Minutes of the Special Faculty Senate Meeting Devoted to General Education, 30 October 2007

The Faculty Senate met on Tuesday, October 30, 2007, at 5:00 p.m. in Wachovia Auditorium. This was the fifth special meeting of the term 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 September 25, 2007 minutes were approved with one correction. The Speaker then announced that the Gen-Ed Faculty Senate meeting that had been scheduled for November 20 was moved to November 27.

Debate on the motion made by Scott Peeples (English) in the previous meeting resumed. That motion called for Approval Criterion #2 of p. 8 of the Gen-Ed Proposal (Goal II.3 Interdisciplinary Analysis and Creative Problem-solving) to be deleted.

Meg Cormack (at-large) said that she supported the motion on the grounds that keeping Approval Criterion #2 would discourage the creation of upper-level interdisciplinary courses. Hugh Wilder (Philosophy) stated that he supported the motion because it would bring the Approval Criteria for the interdisciplinary course for Goal II.3 on p. 8 in line with the interdisciplinary science course required on p. 6.

George Pothering (guest and chair of the ad hoc Committee on Gen-Ed) reiterated a point he made with respect to Goal II.3 in the last meeting in response to a claim that history was inherently interdisciplinary. He said that if a course borrows some knowledge from another discipline (as history courses often do), it is not necessarily interdisciplinary; to be so, there must be a strong “grounding” in the other discipline (i.e., fundamental principles, ways of thinking, methodologies must be taught and utilized). Ms. Cormack did not entirely agree and offered a qualification to Mr. Pothering’s view, saying that in her interpretation of the Approval Criteria, to qualify as interdisciplinary a course need not provide a grounding in another discipline, but could assume such a grounding and build upon it.

John Huddlestun (Religious Studies) highlighted the clause in Approval Criterion #1 that says “explore a topic from the perspective of more than one academic discipline.” He said he read that language as rigorously insisting on providing knowledge of the discipline.

At this point the Senate voted on Mr. Peeples’ proposed amendment, and it passed.

Richard Nunan (at-large) next called attention to what was Approval Criterion #3—now #2 given the success of the preceding motion—and the phrase “to demonstrate advancement through integration.” He said he was not sure how a future Gen-Ed Committee would interpret the phrase, and moved to delete Approval Criterion #2 (formerly #3). The motion was seconded and debate ensued.

Ms. Cormack said that she could only meet this criterion by giving students a test at the start of the course and measuring their progress from that point. She thought this was awkward and supported Mr. Nunan’s motion. Larry Krasnoff (Philosophy) wondered whether the
focus of Approval Criterion #2 was on the word “demonstrate” or the word “integration.” He thought that the focus on “integration”—using two disciplines to look at a topic and integrating their approaches—was reasonable. He added that he did not think that Approval Criterion #2 was intended to emphasize assessment. Mr. Nunan responded that he was still unclear about what the phrase “advancement through integration” meant. Did it mean assessment or something else? Mr. Krasnoff suggested that the language in the latter part of the sentence ("students should demonstrate that their understanding of a topic has been enriched by the integration of different disciplinary insights"), which repeated the word “integration,” offered clearer guidance.

Kay Smith (guest) then gave some examples of how some scholars understand the concept of “advancement through integration.” She said that the objective was doable and that guidelines exist. Mr. Wilder responded that while the examples provided help, they are directed at teachers. But the language in the Approval Criteria is directed at students.

Rohn England (Mathematics) said that he was against the proposed amendment, and that he favored the idea suggested by Mr. Krasnoff. He thus suggested a replacement of the Approval Criterion #2, if Mr. Nunan’s proposed amendment passed.

The Senate then voted on Mr. Nunan’s amendment to delete Approval Criterion #2, which failed.

Mr. Krasnoff then moved to change the language in Approval Criterion #2 from

“Course should require students to demonstrate advancement through integration: students should demonstrate that their understanding of a topic has been enriched by the integration of different disciplinary insights,”

to

“Courses should enrich students’ understanding of a topic through integration of different disciplinary insights.”

