Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Faculty Senate, April 12, 2007

The Faculty Senate met on Tuesday, April 12, 2007, at 5:00 p.m. in Beatty Center 115 to continue discussion of the proposals on General Education submitted by the Ad-Hoc Committee on General Education.

Before the meeting was officially called to order, Speaker of the Faculty Bob Mignone announced that he and Parliamentarian George Pothering had researched Robert’s Rules of Order after the last special meeting. Mr. Mignone then offered Senators several options for motions that could be made by those who want to deal with the entire General Education package as a whole.

Mr. Mignone offered two options that would require the Senate to first finish discussion and take votes on the individual motions.
1) A Senator could make a motion to rescind, which would include all or part of the proposal. An “aye” vote by a simple majority could rescind. A “no” vote would affirm the Senate’s previous actions.
2) A Senator could move to suspend the rules, which would require a 2/3 vote. Then the Senate could reconsider the entire package and affirm it with a simple majority or deny it by a simple majority.

Mr. Mignone mentioned a third option as well, that could take place immediately:
3) A Senator could move to table the current motion. If the Senate voted to table, then a motion to suspend the rules (which requires a 2/3 vote) could be made in order to consider the entire proposal as a package and bring it back on table. A motion to consider by paragraph would allow the Senate to consider the proposal piece by piece, but not vote until the entire package had been debated.

Mr. Mignone then called the meeting to order. Discussion of the second sub-goal (“Effective writing and critical reading; oral and visual communication”) under Goal I of the proposals continued.

Hugh Wilder (Philosophy) began discussion by moving that the proposals dealing with the formation of a CAC Committee (General Education Proposal, p. 18—all of 1.2b and #1 under 1.2c) be postponed until the Senate considers the recommendation to create a General Education Committee. The two proposals would then be considered together. Upon Mr. Mignone’s advice, Mr. Wilder withdrew his motion in order to first make a motion to divide the question so the Senate could consider the CAC proposals separately from the other issues under Goal I.2. The question was divided by consensus. Then Mr. Wilder re-stated his previous motion, pointing out that the CAC Committee is proposed as a subcommittee of the General Education Committee, which is why we need to consider them simultaneously.

The Senate voted in favor of Mr. Wilder’s motion to postpone.
Richard Nunan (At-Large, Philosophy) next introduced an amendment that would delete the requirements that students take at least one speaking-intensive course and that they take a third approved communication-intensive course in any discipline. Mr. Nunan said that he was concerned about the proliferation of courses in the overall proposal. He added that he believes Ms. Eichelberger may have been too optimistic about the 56-59 credit hours she suggested would be required for students to complete these general education requirements. Not all students and not all advisors are savvy enough to take advantage of courses which could double-count, he argued. Mr. Nunan said he was also concerned about the history of Writing Across the Curriculum programs at the College. In past attempts to develop such programs, he argued, the administration supported faculty efforts, but then did not come up with funds to pay for them. Based on this history, Mr. Nunan said he is pessimistic about the likelihood that we’d scale back the number of students we’d be required to service in terms of the Delaware numbers. He does not believe the administration would follow through on this piece of advice from the Senate. While he thinks First-Year Seminar courses would be funded because of the QEP (Quality Enhancement Plan), and also that a literature course would be funded because we currently have English 102, he is not confident that other courses would be paid for, and he said that he wants to be realistic.

Ms. Eichelberger pointed out that, at the present moment, the Senate has not approved any communication-intensive courses, though Mr. Nunan had implied that a literature requirement and other courses had been approved. All we have right now is the status quo, she said—English 101 and 102. She also pointed out that the Ad-Hoc Committee had developed a budget and had discussed the issues Mr. Nunan raised. Both the President and the Provost have seen the budget, and both have said they would support these proposed requirements. Ms. Eichelberger added that it was far more likely we will get support for such initiatives if we ask for it than if we don’t. If we put this requirement in place and the money doesn’t show up, she is confident that a future General Education Committee would pull the requirement, declaring it to be an unfunded mandate.

Paul Young (Mathematics) then pointed out that, if we delete the courses Mr. Nunan suggests deleting, this section of the proposal would have little resemblance to the sub-goals listed. He asked why we would even need a CAC Committee if we approve this amendment. Mr. Nunan replied that he has another amendment, which will be introduced later, for limiting the CAC Committee and deleting the position of CAC director. His amendment doesn’t delete the Committee entirely, because there would still be a communication-intensive component to the general education curriculum that a committee would have to deal with.

