Minutes of the Special Faculty Senate Meeting Devoted to General Education, 19 February 2008

The Faculty Senate met on Tuesday, 19 February 2008, at 5:00 p.m. in Wachovia Auditorium. This was the eleventh special meeting of the academic year dedicated to the General-Education Proposals formulated by the ad hoc Committee on General Education.

After Speaker Joe Kelly called the meeting to order, George Hopkins (History) moved to strike the pending motion (made in the previous meeting by Doryjane Birrer of the English Dept.) and replace it with new language. (The pending motion sought to amend Goal 6—Interdisciplinary and Cultural Analysis—by changing the requirement from six hours to three, which could be met by the required interdisciplinary science course or by another interdisciplinary course. The exact wording of the proposed new language is as follows:

*All students must complete two approved courses. This requirement may be satisfied by one of the courses taken in the Scientific Reasoning and Analysis, and Knowledge of the Natural World and by another approved course. An approved list of interdisciplinary courses fulfilling this requirement shall be maintained by the Registrar. Courses approved to fulfill other general education requirements also may be approved to fulfill this requirement.*

Mr. Hopkins explained that the rationale for his motion stemmed from concerns regarding the number of hours in the proposed Gen-Ed plan and the complexity of the plan. His motion alleviates these concerns: it involves no extra courses and minimizes complications. The idea of making the interdisciplinary courses double-count for other Gen-Ed requirements is something that other school have done successfully and relatively easily. He then called on David Goss, Director of Academic Advising, to speak on the issue of double-counting and whether it is difficult to implement and track. Mr. Goss said that we already have double-counting, and that there is no reason to think that in the future it will be more difficult to track. In fact, it will probably be easier because the technology to run it will be better. Mr. Hopkins asked if advisors and students would be able to tell with ease what courses would double-count. Mr. Goss said that they would, and that the Battery Project would make it easier to look at a student’s records and track that information in coordination with other information concerning Gen Ed. Mr. Hopkins added that given Mr. Goss’ remarks, he didn’t think Senators should be concerned about double-counting issues or worried that the system would be too complicated for students and advisors to use.

There was some question as to whether Mr. Hopkins’ motion was in order (can you make an amendment to an amendment?), but Speaker Kelly ruled that it was.

Hugh Wilder (Philosophy) urged the Senate to vote against the motion, arguing that the Senate needed to decide on whether goal 6 should require three or six hours.

The Senate voted on Mr. Hopkins’ motion and it was defeated.
The Senate’s attention now returned to the motion pending from the meeting on February 5. Richard Nunan (at-large) wished to comment on the state of the Gen-Ed Proposal and to respond to some comments made by Senators in the last Gen-Ed meeting. He said that what he saw as the general problem of the Proposal remained: it was too cumbersome. Hours needed to be cut. Kay Smith in the previous meeting, he recalled, had argued for an expanded Gen-Ed package, pointing out because many students increasingly arrive with AP credit adding more Gen-Ed hours wouldn’t be a problem. Mr. Nunan said that AP credits have been around a while. That’s not new. There will still be a net increase in Gen-Ed hours, which will affect a lot of students. He also pointed out that we don’t have policy about how AP credits will transfer to the new system.

Ms. Smith (guest) responded, first mentioning that the College will be accepting IB (international baccalaureate) credits. She then said that she had investigated how many course credits graduating high school students entering the College will have. She found out that they will come with over 4,600 credits. While she was not sure about the implications of these findings, she was concerned about the integrity of the Gen-Ed experience for students. We have no control, she said, over AP courses; but we can control what students take here. She added that about one-third of students graduate with more than 122 hours.

Mr. Hopkins said that the desire to simplify the Gen-Ed Proposal was fine, but only up to a point. He urged the Senate not to be swayed by the argument that the Gen-Ed Proposal was too complex, and was confident that new technology would be able to handled perceived difficulties. Jason Overby (Chemistry and Biochemistry) said the total number of hours was his major concern. All chemistry students graduate with more than 122 hours because of the number of chemistry courses they must take, which are required by the accrediting agency. Chemistry majors have no flexibility. Adding more Gen-Ed requirements would be a burden for them. Gary Harrison (Mathematics) said that according to figures on AP credits provided by Ms. Smith, the freshmen class on average will come in with enough credits to cover two courses. But the Gen-Ed Proposal, he pointed out, adds 12 to 16 credit hours; so students won’t be able to make up those extra hours solely with AP credit. Meg Cormack (at-large) asked about the students who come to the College with no AP credit. She was also concerned that adding more Gen-Ed hours would limit the ability of students to take electives, and was skeptical that double-counting opportunities would enable students to deal with the extra Gen-Ed hours.