At the same time, he moved that the wording of Approval Criterion #3 be changed from

“Course should develop students’ critical awareness: students should demonstrate reflectiveness about the choices, opportunities, compromises, and limitations involved in using an interdisciplinary approach to the topic being studied”

to

“Courses should develop students’ critical awareness of the choices, opportunities, compromises, and limitations involved in using an interdisciplinary approach to the topic being studied.”
The motion received a second and debate ensued. Ms. Cormack said there was some redundancy, but overall thought the changes were good. Steve Jaumé (Geology) also thought that Approval Criterion #3 created some redundancy and that in amended Criterion #2 the idea of integration was lost from the original wording. Overall, he thought that not much was gained by the amendment, and something was lost. Speaking in favor of the amendment and the need for Approval Criterion #3, Mr. Peeples commented on some key differences between #3 and #2, noting that #3, rather than just specifying that different disciplinary approaches be used to explore a topic, requires some thought about interdisciplinarity itself.

A senator moved to extend debate by 15 minutes. After receiving a second, the motion passed.

Mr. Nunan said that he agreed with the comments about redundancy, but observed that if the proposed amendment is voted down, then the Senate will be stuck with language in the Approval Criteria that no one is happy with.

Jennifer McStotts (at-large) asked for unanimous consent to replace the word “enrich” in Approval Criterion #2 with “advance” in order to recapture some of the meaning of the original document that was lost in the amendment. Unanimous consent was given.

Jack Parson (Political Science) then spoke in favor of Mr. Krasnoff’s amendment, noting that there are key differences among the Approval Criteria. The first asks students to explore a topic using different disciplinary approaches, the third asks students to reflect on what each approach can and can’t do, and the second asks students to understand how integrating disciplines advances knowledge. Jim Newhard (Classics) agreed with Mr. Parson, noting that students learn about and reflect on different theories in different disciplines (#3), but also apply (#1) each theory to a new data set not typical in the discipline, which is where the “integration of different disciplinary insights” (#2) takes place.

The Senate then voted on Mr. Krasnoff’s proposed amendment to change the wording of Approval Criteria #2 and #3, and it passed.

The Senate next moved to p. 9 (Goal III.1 Knowledge of Human History) of the Gen-Ed Proposal.

Bill Olejniczak (guest and Chair of the History Department) began discussion of p. 9 by stating that the History Department was aware of some amendments about to be proposed, and that he was pleased by the generally positive discourse and friendly discussion. He noted that if there is an impression among some faculty that the History Dept. is “turf oriented,” that is a mistake. The History Dept. has no desire to exclude others from involvement in Goal III.1. The Dept. and others concerned with the history goal have thought about the best way to reach student-learning objectives. He added that because the Gen-Ed approach is goal focused, the Dept. acknowledges that its current Gen-Ed courses (HIST101—104) will have to conform to the agreed-upon goals and be revised. Mr. Olejniczak also said that his department supported one of the amendments (the 2nd) that Mr. Nunan would be proposing.
Mr. Olejniczak then addressed the issue of the four categories or “aspects” of analysis in Goal III.1—the political, social, cultural, and intellectual—and argued that they are not too difficult to cover and not overly comprehensive in their scope, and that they all fit together to form a whole. He argued, too, that students need a comprehensive chronological framework, and need to look at the deep past, even before civilizations began. With such a framework students will be able to understand the concept of development. A long time-frame will allow students to see what changes and what doesn’t, and to compare civilizations. Ultimately, this approach allows students to understand the present better. He added that history courses are often narrow in their focus, giving students a fragmentary view of history: events are seen as episodic and unconnected to each other. Students need a sense of deep time and long view of history in order to see and understand the interconnections among historical events.

