Minutes of the Special Faculty Senate Meeting Devoted to General Education, 27 November 2007

The Faculty Senate met on Tuesday, 27 November 2007, at 5:00 p.m. in Wachovia Auditorium. This was the seventh special meeting of the term dedicated to the General-Education Proposals formulated by the ad hoc Committee on General Education.

After calling the meeting to order, Speaker Joe Kelly asked for unanimous consent to change the language in Requirement 2 on p. 9 of the Gen-Ed Proposal by replacing the words “all four eras of human history (ancient, medieval, early modern, and modern)” with “both eras of human history (pre-modern and modern).” This change, which was not made in the last meeting because of an oversight, is in keeping with the other changes made on p. 9 that specify which historical eras are to be covered. By unanimous consent the Senate approved the change.

Todd McNerney (at-large) moved that debate on p. 10 of the Gen-Ed Proposal (Goal III.2 Artistic, Cultural, and Intellectual Traditions and Achievements) be extended by fifteen minutes. The motion received a second and passed.

Debate resumed on the motion pending from the previous meeting that Meg Cormack (at-large) had made. The motion was to modify Requirement #2 of p. 10 by changing the word “three” to “two”: “Students must complete these courses in at least three two different departments or programs.” Ms. Cormack said that the change would allow students to explore topics in more depth and would simplify things. Mr. McNerney responded by pointing out that breadth was also important. Students need to take a variety of courses in a variety of departments. It is important for their development. He noted that such was especially important for students in his department: Theatre. George Pothering (guest and chair of the ad hoc Committee on General Education) pointed out that when his committee looked at student transcripts, they found that the vast majority (40 out of a pool of 43) took humanities course in three departments, though there was no requirement to do so.

Richard Nunan (at-large), speaking in favor of the amendment, said that there was no compelling reason for a three-department requirement, especially if students already take humanities courses in three departments. To put such a requirement in is just a form of window-dressing and “puts up more hoops for students to go through.”

Brian McGee (Communication) had a question about prefixes for departments. Is the department the restraining factor rather than the course prefix?

Mr. Pothering said that he saw Sociology and Anthropology as programs. Idee Winfield (Sociology) asked if it would help to use the term “disciplines,” rather than programs and departments. Bob Mignone (guest) thought that would be confusing. We know, he said, what our programs are (which lead to degrees), but the term “disciplines” is more ambiguous.

Tom Ross (Psychology) spoke in favor of the amendment. He thought it would insure that we don’t inadvertently disadvantage transfer students and double-majors. Jason Overby
(Chemistry and Biochemistry) asked why we should require any number of departments from which students must take courses to satisfy the requirement. Mr. Ross responded that we have to impose some parameters, but that we can find a happy medium between those parameters and flexibility.

The Senate voted on Ms. Cormack motion, which passed.

Hugh Wilder (Philosophy) remarked that we are moving from a system that currently requires four courses in the humanities to one that requires none. Students could, he pointed out, take four courses in studio art to meet the requirements of Goal III.2. This sends a message to our students, prospective students, and the public. He said that he was not sure that he could support such a proposal. Can we really call this general education that has no humanities requirement?

Mr. Nunan then proposed an amendment that would strike the words “unless it is above the 100 level” in Requirement #5. The proposed amendment received a second. He explained that the reason for the amendment is that because the history requirement is more flexible, many students may opt out of history courses to take easier kinds of courses. This amendment would help minimize that potential problem.

Larry Krasnoff (Philosophy) said that he had in a previous meeting brought up the problem mentioned by Mr. Nunan. We need, he urged, to get rid of this loophole. Students could take higher-level history courses and double-count them for Goal III.2, which was not, he thought, the intention of those crafting the Gen-Ed Proposal.

The Senate voted and Mr. Nunan’s amendment passed.