Brian McGee (guest, Communication) spoke next. He said that the speaking-intensive requirement in the General Education Proposal is not what the Communication Department proposed to the committee. It does not represent best practices in the discipline, which would require a discipline-specific course. He realizes such a requirement is unrealistic. But, nevertheless, Mr. McGee said that he supports the speaking-intensive requirement in the proposal because “doing something is better than doing nothing.” With Mr. Nunan’s amendment, we would have no speaking-intensive
course required in the curriculum at all. As far as internal politics go, the Communication Department itself would gain or lose nothing with this proposal. Several colleges around the country have a similar requirement, but don’t even have departments of communication. Developing speaking-intensive courses, he added, is well within the capacity of the people in this room. Currently, about 50% of CofC students take COMM 104 (Public Speaking), either here or with transfer credits. The national trend has been to add oral communication requirements to curricula over the past 50 years. The college is years behind the time in this area. We currently have an unimaginative distribution series created in the 1970’s, based on a Harvard model created in the 1950’s. If we can’t approve this modest proposal, we’re swimming against the tide and repudiating the goals we’ve set ourselves for decades.

Jack Parson (Political Science) said that he was uncomfortable with the notion that we’re not doing any of this now. He argued that there is already a lot of writing and speaking-intensive instruction that goes on at the College. By practice, we’re closer to the norm than has been suggested. Mr. Parson added that he’s also concerned about budgetary issues. If we’re going to have communication-intensive courses in majors with 20 students, the budget assumes that what we’re funding is lines (adjuncts). Not every department is in the same position to call upon adjuncts. The only way around adjunct reliance is to provide a department a full line on the agreement that x number of writing-intensive courses be offered. The budget of $500,000, he argued, won’t go that far.

Darryl Phillips (At-Large, Classics) said that he wanted to follow up on Mr. Parson’s first point. He believes that discussion of the College’s current status quo is overly bleak and is part of a rhetoric being used to get Senators to accept the proposal. He pointed out that we’ve been collecting data in student evaluations about what kind of work gets done in classes (papers, tests), etc. and asked whether anybody had looked at this data. Kay Smith, Associate Vice-President for the Academic Experience, replied that the National Survey of Student Engagement had asked a similar question of freshmen and seniors at the College. These students reported a low number of pages of assigned writing.

Hugh Wilder asked about a discrepancy between p. 1 of the proposal and Ms. Eichelberger’s presentation last Tuesday concerning the number of hours these requirements will take students to complete. Ms. Eichelberger replied that the Ad-Hoc Committee’s original calculations misrepresented how many hours the communication-intensive courses would require. They had overlooked the fact that the fourth communication-intensive course (or sequence of courses) would be part of the major. In addition, the Ad-Hoc Committee had hypothetically estimated the worst-case scenario for the number of required hours if there were absolutely no double-counting—if every requirement had to be filled by a distinct course. After further study, they decided that it was nearly impossible for this worst-case scenario to occur. She added that, even if one doesn’t accept the Ad-Hoc Committee’s estimated hours, writing and speaking are such fundamental skills that they are worth adding a few hours. In response to Mr. Parson’s concern about departments giving courses in the major, she said that the cap of 20 students does not apply to communication-intensive courses in the major.
Melissa Hughes (Biology) said that, while she understands that many of the requirements will be able to double-count, she worries that many students might not know how to double-count courses. Also, there is a problem in that students transferring in might not have major courses that count as communication-intensive, so this would add hours. Ms. Eichelberger replied that her committee had looked at every department and major and each one had some kind of capstone, seminar, or research-methods course that seems like it would be easily double-countable. George Hopkins (History) asked whether these courses would be denoted as being able to double-count in the registration function used by students. Ms. Eichelberger said “yes,” stating that the on-line record would also serve as a portal whereby students could access lists of courses that count toward the various requirements.

Scott Peeples (English) responded to Mr. Parson’s previous point about communication-intensive instruction already being in place at the College. He agrees that such instruction is widespread, but he argued that instituting requirements would guarantee that all students receive such instruction. If we’re already largely doing what these proposals suggest, we would not be making that much of a change, we’d merely be codifying something, and that would not be hard to accomplish. Mike Duvall (guest, English) then said that he had pulled up on his laptop computer the results of the national survey that Kay Smith had mentioned earlier. He read to Senators some of these results, including the fact that freshmen at the College scored significantly lower than freshmen at other universities on questions which asked how many papers they had written and how much time per week they devote to class preparation. The same was true for seniors. Mr. Duvall argued that these numbers give an indication that students don’t feel all that challenged at the College. Student engagement, he said, as well as the number of hours spent on classwork, goes up with writing-intensive courses.