Mr. Nunan then proposed an amendment to p. 9, Goal III.1. He moved that in Defining Criteria #1 the phrase “and/or” replace the word “and” in the list of historical aspects and periods to be studied, thus making the sentence read as follows: “Develop knowledge of the history of human civilizations, societies, and cultures and an awareness of historical experience through the study of the political, social, cultural, and/or intellectual aspects of ancient, medieval, early modern, and/or modern eras.” The proposed amendment called for the same thing to be done in Approval Criteria #1 so that it would read as follows: “Develop students’ knowledge of the history of human civilizations, societies, and cultures and an awareness of historical experience through the study of the political, social, cultural, and/or intellectual aspects of selected eras of human history.” Further, the amendment sought to modify Requirement #2 by reducing the number of historical periods that the required courses would have to cover: “Students must select two courses that, together, cover at least two of the all four eras of history (ancient, medieval, early modern and modern). Courses will be tagged to indicate which eras they cover.”

The motion received a second and Mr. Nunan proceeded to explain the rationale for the motion. However, he first thanked Mr. Olejniczak for his comments. He also suggested that it would be good to ask whether we are really focused on a goal-driven program or still holding onto a distributive one. It would be good to debate that issue, he said, and at the very least to discuss what counts as a goal-driven curriculum. Specifically regarding his proposed amendment, he said that while Mr. Olejniczak’s remarks were helpful, he was not persuaded by the emphasis on the grand sweep of history and the claim that students need to study such large tracts of time. Such a view might have made sense when the Gen-Ed history requirement focused on just Western Civilization, but now we are talking about world history and multiple civilizations and historical traditions. He thought, too, that the learning objectives mentioned by Mr. Olejniczak could be achieved by studying shorter historical periods. Moreover, he observed that as currently written, the goal poses a big staffing commitment to teach the required courses, the rationale for which he didn’t find convincing. Finally, Mr. Nunan noted that only a few courses—HIST101-104—would really satisfy the goal, and in that respect p. 9 didn’t seem to be goal driven.

Mr. Parson also thanked Mr. Olejniczak for his comments. He then asked whether the history courses that satisfy the current Gen-Ed requirement for history—HIST 101-104—would be modified were the Gen-Ed Proposal to pass. Mr. Olejniczak said they would. Mr. Parson then
said that just as he was not persuaded in the discussions on the science goal that comprehensiveness was a key aim for student learning, he was not persuaded by the same argument with respect to the history goal. He was more persuaded by the view that students needed to learn historical methodologies, which do not necessarily depend on the study of long historical time periods. The study of long time periods, he added, precludes one from doing some interesting types of historical inquiry.

Ms. Cormack said that she heard that the History Dept. itself was divided on the history goal and that some members supported Mr. Nunan’s amendment.

Susan Kattwinkel (guest) said that she is a historian of drama and feels that she would be able to offer courses that qualify for the goal, and has confidence in the judgment of the Gen-Ed Committee that it would be open and not exclude other departments. She added that her main concern with the proposed amendment was that students would seek courses dealing only with modern history.

Darryl Phillips (at-large) agreed with Mr. Olejniczak’s emphasis on the importance of a long historical perspective, but was troubled by the historical categories or periods. The classical age, he said, by itself falls into a long time perspective, from 1500 B.C.E. to 500 C.E.; but this won’t count because it doesn’t cover the medieval and early modern periods. So in that respect, Goal III.1, as currently written, is too restrictive. He therefore favored Mr. Nunan’s proposed amendment.

George Hopkins (History) said, in reaction to Ms. Kattwinkel’s remarks, that he was glad that she saw the goal as including some of her courses. In response to some earlier comments, he said that all departments, including History, would have to re-tool their courses to meet the goals of the new Gen-Ed curriculum. He added that most students don’t have much knowledge of history, that they need a deep time perspective to make full sense of historical knowledge, and that if Mr. Nunan’s amendment passes, a student might take two history courses on different topics—in ancient Chinese history, say, and medieval European history—but that the knowledge gained from them would be disconnected from each other.

