Minutes of the Special Faculty Senate Meeting Devoted to General Education, 18 March 2008

The Faculty Senate met on Tuesday, 18 March 2008, at 5:00 p.m. in Wachovia Auditorium. This was the thirteenth 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 27, 2007 meeting were approved. The Speaker then announced that he was resolved to conclude the Senate’s deliberations this semester and would take steps, if necessary, to speed them up.

The Speaker reminded the Senate that Calvin Blackwell’s (Economics/Finance) motion to take Richard Nunan’s “Third-Path” proposal off the table was pending from the last meeting, and that it was not debatable. He added that, even if Mr. Blackwell’s motion failed, Mr. Nunan’s proposal would automatically come off the table when the Senate had finished its deliberations on Larry Krasnoff’s proposed amendments. The Senate voted and the motion to take the “Third-Path” proposal off the table failed.

Larry Krasnoff (Philosophy) moved to amend Goal 2 Requirement to read, “Two courses: one first-year writing course, and one writing-intensive literature course.” The amendment sought to eliminate the speaking-intensive course. After the motion received a second, Mr. Krasnoff said that the purpose of the amendment was to streamline the Gen-Ed Proposal and reduce the total number of credit hours. Passing this amendment was now urgent because his prior amendments to accomplish the same goal had failed. He added that the speaking-intensive course would be an expensive addition to the curriculum and entail a big commitment in resources. He wasn’t sure if the gain from the course was worth the expense.

Brian McGee (Communication) spoke against the amendment, stating first that the addition of the speaking-intensive course requirement does not help his department. He said that the trend among colleges is to have this requirement (he cited Harvard as an example), that oral and written communication go together and have long been part of the traditional discipline of rhetoric and the liberal arts, and that American students are seen as being weak in the area of oral communication skills. Hugh Wilder (Philosophy), speaking in support of the amendment, agreed that oral communication has been part of the liberal arts tradition, but said that the proposed Gen-Ed Program was too big, and that some hours needed to be cut. Despite his dislike for cutting out worthy parts of the proposed curriculum, he said it that needed to be done, and that the speaking requirement was a place to start.

Kay Smith (guest) said that the number of hours in Gen-Ed is inflated by the fact that many students receive credit for foreign language classes, and that some students take foreign language classes below their level to get a high grade with little effort, which is a practice that the College can eliminate. Todd McNerney (Theatre) also spoke to the issue of the total number of Gen-Ed hours and reported that the accrediting agency for his discipline recommends that at least half of a student’s credit-hours go to Gen Ed. According to that recommendation, he said, the College has room to expand its Gen-Ed program.
After a bit more discussion on foreign language placement tests and Gen-Ed percentage figures brought up Mr. McNerney, the Senate voted on Mr. Krasnoff’s motion, which failed.

Mr. Krasnoff then moved to amend Requirement #3 of Goal 5 to read as follows: “At least one course must be in the physical sciences, and one must be in the biological sciences. Courses will be tagged to indicate which sub-requirements they satisfy.” The motion received a second. The purpose of his amendment, he explained, was to simplify how the content requirements to be covered by the goal were categorized. Content areas #4 and #5 in the Defining Characteristics would be covered by all science courses, and content areas #1 through #3 would be reduced to two areas: the biological sciences and the physical sciences. The amendment was intended to help reduce the complexity of the Gen-Ed Proposal. Mr. Krasnoff said that he saw this motion as a key test for Senate to make the Gen-Ed Proposal workable for students and faculty.

One faculty member responded that the amendment was premature and that it was the responsibility of the Gen-Ed Committee (not the Senate) to determine what courses satisfy what content areas. Jaap Hillenius (at-large) said that the five content areas were mainly for internal housekeeping purposes to track which kind of courses would cover which content areas. He said, too, that changing the content areas as proposed by the amendment would reduce the kinds of courses that could be offered. Interesting and creative combinations are possible in Goal 5, but they will be reduced if the amendment were to pass. George Hopkins (History) added that the Advising Office reported that the process of tagging courses in an easy-to-understand way is not a problem. He therefore didn’t think that the current set-up was too complicated. And if it turns out to be so, the Gen-Ed Committee can always come back to the Senate to make changes. Mr. Nunan disagreed, arguing that the third science course (the interdisciplinary course) makes it unlikely that students will cover all the content areas in three courses, which will create complications. He urged the Senate to deal with this problem now by approving the amendment.