Michelle Van Parys (Studio Art) said that her department currently has no course that would count toward the requirement of a communication-intensive course within the major. So they’d have to design something new. Brian McGee replied that several people have raised concerns about delivering communication-intensive courses within the major. He pointed out that this discussion, however, was not relevant to Mr. Nunan’s amendment. In addition, noting that he had been accused of the ancient rhetorical trope of “hyperbole,” he said that he would like to deny the charge, because there is currently no structural way to ensure that students take speaking-intensive courses. Many students simply slip through the cracks.

Norine Noonan, Dean of Science and Mathematics, asked how the Ad-Hoc Committee planned to deal with transfer students who make up 30% of our student population. Ms. Eichelberger said that the transfer student issue is an ongoing problem at the College, whether or not we take up these proposals. Many other colleges designate courses as writing-intensive or speaking-intensive, so sometimes the transfer credit issues would be clear (i.e. for public speaking courses). Other courses would have to be evaluated the way transfer credit is awarded now.
Richard Nunan then asked to make a brief point about the number of courses we’d require students to take under these proposals. He pointed out that this section is only the first place courses are added. A number of proposals are coming down the road that add courses as well, including in the sciences and in foreign language. It is not clear, he said, how AP credit will be affected. Mr. Nunan argued that these things keep adding up and that we need to think about that. Fran Welch, Dean of Education, said that Mr. Nunan was making the assumption that we’re adding courses. It’s possible to retool courses, she argued. The School of Education does this all the time—they look at existing courses and add to them to meet accreditation or other requirements.

Norine Noonan asked to return to the transfer student issue—just saying we have to deal with this problem later is not going to be acceptable, she said. Most of our transfer students come from Trident Tech or from other colleges in the state, she argued, so that we pretty much know what courses they bring. Very few of them are designated as writing-intensive or speaking-intensive. So it will require a considerable effort to figure out if these courses count, or else we’ll have to burden the transfer students with extra courses. Ms. Eichelberger said that students at Trident Tech, for instance, have to take two writing courses. Thus, they’d transfer in with two, then have to take two more. Part of the point of the proposal and of Communication Across the Curriculum in general is that students should have repeated writing instruction throughout their time here. We would be asking no more of these students that we would be asking of our own students. Bob Perkins (Foundations, Secondary, and Special Education) said that he is currently working on a project in cooperation with Trident Tech. Part of what they’re doing is asking our English Department to meet with theirs to develop a consistent process to make transfer credit easier.

Doryjane Birrer (English) said that if we were to have a student come in with no writing or speaking-intensive courses whatsoever, then she’d want them to have to take such courses to make the transition to the College. If that means transfer students would have to take additional courses, then they’d have to do so—they would need them. Kay Smith pointed out that there have been some changing trends in transfer students in recent years. The College is getting more freshman transfers as well as more transfers from 4-year colleges. Our considerable investment in the First-Year Experience is designed to increase retention. By doing this, we will be able to take fewer transfers. Tony Chowning (Communication) said that his understanding is that Trident Tech students are required to take the equivalent of COMM 104, our public speaking course. His wife, he said, transferred to the College with 3 semesters left and there were a number of courses she had to take. She realized this and accepted it, as he believes most transfer students do. Paul Young spoke about the issue of transfer students as well, arguing that it would not be so hard to approve a course, but that only sections of courses that have been approved as writing or speaking-intensive courses would count toward this requirement. So would we need a system to ascertain whether a particular Trident Tech professor had writing-intensive training and whether the class had fewer than 20 students in it.

Frank Morris (At-Large Clasics) said he was concerned that the proposal eliminates ENGL 102 when, in the past, we’ve been advised by the History Department that they
like their students to have 102 before they take the introductory history sequence. Ms. Eichelberger said that the Ad-Hoc Committee devised this proposal not with the idea to eliminate ENGL 102, but on the operating principle that the various skills students need to learn are not the province of single departments. Even the proposed first year composition course is not identified as English 101 in the proposal and nothing would prevent another department from proposing a course to satisfy this requirement. In most cases, the literature course students take would be their second communication-intensive course, to be followed by two others. This proposal spreads writing instruction out over the student’s whole career rather than front-loading it in their freshman year. In addition, Ms. Eichelberger said that she believes the History Department doesn’t hold with the view anymore that students should wait to take the introductory sequence until after completing ENGL 102. Chair of the History Department, Bill Olejniczak, confirmed this.

Terry Bowers (English) said he wanted to address the joke Mr. Nunan made when introducing his amendment—that this amendment (not the one to drop the literature requirement made at the previous special meeting) would really “gut the communication-intensive program.” Writing, Mr. Bowers argued, is an absolutely fundamental skill if we’re really serious about the intellectual development of our students. The proposal from the Ad-Hoc Committee formalizes something we probably already do. But it also sends a message to students, to the public, and to us that writing is an ongoing skill.