Mr. Wilder said that he was surprised by Ms. Kattwinkel’s view because he didn’t see that the wording on p. 9 would include the course she mentioned. Her course, he observed, focuses on the cultural but not other areas listed in the Defining Characteristics and Approval Criteria (e.g., the political and social). However, Mr. Nunan’s amendment would make Goal III.1 more inclusive. He then suggested that the Senate divide the question and vote separately on the part of the amendment dealing with historical “eras” and the part dealing with the analytical historical “aspects.” He said, too, that he wished to hear from other departments, especially about whether they thought their courses would satisfy the Approval Criteria.

Mr. Huddlestun highlighted the use of “must” on p. 9 and saw it as likely to exclude courses from other departments from meeting the standard to satisfy the goal. Only the History Dept., he said, offers courses that would satisfy all Approval Criteria.
Jason Coy (at large) responded that the Approval Criteria precluded narrowly focused courses, which usually are upper level. Underscoring Mr. Hopkins’ point, he said that courses with a broad focus are needed to give students a general grounding in history and to prevent a fragmentary understanding of history. He said that he saw Ms. Kattwinkel’s course as counting because it would cover a broad swathe of time, but a course, say, in the history of Elizabethan Theatre would not. Mr. Krasnoff replied that the example given by Mr. Coy was not representative, and said that the requirement of teaching theories of historical change as stated in the Defining Characteristics and Approval Criteria set a very high bar for survey courses in other departments to meet. Mr. Coy responded that Mr. Nunan’s second amendment, to be proposed later, would take care of that issue.

Jerry Boetje (Computer Science) said that he would love to see a course on the history of computing and didn’t see a problem with it covering the four areas of history.

Rosemary Brana-Shute (History) moved to extend debate by thirty minutes. After receiving a second, the motion passed.

Mr. Phillips said that it would be helpful to hear some explanation of where the four periods came from (how, why they were chosen) and to know whether they were supposed to apply to all civilizations or just Western civilization.

Jeffery Diamond (guest) responded, saying that students need to know how history works as a discipline and to understand that it provides theories and methodologies for looking at the world. History, as an academic discipline, doesn’t just focus on a theme or topic. It offers ways of analyzing a society or period. He also pointed out that the four categories of analysis mentioned on p. 9—the political, social, cultural, and intellectual—have evolved in historical scholarship over time, and that we limit our historical knowledge if we get rid of one. He added that students need to look at, but also go beyond classical history to study the other periods (medieval, early modern, etc.) in order to see what changes from one to the other. To reduce the required eras to be covered from four to two would “butcher” the history goal and prevent students from acquiring the long, comprehensive historical perspective they need.

Mr. Olejniczak pointed out that it would not be accurate to imply that the periods stated on p. 9 apply only to the West. Historians, he noted, use the categories of ancient, early modern, and modern in studying Chinese history, though he granted that the term “medieval” is problematic for Asian history.

Tim Carens (English) said that he was “on the fence” with regard to Mr. Nunan’s amendment, but it did seem to him that to allow courses outside the History Dept. to satisfy Goal III.1, some modification of the Defining Characteristics and Approval Criteria was needed. He suggested that perhaps two broad historical periods should be covered, rather than four.

Mr. Huddlestun (Religious Studies) said that as a historian he had no problem with what was said about historical methodology, but wondered what courses would count toward the goal apart from those already offered by the History Dept.
In response to earlier comments that questioned the objective of comprehensiveness, Ms. Brana-Shute said that we can teach world history and provide students with a general knowledge of the world. While we don’t try to cover every detail, we can teach students to discern major patterns. Doing so provides students with a sense of coherence that stems from a broad historical narrative. Such coherence is what the history goal seeks to provide and what is vitally needed. She added that students also need to learn how to read primary sources, to read critically, and to know what questions to ask about a document. Finally, she mentioned that no one in the History Dept. was formally trained in world history. Faculty in other departments, she suggested, could also train themselves to teach courses that would satisfy the new Gen-Ed history goal.

Returning to the question of how appropriate the designated historical periods are for world history, Mr. Parson stated that he thought they applied only to the West and were somewhat arbitrary. He remarked, too, that on the one hand members of the History Dept. stress the laudable desire to include the participation of other departments, yet on the other hand they insist on such specific criteria that allows only History Dept. courses to meet the goal. Approval Criterion #3, he added, sets a high threshold for other departments to reach.

