Minutes of the Special Faculty Senate Meeting Devoted to General Education, 26 February 2008

The Faculty Senate met on Tuesday, 26 February 2008, at 5:00 p.m. in Wachovia Auditorium. This was the twelfth special meeting of the academic year dedicated to the General-Education Proposals formulated by the ad hoc Committee on General Education.

After the Speaker, Joe Kelly, called the meeting to order, the minutes from the November 13, 2007 meeting were approved.

Debate on Jason Overby’s (Chemistry/Biochemistry) motion regarding the science goal made at the previous meeting resumed. The motion sought to alter the Requirement section of Goal 5 in the following way:

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.

Jaap Hillenius (at-large) began the discussion by stating that if Mr. Overby’s amendment passes, the science goal will be unworkable because the remaining two required courses won’t be able to cover all the Approval Criteria of the goal—in which case he would suggest that the entire science goal be struck and replaced by what we currently have for the science requirement.

Larry Krasnoff (Philosophy) moved to amend Mr. Overby’s proposed amendment by deleting the last sentence in the Approval Criteria of Goal 5.

One of the three approved courses must be defined by an interdisciplinary approach involving the relationship of scientific knowledge to culture and society.

The motion received a second. Jon Hakkila (guest) then expressed disappointment with the direction of the Gen-Ed amendment process and said that he “didn’t expect one person to cause so much havoc.” He spoke of how the faculty was losing a sense of common cause by segregating themselves into groups, and was worried that the Gen-Ed reform effort would collapse. Mr. Wilder replied, saying that he assumed Mr. Hakkila’s remarks were directed at Mr. Overby’s motion, but that the Senate needed to deal first with Mr. Krasnoff’s motion. The Senate voted on Mr. Krasnoff’s motion, which passed.

Richard Nunan (at-large) responded to Mr. Hillenius’ comment, agreeing that with two science courses all the Defining Characteristics of the goal could not be covered, but he said that that was also true prior to Mr. Overby’s amendment. Mr. Hillenius disagreed, saying that
with three courses the key content areas could be covered, but with just two it was impossible. Norine Noonan (Dean of the School of Sciences and Mathematics and guest) agreed with Mr. Hillenius. If Mr. Overby’s amendment passes, “we’d have to go back to the status quo ante.” She urged the Senate to defeat the amendment. Bob Mignone (guest) spoke against the amendment and urged Senators to trust their colleagues in the sciences on the point that the science goal could not be achieved in two courses.

George Hopkins (History), responding to point made by Mr. Overby at the prior meeting that the interdisciplinary course was not a science course, said that it had never been thought that the interdisciplinary course would contain no or little science content. The point is to see how science impacts society. He stressed that students need to learn science, but they also need to learn how it interacts with other disciplines. He didn’t want science to become isolated in the education process from other areas. Mitchell Colgan (guest) said he felt that he was experiencing a Rip van Winkle moment: he thought that all the issues about the third science course and the distrust among the disciplines had been resolved; now he finds that these problems have returned. He, too, urged the Senate to defeat the amendment and stressed that the interdisciplinary science course held the promise for many new, exciting, and creative courses that would benefit students immensely. He said that worries about the content of the third course were exaggerated and that there will be mechanisms in place (e.g., the Gen-Ed Committee) to vet them and monitor the system.

Mr. Krasnoff said that two issues had emerged: one concerns the science content of the interdisciplinary science course; the other concerns whether the Defining Characteristics of the goal can be covered. He wanted to know from his colleagues what courses would allow students to cover the Defining Characteristics of the goal. Mr. Colgan responded that the Gen-Ed Committee would make such determinations, and that he wouldn’t be forced to come up with courses on the spot. He was “not going to play that game.” Mr. Hakkila again expressed his disappointment with the tone and tenor of the discussion, and chastised those present for engaging in disrespectful behavior, which included making snide remarks and laughing while people had the floor. He agreed with Mr. Colgan’s last remarks, saying that many science courses would have to be revised to meet requirement, and that to be forced to come up with specific courses on the spot was unhelpful. He urged the Senate to work together to reform Gen-Ed science because what we have now is “stale and rigid.”

Addressing a different matter, Darryl Phillips said that staffing issues and resources have not been seriously addressed in these discussions, and that the Gen-Ed Proposal would require a massive re-distribution in resources, especially with respect to the science goal, which will go from eight required credit-hours to eleven. Mr. Hopkins responded, saying that greater resources will have to be found by the College administration. He also supported Mr. Hakkila’s sentiment that the Senate must work together to strengthen science education and to keep the eleven credit hours as stipulated in the Gen-Ed Proposal. Jack Parson (Political Science) remarked that he accepted the notion that eleven credit-hours were needed for science education, but he didn’t accept getting rid of the interdisciplinary course, which connects science to society. Paul Young (Mathematics) said that what bothered him about the interdisciplinary course in Goal 5 was the use the word “must” in the last sentence, which states that one of the three courses “must,” rather than “may” be interdisciplinary, and which
defines what kind of interdisciplinary course it must be. Agnes Southgate (guest) said that most faculty in the sciences don’t feel that the third course should be all science. We in the sciences, she said, want interdisciplinary courses that explore the connections between science and society, and we would love to teach them, but don’t want to bear all of the burden of teaching them. Mr. Huddleston supported Ms. Southgate’s remarks and urged the Senate to defeat Mr. Overby’s amendment. Mr. Hakkila also supported them, saying that he wanted more teaching collaboration between those in the sciences and other disciplines. Jerry Boetje also agreed and stressed the need for more interdisciplinary work: knowledge shouldn’t be isolated in big “silos”; it must to be exchanged and shared. That is why, he added, it is crucial that the word “must” remain in the last sentence of Goal 5.

