Minutes of the Special Faculty Senate Meeting Devoted to General Education, 5 February 2008

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

Speaker Joe Kelly called the meeting to order. Next, the Minutes of the November 6th meeting were approved. The Speaker also announced that Senators would be limited to speaking twice on a given issue.

Jack Parson (Political Science) moved to table the main motion on the first Gen-Ed Proposal so that the Senate could consider the second Gen-Ed Proposal concerning the establishment of a Gen-Ed Steering Committee. He said that in last week’s Senate discussion there seemed to be no disagreement over the benefits of a goal-driven system, and that disagreement mainly centered on double-counting and the number of total required hours. He was worried that power to make major decisions about Gen Ed might be handed to a committee that was unaccountable, yet powerful. He thought therefore that now was a good time to talk about the committee, to define and limit what it could and couldn’t do. The motion received a second.

David Gentry (at-large) asked if faculty approval would be needed to create the committee because it would entail a change in the by-laws, which the whole faculty would have to approve. Mr. Parson said that a faculty vote on the committee would not be necessary. Brian McGee (Communication), who chairs the By-Laws Committee, said that his committee prepared a report on the proposed Gen-Ed Committee. Its key points are that such a committee would have no influence on graduate education, and that the duties and authority of the Curriculum Committee would not change (the report also clarifies the relationship between the Gen-Ed Committee and other committees). Mr. McGee added that any decision of the Gen-Ed Committee could be appealed to the Senate.

Larry Krasnoff (Philosophy) opposed the motion, arguing that since no Gen-Ed elements have been voted on, the committee’s necessity is not yet established. We should focus on the Gen-Ed goals, he said. Mary Beth Heston (Art History) added that the Senate should at this moment think about the larger issues of Gen Ed. Darryl Phillips (at-large) agreed that now is the not the time to for a discussion of the Gen-Ed Committee, especially given the fact that the Senate does not yet know what such a committee would be presiding over.

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

Mr. Krasnoff then moved to re-number the goals in the Gen-Ed Proposals using Arabic numbers. The motion received a second. He then passed out a green sheet that listed the goals. There was some discussion as to whether the Senate would vote on the numbering of the goals as they appeared on the green sheet, with Susan Kattwinkel (guest) pointing out that the numbering in the motion didn’t match up with the numbering on the sheet. Steve Jaumé asked if the numbering in the motion corresponded to how the goals where numbered on p. 25 of the Gen-Ed Proposal, and Mr. Krasnoff responded “yes.” Jason Overby (Chemistry and
Biochemistry) supported the motion, arguing that the Roman numerals were confusing. The Senate voted on the motion, which passed.

Richard Nunan (at-large) moved to strike the main motion and replace it with a Gen-Ed proposal that he called “the Third Path.” Mr. Nunan had circulated the “Third-Path” document prior to the meeting, but highlighted some of its key features as he made his motion. His proposal, he said, would eliminate some requirements, modify lab courses,heap under one category all humanities courses (except ENGL 101), and address some double-counting issues. After his motion received a second, Mr. Nunan explained that his proposal also dealt with the “elephant in the room”: “turf protection.” Many departments, he continued, have a stake in the existing Gen-Ed system (e.g., English and History have guaranteed courses) and they have an incentive to protect their turf in the Gen-Ed reform effort. His proposal does away with all protectionism for individual departments. He said, too, that his proposed system is simpler and easier to use, requires few hours, and helps students graduate on time.

Mr. Overby praised the proposal for its simplicity. George Pothering (guest) asked Mr. Nunan why he cut the humanities from 21 to 18 hours. Mr. Nunan replied that the added three hours given to science had to be cut from some other area to keep the total number of hours down. Mr. Phillips said that while he shared some of Mr. Nunan’s sentiments about the Gen-Ed situation, he didn’t want to see a pattern develop where all 82 Senators each present their individuals visions of Gen Ed. Such a development would not be a good use of the Senate’s time. He urged, instead, that the Senate vote on the Gen-Ed Proposal before them. Mr. Nunan replied that it was a mischaracterization to suggest that he has invented something new. Rather, he has tried to take what the ad hoc Gen-Ed Committee has done and make it work. His proposal was a salvage operation.