Ms. Cormack, addressing the concept of historical periods, said that the medieval period does not exist in Africa, China, and some other parts of the world. In that respect, the scheme of periodization stated on p. 9 reflects a bias toward European history. At this point, Ms. Cormack, acting on Mr. Wilder’s earlier suggestion, formally moved to divide the question and to vote on the issue of “eras” separately from the issue of “aspects.” After receiving a second, the motion passed.

Mr. Carens asked if the historians would be comfortable with utilizing two broad historical periods, say, a pre-1500 period and post-1500 period (or some other date could be used that historians might see as more appropriate), and requiring students to take a course that covered a large span of time in each period. Would such an arrangement meet the objective of exposing students to the broad sweep of history? Mr. Nunan said that the word “cover” means breadth and that some historical sweep can be assumed in the goal, as it is already worded. He advised the Senate to trust the Gen-Ed Committee to understand this, and said that in this sense some courses mentioned by Ms. Kattwinkel and others would count, but would not if all four periods or eras were required. Gerry Gonsalves (Management and Entrepreneurship) said that we live in a global world and that students need a broad view of the world. He also said that he favored the idea mentioned by Mr. Carens. Mr. Krasnoff stressed that sticking with the four eras did not allow for much inclusiveness, but that Mr. Carens’s idea offered a compromise. He added that the four required eras leads lock-step to the current four Gen-Ed courses now taught by the History Dept. (HIST 101-104), and that such a situation is inconsistent with other positive things happening throughout the Gen-Ed Proposal. Further, he thought that Goal III.1, as currently written, would not serve the History Dept. well, as it would force the Dept. to rely heavily on adjuncts and force its faculty to teach the same old courses.

From the perspective of art history, David Kowal (Art History) observed that the four periods mentioned on p. 9 didn’t work at all for non-Western art and only worked partially for
Western art. Most art history courses, he pointed out, wouldn’t satisfy the Approval Criteria of the goal, and to make them meet those criteria, the Art History Department would have to revert to an old, out-moded, and ineffective way of teaching by offering courses that cover large sweeps of time. Such courses, he explained, end up going covering too much too fast and being superficial. Ms. Cormack agreed that such courses often end up being superficial, but said that they could be done. She also suggested that it might be a good idea to replace the four eras with two: pre-modern and modern.

With regard to an earlier comment about the History Dept. being inconsistent (advocating inclusiveness, but denying it in the requirements of the goal), Mr. Coy noted that the History Dept. invited other departments to provide input and that it was charged by the Gen-Ed Committee to come up with the best form of history education for the Gen-Ed program. And what it has concluded is that a long and broad sweep of history would provide students with a coherent and comprehensive form of education in history. He strongly urged the Senate to oppose the amendment, suggesting that if it were to pass, students would end up with large gaps in their knowledge of history.

Mr. Diamond re-iterated the argument that if the amendment were successful, then students would not gain an understanding of change over time or have the framework for understanding certain cross-cultural contexts. He added that the insertion of “and/or” as called for the amendment would allow students to go to the easiest, most familiar courses.

Ms. Brana-Shute moved to extend debate by fifteen minutes. After receiving a second, the motion passed.

To Mr. Diamond’s remarks, Mr. Nunan responded that his amendment doesn’t say that students can take two courses in one area. To imply that it does mischaracterizes it. Mr. Wilder added that while he appreciates the point about the sweep of history, the insistence on it takes him back to the current Gen-Ed history courses (HIST 101-104). Mr. Peeples, picking up on a suggestion made earlier, asked those in the History Dept. if they would support the date 1500 as a dividing line for a two-period scheme.