Todd McNerney (Theatre) said that his accrediting agency recommends that a minimum of 50% of total credit hours be devoted to Gen Ed. Our current Gen-Ed package falls below that minimum. He added that it was not just “crazy people in the arts” who recommend this. The state university system of New York recommends that about three-quarters of a student’s study be devoted to Gen Ed. Mr. McNerney thought that Gen-Ed should comprise about 50% (or slightly above) of a student’s total number of credits during his/her undergraduate career, and would like to see courses in the major double-count for Gen Ed so that students could make connections between their major and Gen Ed. Mr. Krasnoff responded that adding on hours would, as Ms. Cormack mentioned, reduce students’ freedom to take electives and pursue other interests. That freedom, he said, needs to be preserved.
At this point, a Senator called the question, and the motion passed.

The Senate voted on the amendment to Goal 6 proposed by Doryjane Birrer (English), which reads: “All students must complete one approved course. This requirement may be satisfied by one of the courses taken in Scientific Reasoning and Analysis, and Knowledge of the Natural World or another approved course.” The amendment passed.

Mr. Nunan asked what the vote count was. Speaker Kelly said it was 34 to 26.

Mr. Krasnoff then moved to amend the Goal 1 Requirement by adding the statement “The course used to fulfill this requirement must also satisfy one of the General Education requirements below.” The motion received a second.

Ms. Smith said that because this motion affects the First Year Experience (FYE) she would like to postpone discussion until Susan Kattwinkel, the Director of the FYE, could be present to offer her input. Edith Ellis (Health and Human Performance) therefore moved to table Mr. Krasnoff’s motion definitely until Ms. Kattwinkel could be present. Mr. Krasnoff replied that he had no objection to the motion to table. Parliamentarian Brian McGee clarified that there is an assumption that Ms. Kattwinkel will be present at the next meeting. If she is not, then the motion can be taken off the table. The motion received a second. The Senate then passed the motion to table the amendment.

Mr. Krasnoff then moved to combine Goals 10 and 11 to a single goal (to be labeled Goal 10 International or Intercultural Perspective) and to amend the Requirement as follows: “Students must complete one course, satisfying either the approval criteria on p. 13 or the approval criteria on p. 14. The course used to fulfill this requirement must also satisfy one of the General Education requirements above.” The motion received a second.

Mr. Pothering said that he would like to see both required courses, one for goal 10, which focuses on international contexts, and one for goal 11, which focuses on learning about multiple cultural contexts. He thought this amendment, if passed, would be a great step backwards. Jack Parson (Political Science) agreed, saying that the Senate has spent much time defining key goals. So to combine them just causes confusion. Mr. Gentry also thought that the proposed amendment would restrict students from taking electives in other areas in the humanities and social sciences. Mr. Krasnoff said that the intent of the amendment was to make study abroad count. If that is not clear, the language can be changed to make it so.

Calvin Blackwell (Economics and Finance) moved to amend Mr. Krasnoff’s amendment by striking the sentence “The course used to fulfill this requirement must also satisfy one of the General Education requirements above.” His motion received a second. After a brief discussion about the what the amendment to the amendment meant and what its implications were, the Senate voted, and Mr. Blackwell’s motion failed.

Speaking to Mr. Krasnoff’s proposed amendment, Jeffery Diamond (History) said that he, too, had a problem with combining goals 10 and 11, arguing that today students need an international perspective on the world as well as an understanding of multiple cultures,
especially given the changes in our own society. He thought that conflating the goals was a mistake. Doryjane Birrer (English) agreed, noting that students need to be exposed to the larger world beyond what is familiar to them. Julia Eichelberger (guest) noted that some majors (e.g., in business and education) already have requirements that cover both goals 10 and 11.

Mr. Harrison said that while both goals are admirable, some streamlining of the Gen-Ed Proposal is needed. If we don’t begin here, then where will it happen? Let’s start making small changes now, he urged. If we wait till later to make a big change, instability to the entire system is likely to result. Mr. Parson disagreed with that assessment, as did Jerry Boetje (Computer Science), who said that even if the Gen-Ed package is a big change, it is needed. It’s been over thirty years, he continued, since Gen Ed at the College has been changed. Ms. Birrer added that she saw goals 10 and 11 as core goals that are crucial for students’ education. If we are going to reduce these goals, then we should do the same with science, math, and other core learning goals. Frank Morris (at-large) also spoke against the amendment, arguing that goals 10 and 11 address what has been lacking in Gen Ed at the College—a focus on the international, multicultural, and interdisciplinary. Mr. McNerney agreed with Mr. Morris, but Mr. Nunan said that while such arguments are good, the Gen-Ed Proposal is still too big and too complicated. He thought it was a mistake to think that computers or technology could easily deal with those issues, and that Senators had to make some tough choices about what to cut. Mr. Hopkins disagree, saying the “too complicated” has simply become a mantra, not a substantiated claim. Mr. Diamond called the question, and his motion passed.

The Senate voted on Mr. Krasnoff’s motion to combine goals 10 and 11, and it was defeated.