Mr. Phillips, moving to a different topic, asked how he defined a “discipline.” Is history a discipline? Do the humanities constitute a single discipline? Mr. Nunan said that some wordsmithing would be needed to work out the issue of what counts as a discipline. Scott Peeples (English) was not convinced that Mr. Nunan’s “Third Path” was a goal-driven system, and suggested that the Senate might wish to consider a proposal crafted by Mr. Krasnoff that kept the goal-driven scheme created by the Gen-Ed Committee, but streamlined it. Jason Coy (at-large) agreed with Mr. Nunan’s effort to preserve the work of the Gen-Ed Committee, but felt that the spirit of their work had been voided in Mr. Nunan’s proposal. The history goal and the interdisciplinary goal, for example, were absent in his proposal. Jeffery Diamond (History) thought that Mr. Nunan’s proposal raised too many questions and was too radical to be acceptable. Mr. Krasnoff, responding to Mr. Peeples’ comment, thought that Mr. Nunan’s proposal was goal-driven. More importantly, it contained a big idea worth considering—namely, the idea of lumping together all the humanities courses in one group and not privileging certain departments.

George Hopkins (History) supported Mr. Peeples’ idea of considering Mr. Krasnoff’s proposal, which, he said, was much more in line with what the Senate has been working on. Doryjane Birrer (English) moved to table Mr. Nunan’s motion in order to view Mr. Krasnoff’s motion. The motion was seconded. Mr. Nunan said that he was amenable to
tabling his proposal so long as the intent was not to kill all consideration of his proposal. The Senate approved the motion to table Mr. Nunan’s motion.

Mr. Krasnoff then circulated a sheet that contained his proposal. More specifically, he said that it contained a set of suggestions for streamlining the Gen-Ed Proposal, reducing the number of required hours, and addressing uncertainties with double-counting. He proposed that the Senate take up and vote on each suggestion individually. The Senate did not have to take the whole package, but could adopt just those ideas that it found useful. He then moved to delete goal 6 (page 8 of the Gen-Ed document), which requires an extra interdisciplinary course (in addition to the interdisciplinary science course in goal 5). Mr. Krasnoff said that he saw this idea as the least controversial item in his proposal. His motion was then seconded.

Todd Grantham (guest) wondered if just the requirement could be deleted, but not the entire page. He said that he would like to keep the goal and strike just the requirement. Mr. Nunan thought that the remaining interdisciplinary course should no longer be exclusively linked to the sciences. Mr. Krasnoff in principle agreed with Mr. Nunan, but said that since the science faculty have argued that three courses are needed to cover science education, then the interdisciplinary course must remain linked to science to reduce the number of overall requirements. Picking up on Mr. Grantham’s point, Mr. Pothering said that one reason the Gen-Ed Committee put the goals in was to highlight what is important in education. To strike page 8, you take out the idea of the importance of interdisciplinary learning. It would be good, he stressed, to keep the goal in, even if the requirement is deleted. Mr. Grantham added that it was important to keep the goal so that a future standing Gen-Ed Committee knows the goal is there and makes sure that it is met. This remark prompted Mr. Overby to ask for whom the document was intended. Tim Carens (English) said that the document is in part for students: we are making a statement that interdisciplinary modes of inquiry are important. Jim Newhard (Classics) added that to delete page 8 would also send the message that only interdisciplinary learning linked to the sciences is important. This point was echoed by Margaret Hagood (Elementary and Early Childhood Education).

Phil Dustan (Biology) asked where the goals of the Gen-Ed Proposal came from and whether they were data driven. Mr. Pothering responded that they come from the faculty. Mr. Dustan asked if they were based on other data. Julia Eichelberger (guest) said that they were also based on studies done by one of the major education associations.

Norris Preyer (Physics and Astronomy), speaking in favor of keeping the goal, said that the goal gives us the chance to emphasize cross-disciplinary education. We don’t want, he added, to revert to disciplinary boundaries. Mr. Nunan did not think that removing the goal would send a message that we only value interdisciplinary learning linked to the science. He also did not think that keeping or removing the goal would have any consequences for what a future Gen-Ed Committee would do or not do.