The Senate voted on Mr. Krasnoff’s proposed amendment to Goal 5, and it was defeated.

Because the Senate had finished its deliberations on Mr. Krasnoff’s list of proposed amendments, Mr. Nunan’s “Third-Path” proposal came off the table.

Meg Cormack (at-large) moved to modify Mr. Nunan’s amendment to Goal 2 so that the Requirement of the goal would read as follows: “Two Three courses: One first-year writing course, and one writing-intensive literature course in the arts or humanities (see Goal 8), and one speaking-intensive course.” After the motion received a second, she explained that she thought students would learn to write better if they took subjects they were interested in. Her amendment would increase the kinds of courses offered that would satisfy the goal.

Kay Smith (guest) suggested that one way to streamline Gen Ed with respect to Goal 2 was to place the writing intensive course in the major. Denis Keyes (at-large) supported this idea, but Mr. Nunan pointed out that it was not clear that some majors were equipped to offer intensive writing courses. He was also not clear about the impact of Ms. Cormack’s amendment on Goal 8 in his proposal. Speaker Kelly also pointed out that Ms. Cormack’s
amendment implies that the reference to the arts and humanities in Goal 8 be deleted. He therefore asked if there was unanimous consent to make that change. There was not unanimous consent.

Scott Peeples (English) spoke to Ms. Cormack’s proposed amendment with respect to its impact on writing and literature. He said that, on the one hand, everyone agrees that literature is essential to education and that writing and literature are closely linked in the educational process, especially because literature courses focus on the structure and nuance of language. Everyone in his department believes that. One the other, he said that the English Department supports Writing across the Curriculum efforts and doesn’t think it “owns” the courses that teach writing. He said that he would support Ms. Cormack’s amendment, but wanted to make sure that the writing intensive courses would have appropriate standards. He was therefore prepared to offer an amendment that would specify what intensive writing means. His main concern, he added, was that writing intensive courses meet stringent requirements. Steve Litvin (Hospitality and Tourism) responded that he could not envision a Gen-Ed curriculum at the C of C where students don’t study literature.

The Senate voted on Ms. Cormack’s proposed amendment, which failed.

Discussion of Mr. Nunan’s “Third-Path” proposal resumed. George Pothering (guest) asked Mr. Nunan what became of Goal 7 (Knowledge of Human History) in his plan. Mr. Nunan replied that it was subsumed into Goal 8, and that the special provision made for history courses was eliminated: students could take history courses to meet Goal 8 (Artistic, Cultural, and Intellectual Traditions), but would not be required to do so. Because Mr. Nunan’s proposal eliminated the history requirement, Mr. Pothering said that he was opposed to it. Doryjane Birrer agreed with Mr. Pothering, adding that Mr. Nunan’s proposal eliminated some key goals that the Senate had long agreed upon. Mr. Krasnoff responded that Mr. Nunan’s plan simply takes specific requirements and changes them into a broad-based liberal arts requirement. He added that specific requirements demand the high use of adjuncts and discourage innovation: the more protected courses we have, the less innovation we have.

Steve Jaumé (Geology) then moved to amend Goal 5 of Mr. Nunan’s proposed amendment. Specifically, he proposed to change the “Knowledge of the Natural World” section in both the Defining Characteristics and the Approval Criteria to read as follows (red indicates Mr. Nunan’s language struck by Mr. Jaumé, and blue indicates Mr. Jaumé’s added language):

**Knowledge of the natural world**

Students should acquire the following areas of knowledge of the natural world:

1. The origin and evolution of the Universe and of Earth, and the nature of the physical world
   1. The nature of the physical world and how it evolves over time
   2. The nature of the biosphere and how it evolves over time
   3. The processes of inquiry in science
   4. The integrative and synergistic nature of scientific knowledge within and outside of scientific disciplines.
After the motion received a second, Mr. Jaumé said that the intent of his amendment was to acknowledge that the physical world evolves as well as the biological world. Mr. Krasnoff supported the proposed amendment, pointing out that it reduces the number of content areas from five to four, which he had tried to do in an earlier proposed amendment. Rohn England (Mathematics) sought unanimous consent to add the words “origin and” to the text, but it was not granted.

Speaking against Mr. Nunan’s “Third-Path” proposal, Mr. McNerney observed that it only reduces the Gen-Ed proposal by about a course’s worth of credit hours. It would be better to stick with the original proposal, he said, especially since the difference in credit hours is minimal. Speaking against Mr. Jaumé’s proposed amendment, Mr. Overby said that the Chemistry Department “abhors” the amendment because it seemed to eliminate chemistry as part of the science requirement.