Deanna Caveny (At-Large, Mathematics) then moved to divide the question so that the Senate could consider the two parts of Mr. Nunan’s amendment separately—1) to eliminate the speaking-intensive requirement, and 2) to eliminate a third approved communication-intensive course in any discipline. The Senate voted to divide the question. Discussion now focused on the speaking-intensive requirement.

Tony Chowning spoke against Mr. Nunan’s amendment, saying that this is his area of specialty. He teaches public speaking and his degree is in speech communication. Students who just give presentations in other courses, he said, are not getting the speaking-intensive skills they need. They’re not learning how to do it well. Employers, he added, want communication skills. If we are not going to require COMM 104, we need some other means to be sure faculty are teaching skills, not just getting students in front of the class to speak. Students are currently not getting these skills. Mick Norton (Mathematics) said that he is currently working with a student on a senior thesis project. He would like her to give a public talk about her research, but she declined because she said she faints when she has to speak publicly. What do we do with students like this, he asked. Brian McGee suggested that, if the student has a disability, she should be referred to the SNAP program. He also said that his discipline has 40 years of research in dealing with communication-apprehensive students. Mr. Norton’s example, he argued, speaks to the need for providing background to faculty on teaching these skills. David Gentry (At-Large, Psychology) pointed out that COMM 104 would not be a course that could be double-counted. He wondered what else would count as a speaking-intensive course. Ms. Eichelberger replied that the Ad-Hoc Committee had only made a start at defining
these criteria. The proposed CAC Committee would come up with guidelines and have to bring these back to the Senate for approval.

Carol Ann Davis (English) then pointed out that if we get rid of the speaking-intensive requirement and of the third communication-intensive course in the discipline, it would make it much harder for a department to deliver the required communication-intensive course within the major. Students would not have the kind of background they would have if we keep these requirements. Departments would have to provide more elementary instruction than they otherwise would. Glenn Lesses (guest, Philosophy) said that he believes there has been a bit of hyperbole in some of this discussion. If the speaking-intensive requirement were eliminated but the communication-intensive course in any discipline were approved, then there would be another communication-intensive class. It’s not as though there would be no speaking-intensive courses, he added. His worry is that if all these things are included, there would be little flexibility. Mr. Lesses said that he wanted to encourage Senators to make the proposal as flexible as possible. Jerry Boetje (Computer Science) noted that he came out of industry five years ago to teach at the College. In the field of Computer Science, he said, it’s incredibly important that people be able to stand up and give presentations. His department, accordingly, requires COMM 104 of all their majors. Even people coming out of COMM 104, though, need reinforcement. Meg Cormack (Religious Studies) said that she regularly uses the excellent facilities provided by the library research staff to introduce students to research projects. She wondered whether her Communication colleagues could provide a similar service to faculty members—if they could visit classes and teach students the essentials of good public speaking.

Doryjane Birrer (English) called the question on the amendment to strike the requirement for a speaking-intensive course. The Senate voted to call the question. The Senate then voted against this portion of Mr. Nunan’s amendment. The speaking-intensive requirement will stay in the proposal.

Robert Westerfelhaus (Communication) called the question to strike the requirement for a third communication-intensive course in any discipline. The Senate voted to call the question. The Senate then voted against this portion of Mr. Nunan’s amendment. The requirement will stand as it appears in the original motion from the Ad-Hoc Committee.

Richard Nunan then moved another amendment, to strike the possibility that the communication-intensive requirement within the major could be satisfied by an “instructional sequence” rather than an individual class. Mr. Nunan said he was concerned that this provision would turn the requirement into a “paper tiger,” that it would be a way for departments to avoid the requirement. Susan Kattwinkel (Theatre) said that she understood Mr. Nunan’s concern, but she assumed that her department would naturally meet this requirement through an instructional sequence. She requires a good deal of writing in a two-course required Theatre sequence she teaches, but because the content is so large, she is unable to condense the writing instruction into one class. In addition, she believes spreading the writing-intensive requirement in the major over a sequence of courses helps her students because it builds their writing skills over two
semesters. Ms. Kattwinkel added that she can imagine other departments have similar situations. Paul Young then asked a question about the instructional sequence. He wondered if every course and section in such a sequence would have to be certified and whether each course would have to have an enrollment of 20 or less. Ms. Eichelberger reiterated that there is no 20-student cap for the communication-intensive course in the major. She said her committee was willing to add language to clarify Mr. Young’s first question—the intent of her committee was to not require training within the major. Mike Duvall (guest, English) said that retaining the flexibility of an instructional sequence rather than a single course might help with speaking-intensive instruction as well. If professors are concerned about student presentations taking up class time, this could be a way to spread speaking requirements out over a number of courses.