At this point, Mr. Peeples called the question, but the motion failed.
Ms. Birrer moved to amend Mr. Krasnoff’s motion. Her amendment would retain goal 6, but change the requirement to read, “All students must complete one approved course. This requirement may be satisfied by one of the courses taken in the Scientific Reasoning and Analysis, and Knowledge of the Natural World or another approved course.” The motion received a second.

Jennifer McStotts (at-large) thought that the motion was redundant. Ms. Birrer responded that the aim is to make a rhetorical gesture to indicate that interdisciplinary learning is valued and can take place in other disciplines not connected to science. Mr. Overby thought that the motion wouldn’t have any practical consequences. Ms. Cormack agreed and asked for unanimous consent to strike the second sentence of the motion. Unanimous consent was not granted. Calvin Blackwell (Economics and Finance) then called the question, but his motion failed. Mr. Nunan stressed that the Senate needs to cut some hours in the Proposal; otherwise the Proposal will fail. He thought that that the motion was unnecessary, but not a crucial issue. He urged the Senate to move forward. Mr. Grantham said that his work is interdisciplinary, that keeping goal 6 was not frivolous, and that it would guide the Gen-Ed Committee.

Steve Litvin (Hospitality and Tourism) wondered why the burden of teaching interdisciplinary courses was falling on the science departments and suggested that the interdisciplinary science requirement be deleted. Norine Noonan (Dean of the School of Mathematics and Science and guest) said that she was delighted to accept the burden because it means that her school will grow by 20 new faculty. She added, however, that it was not right that the sciences are the only departments that must teach the interdisciplinary course. Other departments should have the right to teach such courses. Ms. McStotts said that she now changed her view and supported the motion, saying that cutting out goal 6 sends a message to the College as a whole that interdisciplinary inquiry happens only in the sciences. This would be insulting to other fields of study, she added. Responding to Ms. Noonan’s remarks, Mr. Parson asked if she was proposing that the 11 hours devoted to science should be reduced to 8. Ms. Noonan said no. She just wanted others to be involved. Mr. Litvin added that his earlier comment was not meant to be taken as hostility toward interdisciplinary learning; rather, his objective was to reduce the total number of required hours. Kay Smith (guest) remarked that it was important to question the desire to reduce the number of Gen-Ed hours. The Senate should consider the fact many students come to the College with AP credits and thus experience a diminished Gen-Ed package in college. Indeed, the freshman year is nowadays collapsed into the senior year in high school. Given this trend, she urged the Senate to consider expanding, rather than further contracting, Gen Ed.

Mark Long (Political Science) observed that last week the Gen Ed Proposal seemed headed to defeat because of concerns about its size, double-counting, etc. The Krasnoff proposal, he said, was put together as an attempt to address those concerns and move forward with the Proposal. Because the interdisciplinary requirement is not tied to a specific department, it seemed to be the easiest to cut. If it is not cut, he warned, the Proposal will likely go down to defeat because of the high level of territoriality among us.
Picking up on Ms. Smith point about the size of Gen Ed, Ms. Kattwinkel reminded the Senate of the transcript analysis done by the *ad hoc* Gen-Ed Committee, which showed that that the proposed system would have little or no impact on the ability of students to graduate in a timely fashion. They would be able to get through college at the same rate as they do in the current system. Yet some Senators, she said, have chosen to ignore the study or don’t believe it. She suggested that those who don’t believe it do their own study to show that graduation rates would be adversely affected under the new system. Glenn Lesses (guest) said that he looked at the transcript analysis and thought that the proposed system would affect students. Mr. Pothering disagreed and said that when he did the study, he tended to be conservative in his estimates.

It was now 7 p.m., the scheduled end of the meeting. Speaker Kelly announced that further debate on the Gen-Ed Proposal would resume at the next meeting devoted to Gen Ed, which was scheduled for February 19. The Senate adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Terence Bowers
Faculty Secretary