Rick Heldrick (guest) said that he and his colleagues in the Chemistry Department had a different view. They thought that the extra three credit-hours in science was good, but thought that students should take two courses in one science and the third course in another science. From their point of view, the goal is make sure that students are well-rounded in science. When the science goal morphed into something else, he said, the department no longer supported it. His department also did not like the fact that the interdisciplinary requirement was located in the science goal. Mr. Krasnoff said that he appreciated those remarks, but said that if Mr. Overby’s motion passes, we will be back in our “silos.” He agreed, however, that the staffing issue is significant. He said, too, that he apologized if his earlier question seemed rude, but that was not his intent. He merely wanted to know why two courses could not meet the science goal because some faculty in the sciences have said that two courses could do the job. Ms. Noonan replied that when the science goal was mapped onto our current courses, it was clear that two courses would not meet it; hence the need for a third course, which the Senate had agreed upon last semester.

The question was called. The motion to call the question passed.

The Senate voted on Mr. Overby’s proposed amendment, which failed.

Mr. Hillenius moved to amend the last statement in the Goal 5 Approval Criteria to read, “One of the three approved courses must be defined by an interdisciplinary approach involving the relationship of scientific knowledge to culture and society.” The motion was seconded. Mr. Hillenius explained that there was concern among his colleagues that the third science course was too restrictive. His amendment sought to open up the course so that it was not limited to just courses focusing on the connection between science and society. He wanted to give more choices to students and to make room for other interdisciplinary science courses that did fit the current definition in the Approval Criteria. His intent, he added, was not that the third course should be taught solely by faculty in the science departments.

Mr. Nunan supported the proposed amendment. He said that it would help with the staffing issue, especially in light of his view that there were not enough faculty on campus to teach all the science-society courses that would be needed. However, he was still worried about whether all the Defining Criteria of the goal could be covered.
Scott Peeples (English), speaking against the amendment, addressed both the view that the interdisciplinary course was too restrictive and the notion that it severely diminished the science content of the course. The Approval Criteria don’t say, he pointed out, that the content of the course has to be “50-50”—half science and half social issues. It just says that a connection has to be made, which, as various Senators have said, is vital. In that regard, the course doesn’t dilute the science content of the course. Mr. Parson also opposed the amendment and said that he only voted for the extra science course because it was intended to connect science and society. However, he added that he would be willing to change the word “must” to “may” in the last sentence of the goal. Ms. Noonan, recalling the effort to add another science course last semester and the agreement that it should be interdisciplinary, said that she would stick by that agreement, especially because it offered the possibility of creating exciting new courses for students. She agreed, too, that the word “must” is “silo breaker” and shouldn’t be changed to “may.” Doryjane Birrer (English) echoed Mr. Parson’s point that the reason many Senators voted for the third science course was that it would make the connections between science and society.

Mr. Heldrick thought it would be difficult to create all the new courses that would be needed and said that use of the word “must” bothered his department. Mr. Young disagreed with the view that changing “must” to “may” would preclude the “silo breaking” that many desire. Calvin Blackwell (Economics and Finance) spoke in favor of the amendment and thought that the current wording of the Approval Criteria of Goal 5 was vague and would cause problems for the Gen-Committee and staffing problems.

After a few more comments along these lines, the Senate voted on Mr. Hillenius’ amendment, which failed.

Following up on Mr. Young’s idea made earlier in the discussion, Mr. Nunan moved to change the word “must” to “may” in the last sentence of Approval Criteria of Goal 5. The motion received a second. Mr. Peeples spoke against it, arguing that it would gut the interdisciplinary component of the third course. He said you might as well strike the whole thing, if you change “must” to “may.” Mr. Young disagreed, saying that it gives students options: they could take a third science course, if they wished, or a third course that is interdisciplinary linking science to society. He stressed, too, that he wants there to be interdisciplinary courses. The Senate voted on the motion, which failed.

Speaker Kelly reminded the Senate that at the last Gen-Ed meeting the Senate laid on the table a motion made by Mr. Krasnoff regarding the First Year Experience (FYE). Specifically the motion sought to amend the Goal 1 Requirement by adding the following sentence: “The course used to fulfill this requirement must also satisfy one of the General Education requirements below.” Mr. Krasnoff explained that the purpose of the amendment is to reduce the total number of Gen-Ed hours by making sure that the FYE counts for another Gen-Ed requirement. The cost of passing the amendment is that some FYE courses scheduled for next year probably won’t count for another Gen-Ed requirement.

Susan Kattwinkel (guest) spoke against the amendment. She said that while the majority of FYE courses satisfy another Gen-Ed requirement, not all do. The most popular FYE course,
for example, does not. She added that for certain students (e.g., athletes and majors in the School of Education), making sure that the FYE double-counts could be difficult. The School of Education of and the School of Business have supported and bought into the FYE, but she feared their support might be lost were the proposed amendment to pass. She added that the FYE is an opportunity for students to try some new things and some courses might seem a little odd because they are not always typical courses. The amendment, if it passed, might make some of the FYE courses less innovative and less attractive to students. However, overall she thought that 85% of the FYE courses would double-count.

Mr. Nunan agreed with Ms. Kattwinkel, saying that the FYE shouldn’t be burdened with the goal of slimming down a “bloated” Gen-Ed program. Kay Smith (guest) added that the FYE needs maximum flexibility so that enough courses can be offered to entering freshmen.

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

Mr. Blackwell then moved to take Mr. Nunan’s “Third-Path” proposal off the table. His motion was seconded.

It was now 7 p.m., the scheduled end of the meeting, and the Senate adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Terence Bowers
Faculty Secretary