Mr. Krasnoff commented that the issue is not just whether the computer can handle a complex system, but also whether we can sell the Gen-Ed Proposal to our colleagues. To do the latter, we need a clearer, simpler proposal. Mr. Krasnoff then made the following motion (item 2B of his list of amendments): “Delete Goal 11. Add to the Requirement of Goal 10: The course used to fulfill this requirement must also satisfy one of the General Education requirements above.” The motion received a second. He said that by just requiring the international requirement (Goal 10) and eliminating Goal 11, the Gen-Ed Proposal would be simpler and smaller. Also, not much would be lost because most internationally focused courses deal with other cultures; so the intercultural content of Goal 11 would effectively remain. Moreover, he thought that there should not be much concern that the study of multiple cultures in the USA would be lost by eliminating Goal 11 because many courses on American society taught in different departments deal with multiculturalism.

Von Bakanic (Sociology and Anthropology) strongly opposed the proposed amendment. She said that we face many social problems today and that students need to understand that we live in a diverse, multicultural world and learn about the issues of that world.

The Senate voted on Mr. Krasnoff’s amendment, which failed.
Hugh Wilder then moved to add the following statement to the Requirements for Goals 10 and 11: “The course used to fulfill this requirement must also satisfy one of the General Education requirements above.” The motion received a second. Mr. Hopkins thought the motion was excellent, and was certain the computer system would be able to handle the double counting.

Laura Turner (Theatre) moved to amend Mr. Wilder’s proposed amendment by changing the statement to read, “The course used to fulfill this requirement must also satisfy one of the General Education requirements and/or a requirement in the major or minor.” The motion received a second.

Jason Coy (at-large) spoke against the amendment to the amendment, saying that Gen-Ed requirements shouldn’t be mixed with the major’s requirements. He thought the motion would make the Gen-Ed Proposal more complex. Mr. Overby agreed and reminded the Senate that it has previously deleted a page from the Proposal that dealt with the Gen-Ed’s connection to the major. Ms. Cormack strongly disagreed with this view, arguing that the whole point of the Gen-Ed reform is to get students to forge connections between Gen Ed and their major. Calvin Blackwell (Economics and Finance) spoke against the motion, saying that he was having difficulty understanding the Gen-Ed package, and if he was having difficulty, surely students would find it even harder to understand. He stressed the need for simplicity and flexibility. Jennifer McStotts (at-large) asked what would happen if students switched majors. The motion, if passed, could create problems in this area. A few more comments along these lines were made until Gary Harrison (Mathematics) called the question. His motion passed.

The Senate voted, and Ms. Turner’s amendment to Mr. Wilder’s amendment failed.

Mr. McNerney called the question on Mr. Wilder’s proposed amendment. The motion to call the question passed.

The Senate voted on Mr. Wilder’s motion, which failed.

Mr. Overby then proposed to strike the interdisciplinary science course. Specifically he proposed the following changes to the Requirement section of Goal 5.

1) All students must complete three two approved courses and two approved labs.

2) Coursework must be done in at least two different departments.

3) Students must select three two approved courses and two approved labs that, either separately or in combination, cover all five areas of knowledge designated under “knowledge of the natural world.” Courses will be tagged to indicate the topics they cover.

After his motion received a second, he explained the rationale. He argued that the interdisciplinary course, though worthy, was a public policy course, not a science course.
Scientific theory, he announced, was “not touchy feely,” but “bound by fact.” This interdisciplinary course, he continued, “isn’t what you think it is; it’s not science.” He added that if the Senate wished to keep it, then it should be moved to the interdisciplinary goal. He said that he would like to make the interdisciplinary science course interdisciplinary among the sciences, but that that idea had been shot down.

Bob Mignone (guest) asked why Mr. Overby couldn’t modify his amendment to make the interdisciplinary course include interdisciplinary courses among the sciences. He then recommended that the motion be tabled so that more science faculty could have a chance to think about the proposed amendment. Sorinel Oprisan (Physics and Astronomy) then moved to table the amendment. The motion received a second. Mr. Krasnoff asked the Speaker to rule the motion out of order on the grounds that there was some confusion in the motion. The Speaker declined to rule the motion out of order. Steve Litvin (Hospitality and Tourism) spoke against the motion, arguing that we have already gone over the Gen-Ed Proposal for days and it was time to deal with it now and not schedule more meetings so that others could be present. Pete Calcagno (Economics and Finance) agreed and said that the science faculty already have representation in the Senate and those Senators should be here.

Rohn England (Mathematics) thought there was some confusion about the current state of the Gen-Ed document because of the multiple amendments and thus urged his fellow Senators to table the motion. Steve Jaumé agreed and thought it prudent to provide time to think through the ramifications of Mr. Overby’s proposed amendment. Other Senators agreed, but still others thought that the Senate proceedings should not be “held hostage” by absent colleagues, and that the Senate should send a message to those colleagues by voting not to table the amendment. Finally, a Senator called the question, and the motion to call the question passed.

The Senate defeated the motion to table Mr. Overby’s proposed amendment.

At this point it was 7:00 p.m., the scheduled end of the meeting. The Senate adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Terence Bowers
Faculty Secretary