Mr. Boetje remarked that a course such as the History of Computing could go from ancient to modern times. It’s not just HIST 101-104, he said, that can cover such time spans. Picking up on this thought, Mr. Pothering said that he thought the Gen-Ed Proposal opened up the possibility of other kinds of courses now going on in other departments that could, with some modification, satisfy the criteria of Goal III.1. Mr. McNerney, speaking against the amendment, pointed out that students now can’t take HIST 101 and 104, but will be able to in the proposed new system. It thus provides, along with a broad view of history, some flexibility. Mr. Diamond reiterated his point that if the amendment passes, students could choose to take courses that cover the early modern and modern periods (and probably “would flock” to courses covering the modern era), and in so doing the desired broad historical overview would be lost. Tim Carmichael (History), speaking against the proposed amendment, underlined the need for students to have a long view of history to see what changes over time and to understand how change happens. Mark Long (Political Science) acknowledged that providing a long view of history was important, but said that a two-period
scheme would be more useful historical. He objected, however, to designating the year 1500 as the dividing point for such a scheme, claiming that 1500 is a Western date. In response, Mr. Coy said that he appreciated the idea of the two-period scheme, but preferred the current proposal and thought that the year 1500 was arbitrary and in some respects offered less flexibility (courses would have to start or end at 1500). He added that perhaps the terms “pre-modern” and “modern” could work, but thought the four-eras design was better because it offered more flexibility and insured that students would study the broad sweep of history. Ms. Brana-Shute underscored the argument that a broad historical narrative provides coherence, allowing students to see how discrete historical events fit into larger patterns. Jason Overby (Chemistry and Biochemistry) mused that if “history repeats itself,” then one era should cover all the others too. Perhaps more seriously, he asked how much ancient or modern history should be taught. At this point, Speaker Kelly asked the Senate not to repeat arguments.

Ms. Cormack then moved to remand the issue to a committee to work out a solution to the problems the Senate had been discussing. The motion was seconded. Mr. Phillips asked is such an amendment was in order with a motion before the Senate. The Speaker ruled that Ms. Cormack’s motion, as he understood it, was in order, and said that he would facilitate the formation of a committee if it passed. The Senate then voted on the motion, but it failed.

Mr. Krasnoff moved to extend debate by eight minutes. The motion was seconded and passed. He then said that he voted against the motion to postpone debate on Mr. Nunan’s proposed amendment because the options were clear, and that there were three: the first option is to stay with the four eras to be covered as the Gen-Ed Proposal currently stipulates; the second is to allow any two of the four eras to be covered as Mr. Nunan’s amendment proposes; the third is to devise some kind of two-part period scheme (such as pre-and post 1500 periods, or pre-modern and modern periods) as some Senators suggested. He then called the question, which, after receiving a second, passed.

The Senate then voted on the part of Mr. Nunan’s proposed amendment that would change the number of historical eras to be covered from four to two. The amendment failed.

The Senate then began debate on the second part of Mr. Nunan’s amendment concerning how many “aspects” should be covered in courses that satisfy Goal III.1. One senator opened discussion by asking how such courses as History of the Theater or the History of Computing, which some Senators had claimed earlier would satisfy the history requirement, would cover all the analytic aspects (political, social, cultural, and intellectual) specified on p. 9.

Ms. Kattwinkel responded that in a course on the history of the theater students learn about the political views that plays express, the intellectual and philosophical views that underpin various plays or that the plays speak to, and the social place of actors. Such a course, she said, would cover all the aspects mentioned on p. 9. Doryjane Birrer (English) said that the same applies to literature generally. Some people perceive literary art as aesthetic objects detached from the world, but in fact they are embedded in the social, political, and intellectual environment in which they were created.
Paul Young (Mathematics) noticed a difference in meaning between Defining Characteristic #1 and Approval Criterion #1, specifically in the way “and” was linked to the word “must” in the Defining Characteristics but not the Approval Criteria. He suggested that perhaps the use of “and/or” as called for by Mr. Nunan’s amendment would be useful here.

It was now 7 p.m., the end of the scheduled meeting, and the Senate adjourned. Speaker Kelly said that debate on the second part of Mr. Nunan’s proposed amendment would resume at the next Senate meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Terence Bowers
Faculty Secretary