The Senate voted on Mr. Jaumé’s proposed amendment, and it was defeated.

Mary Beth Heston (Art History) called the question on Mr. Nunan’s “Third-Path” proposal, and the motion to call the question passed.

The Senate voted on Mr. Nunan’s “Third-Path” proposal, and it was defeated.

Discussion of the Gen-Ed Proposal resumed. Ms. Cormack moved to amend the Goal 2 Requirements to read as follows: “One first-year writing course, one additional writing-intensive literature course, and one speaking-intensive course, meeting relevant approval criteria on p. 3.” Her motion also sought to amend the Goal 2 Approval Criteria and to reflect Scott Peeples’ ideas concerning the definition of “writing-intensive”:

Approval Criteria
1. Courses must require students to generate a significant quantity of written communication (at least 15 pages) or oral/visual communication appropriate to the discipline. …
5. Course must include several opportunities draft workshops or conferences for individualized feedback by the instructor and revision by the student.

The motion received a second. Ms. Heston then spoke against the proposed amendment, saying that while she didn’t disagree with its spirit, she didn’t like the 15-page requirement and the workshop requirement. Scott Peeples (English) replied that the workshops aren’t intended as the culmination of the intensive-writing course, but as part of the writing process that students go through. He added that the amendment helps students to learn to write within different disciplines, not just within the discipline of literary students. That change would also help compensate for the removal (last spring) of the intensive-writing requirement in the major from the original Gen-Ed Proposal. Mr. Blackwell said that he liked the fact that Ms. Cormack’s amendment gets rid of the literature requirement, but he thought it was inappropriate to specify a precise page-limit in the Gen-Ed document. That’s something that the Gen-Ed Committee should do. He added that if he were on the committee, he would support the requirement. Mr. Overby asked what else the Senate was going to specify in the
document—font sizes and margin widths? Ms. Birrer responded that we do need some minimum standards to make clear what we want and to hold faculty to. Hugh Wilder (Philosophy) expressed his concern that the Senate was doing too much “micromanagement.” We don’t define and set standards for other courses, he pointed out.

Speaking to a different issue, Steve Litvin (Hospitality and Tourism) said that while he has his students do a lot of writing, he is not sure that he can improve their writing or that he wants the responsibility to do so. He was concerned that the amendment would be shifting the charge of teaching writing from those who have expertise in that area to those who don’t. Mr. Diamond also opposed the amendment because it would eliminate the literature requirement. Literature needs, he stressed, to be a part of Gen-Ed and the liberal arts.

At this point, Mr. Nunan moved to divide the question between Ms. Cormack’s proposed changes to the Goal 2 Requirements (which would separate the literature requirement from the writing-intensive requirement), and her proposed changes to the Goal 2 Approval Criteria (which would define “writing-intensive”). The motion to divide received a second. The Senate voted on the motion, and it passed.

On the issue of the literature requirement, Mr. Hopkins said that he would like to hear from the English Department and other faculty who teach literature. Tim Carens (English) said that while it was difficult for those in his department to imagine Gen Ed without literature, in the spirit of moving the Gen-Ed reform effort along, they were willing to give up the literature requirement. Jason Coy (History) opposed the amendment, saying that he was uncomfortable with any student going through college without taking a literature course. Changing his earlier view, Mr. Blackwell opposed the amendment that would eliminate the literature requirement. Mr. Wilder, however, while agreeing that literature is important, didn’t see why literature and writing courses have to go together. We can put the literature requirement elsewhere in the document, he said. Ms. Birrer supported that view, but Bob Mignone (guest) said that one consequence of passing the amendment would be that many courses across the campus would have to be capped at 20 students. Mr. Huddlestun echoed Mr. Litvin’s earlier view that it was important to keep the writing-intensive courses in hands of those who are good at teaching it, such as those in the English Department. Ms. Birrer responded that the dominant model is not to teach English 101 through literature. The move to divorce writing and literature, she said, is common now. Mr. Diamond stressed that it was important to include literature in the curriculum—whether through the intensive-writing requirement or some other way—because students don’t read much now and need to cultivate the habit and skills of reading. Jim Newhard said that he was conflicted about the amendment: students need to experience literature, but they also need to learn to write within specific disciplines. However, the amendment doesn’t allow for both. Mr. Peoples echoed that ambivalence.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Terence Bowers
Faculty Secretary