explains its title). Despite the fact that the course title (Central Asian Cultures and Languages) appears to cover a broad region, it fact the course is limited to one country. It was asked whether the course could be broadened by discussing more of the countries in this area and then focusing on one, or using it as a comparison to the other countries. Landis noted that Kazakhstan is a region that is about as large as western Europe, and one of the largest countries in the world (#9 on that list). In that sense it is more than a single country. It also has about 100 different ethnicities and was a major crossroads for various groups going between the east and the west. Kazakhstan is not as similar as its neighbors, since it has a smaller Muslim population compared to its neighbors, and is one that is politically leaning towards the US. It is an oil rich nation and politically strategically placed country (as anyone who has played *Risk* can tell you). There is also the course Japan which may be viewed as a similar situation to this course in term of its “one-nation” setting.

Vinton wondered about the grading of journals in the course, and wondered about any rubrics were provided to the students. Landis said that he had asked that the students reflect on daily events in their journals, their thoughts about what they have heard and seen. For the final paper, they have to provide 3 specific pieces of information – a story or memorable event; goals and objectives and how those related to the activities of the course; implications of the course – what have they taken away with them from their experience.

Landis mentioned that he will be going to Kazakhstan for a few years after the offering of the course this summer. For the course enrollment, he’d like to get about 10 students enrolled in the course. Baughman again mentioned the strong experiential aspect of the course and how it may fit very well into the Capstone Experience category, and whether Dr. Landis had considered that. Landis mentioned that he had not considered it for the category, but was told that the process for having the course considered for the Capstone Experience category was relatively painless.

#### Discussion of 800:064 *Elementary Probability and Statistics for Bioinformatics*

Syed Kirmani and Jerry Ridenhour provided information on the course 800:064 *Elementary Probability and Statistics for Bioinformatics* (EPSB). This is part of the bioinformatics major, a major that has a large number of credits in biology, computer science, mathematics, and chemistry. EPSB was specifically designed to provide the statistics background for these majors. There are certain topics covered in EPSB that are not covered in the “regular” LAC statistics course 800:072 *Introduction to Statistical Methods*. Apart from these differences, the material covered in the two courses is fairly similar. The mathematics department originally considered having just a special section of 800:072 that was designed for the bioinformatics majors, but instead opted for creating this new course. While the course is only required for bioinformatics majors, it would likely appeal to other biology-related majors, as well as health related majors and social

science majors. The course would also be of use to actuarial science majors and could be used as a substitution to 800:072, which is required of those majors. The course is currently being offered this semester with about 20 students.

Dunn asked if the course had an ACT requirement, but it currently does not. If a requirement was placed on it, it would likely be the same requirement that is currently on 800:072. The title was also discussed and viewed as a bit intimidating to your typical college student. If it were reworked into something less scary like “Introduction to Statistics for Biology and Health Sciences” it may draw more students.

Dunn mentioned the existence of a variety of statistics courses scattered about the university and whether those courses could also be included in the 1C category. These courses were discussed, including their prerequisites, their emphasis and the subjects that they cover. Kirmani mentioned that 800:072 and EPSB should be viewed as foundations for these discipline specific statistics courses. He continued that the discipline specific courses are often taught with a different philosophy compared to 800:072 and EPSB, in what is emphasized and how it is presented.

Baughman asked about future demand for the course EPSB if it were approved for 1C credit. Ridenhour mentioned that there are approximately 700 students/semester in 800:072 and there are about 600 biology majors. He doesn't expect 800:072 to lose half of their students to EPSB, but he does expect that there will be demand for EPSB in the future and that it will likely grow. Pretty much all of the 800:072 faculty could also teach EPSB, so staffing will not be a problem.

### III. Approval of Minutes:

Baughman moved and Dunn seconded the approval of the minutes for September 22, 2006. Motion passed.

### IV. Announcements:

A. The status of the committee was discussed yet again. Michelle Swanson will be the COE representative, and Ron O'Meara will be the CNS representative. The Faculty Senate made an effort to find someone, but alas, it didn't work out.

B. Morgan distributed the full details of the fall 2006 backlog. Some areas show improvement, some show regression – but overall there is not a significant change from fall 2005. Morgan also mentioned that based upon feedback from the Capstone faculty and CNS, there may be about 1100 seats in Capstone for spring 2007.

Neibauer asked about the possibility of having some advanced planning in place for LAC courses – basically having a mechanism to tell departments “we need X seats in your course next semester” so that the people in advising, new students, transfer students, current students, etc., will not have to scramble around to find enough courses. Currently

it is now a re-active situation, rather than a pro-active mechanism. To initiate such a change, the plan would have to come from the Provost's office, in conjunction with the LAC committee. Patton mentioned that such a scenario would likely involve taking money back from departments to meet needs across the university and setting up a position within the Provost's office to oversee it all.

There is the added complication that if we have courses that have limited enrollments (for example, College Reading and Writing, Oral Communication), then the use of adjuncts remains high, and the availability of funds to cover the costs for adjuncts is always rather nebulous. Patton mentioned the possibility of stretching the limits of some courses – say from 22 to 26 in the College Reading and Writing course. This would increase overall enrollment by 120 (assuming 30 sections). The presence of a backlog has become the “norm” and is accepted as part of the standard operating procedure – this should not be the case.

Neibauer mentioned that President Allen has talked about “growing” the University, or expanding the student population – can we handle that? If we currently have a large backlog, will this “growth” make the problem worse? Can we place more students in LAC courses without having more LAC faculty or funding? Morgan mentioned that she'll make an effort to provide information to departments about projected needs for courses – this would have to be a group effort with involvement from the LAC coordinator, the Registrar's office, the Provost's office, Admissions, Academic Advising, and the various departments. This just may come down to a matter of facilities, resources, and funding, as is usually the case.

Baughman mentioned the fact that there are still quite a few juniors in the backlog. Some of the courses are expected have large backlogs, such as Capstone, or the difficult to schedule Personal Wellness course. The backlog is also complicated by the variety of lengths of majors, in particular those that are arranged to stretch the LAC courses over the entire four year span of its majors.

C. Morgan distributed the feedback e-mail message from Charles Holcombe (acting chair of the Non-Western Cultures committee) about the course *230:186g Studies in Central Asian Cultures and Languages*. The comments in the message are similar to the questions already brought up in the discussion a few pages ago.

D. Morgan distributed two new Capstone Experience proposals – one from Carol Cooper “Local Issues: Advocacy and Civil Engagement” and one from Kamyar Enshayan “Renewable Energy in Iowa and Beyond”.

E. Future meetings – at the October 6 meeting, we'll have Carol Cooper discussing her proposal and the Mathematics people discussing the proposal for “Mathematical Reasoning for Teaching I”. For the October 13 meeting, we'll have Kamyar Enshayan discussing his proposal.

F. Morgan reminded the committee to provide her with feedback on the Capstone report that was previously distributed. This could include any typos, things excluded, things that should be excluded, and anything else that will improve the quality of this fine document.

VII. Adjournment:

Baughman moved to adjourn; Caswell seconded the motion. Motion passed.

The meeting adjourned at 9:50 a.m.

Next Meeting – October 6, 2006

Respectfully submitted,  
Siobahn Morgan