At this point discussion ended and a vote was taken. Mr. Nunan’s amendment failed.

Darryl Phillips (At-Large, Classics), noting that he’s given a lot of thought to big procedural questions concerning the proposal, argued that the Senate had been “misguided” in starting debate on individual sections of the proposal. As we’re improving one part of the proposal, he said, this affects other parts. Mr. Phillips moved to table the motion before the Senate so that we could suspend the rules and come back and consider the entire General Education package as a whole.

A vote was taken, and Mr. Phillips’ motion failed on a show of hands.

The Speaker then recognized Richard Nunan, who said that since Robert’s Rules do not allow debate on a motion to table, he wanted to say something about considering the entire package while he has the floor. To discuss the whole proposal at once without voting on separate parts, Mr. Nunan argued, would be completely chaotic. Mr. Nunan then made an amendment that would delete from this section of the proposal language requiring students to post work to an online record (the Senate already approved deleting a requirement that students post such work samples in our previous discussion of the online record). Deborah Vaughn (Accountability, Accreditation, Planning, and Assessment) spoke against the amendment, arguing that the QEP (Quality Enhancement Plan) requires assessment of student writing samples. Having these posted to the online record would make it easier to collect these samples.

A vote was taken, and Mr. Nunan’s amendment was approved.

Jack Parson (Political Science) asked whether every item a CAC Committee came up with would have to come back to the Senate for approval. Ms. Eichelberger said that it would. Mr. Parson pointed out that this is an important point, because he has no idea what “communication-intensive” would actually mean in any particular course. While he said that he is not necessarily objecting to this fact, he wants assurance that nothing will be required until Senate approval has been obtained. Darryl Phillips expressed concern that such a committee would have to review and approve syllabi from individual faculty members so that their courses could count as communication-intensive. Faculty members, he said, often don’t make their syllabi very far in advance. He argued that such
a requirement could limit the creativity of professors who constantly adapt and change their courses.

Gary Harrison (Mathematics) then offered an amendment to eliminate paragraph 6 on p. 20 of the proposal, which he thinks is unworkable. The paragraph reads:

A course’s designation as WI or SI is dependent on the faculty member who teaches it as well as on its curriculum. For a section of a course to be so designated, its instructor must undergo formal training in communication instruction. If a previously-approved WI or SI course is later taught by another faculty member who has not received this training, that faculty member’s sections of the course will not satisfy a communication-intensive requirement.

Cathy Boyd, College Registrar, said that the College’s current degree audit system does not recognize an instructor or a section. Courses that are speaking or writing-intensive would have to be approved by course number. She imagines that the same will be true of a new system. Brian McGee said that he spoke with the Associate Provost at the University of Mary Washington at length about this issue. They have been able to adapt their software to recognize instructors and sections. He added that he is convinced that what other universities have done for over a decade, we can do as well.

Larry Krasnoff (guest, Philosophy) argued that this paragraph would be difficult to enforce with transfer students. In general, he would like to see these courses evaluated by the number of papers required, not by whether an instructor is trained. Calvin Blackwell (Economics/Finance) asked how classes would actually be evaluated if this amendment passes. Mr. Harrison replied that Department Chairs could make sure that a person assigned to teach such a course had the proper training and requirements to teach it. Mike Duvall said that, as a former director of a Writing Across the Curriculum program at another university, he wanted to remind Senators that WAC involves more than just the number of papers assigned. Generally there are process requirements (drafting, etc.), writing-to-learn requirements and other criteria. He said we should view the formal training required in the original proposal as faculty development. He argued that it would be dangerous to take this requirement out completely.

Discussion ended, and the Senate voted to approve Mr. Harrison’s amendment.

Mark Long (Political Science) said that he believed there was an implicit notion that the required literature course in this section of the proposal would in fact be a writing-intensive course. Therefore, he moved to amend the motion by striking the words “or speaking-intensive” from this requirement. Ms. Eichelberger said that her committee would not accept this as a friendly amendment, because they do not wish to limit flexibility. She argued that literature courses in foreign languages, in particular, might be designated as speaking-intensive. In addition, there are oral interpretation of literature courses offered in the Communication Department.
Having run out of time, the meeting adjourned at this point. When the Senate next discusses the General Education Proposal, we will begin with Mr. Long’s amendment.

Respectfully Submitted,
Susan Farrell
Faculty Secretary