Mr. Krasnoff said that he wanted to pick up on Mr. Wilder’s earlier point about the humanities. Perhaps some re-labeling is needed, he suggested, to include the term humanities. Or perhaps the performing arts courses could be limited to one or two. Susan Kattwinkel (guest) responded that the intent of the ad hoc Gen-Ed Committee was not to have students take all courses in the arts to satisfy Goal III.2. Perhaps, she suggested, the Senate could appoint a sub-committee to work on the issue as had been done with the science requirement.

Mr. Pothering remarked that students will be required to take literature and history courses, so the humanities aren’t being excluded in the proposed Gen-Ed curriculum.

Mr. McNerney moved to extend debate on p. 10 by fifteen minutes. The motion received a second and passed.

Mr. Wilder acknowledged Mr. Pothering’s point, but said that compared to what students take now, the new proposed requirements diminish the role of the humanities. We are moving from a very strong humanities requirement to a system that has a much less significant humanities requirement.
Mr. Krasnoff moved that for Requirement #3 the following sentence be added that would limit the number of performing arts courses that would count for Goal III.2: “No more than two such courses can be used to satisfy this requirement.” The motion received a second. The Senate voted and the amendment passed.


Tom Ross (Psychology) proposed the following three-part amendment to p. 11 on behalf of the Psychology Department.

(A) Modify the Defining Characteristic #2 and Approval Criterion #1 as indicated below, with italicized additions and striken deletions:

Defining Characteristic #2: “Understand and be able to develop generalizable explanations for human behavior and social interaction by using appropriate empirical evidence, systematic analysis, and models and ideas associated with the social scientific methods of inquiry.”

Approval Criterion #1: “Courses must require students to understand and be able to develop generalizable explanations for human behavior and social interaction by using appropriate empirical evidence, systematic analysis, and models and ideas associated with the social scientific methods of inquiry.”

(B) Modify the ‘Requirement’ to read:

“Students must complete two approved courses, in two different departments or programs, each of which must satisfy both Defining Characteristics.”

(C) Modify the introductory line of the Approval Criterion #2:

“Courses should advance students’ understanding must require students to demonstrate knowledge of at least one of the following.”

The proposed amendment received a second. Mr. Ross explained that in a spirit of cooperation colleagues outside of the Psychology Department were consulted and participated in forming the amendments. With regard to part A of the amendment, he said that they had attempted to strike a balance that centers the goal in the scientific methodologies of the social sciences tradition, yet allows for some flexibility. The main concern is to exclude courses that don’t rely on social science methods. He stressed, however, that he doesn’t think that colleagues outside of the social science departments aren’t capable of teaching courses in the social sciences. He added that his department wanted to make sure that the terms “social science” or “social scientific” were included in the goal statement. He remarked, too, that he did not understand why they weren’t in the document to begin with. With regard to part B, he said that eliminating the requirement that both required courses be taken from two different
departments allowed for greater flexibility. And with regard to part C, the changes insert language that is more consistent with the rest of the document.

Ms. Cormack urged the Senate to vote against the proposed amendment and said that she would be ready to propose an alternate amendment. While she appreciates the point that students should study social scientific methodologies, she said students need to be exposed to other methodologies in studying human behavior and social interaction, and that language that allows for the inclusion of such methodologies should be in the Approval Criteria. She added that in the areas of ethical behavior and religious practices or values, the social scientific methodologies, which tend to be quantitative, don’t easily lend themselves to those subjects. Her alternative amendment would allow for courses that don’t strictly use social scientific methodologies.

Mr. Pothering remarked that the requirement for Goal III.3 is different from earlier versions of the Gen-Ed Proposal, and that there was extensive consultation with colleagues in the social sciences. David Gentry (at-large) said that the Psychology Dept. made recommendations last fall, but that none of them appeared in the new Gen-Ed document.

Mr. Krasnoff said that he would like to hear more about why certain courses would be excluded and which courses. Would all anthropology courses that are qualitative in approach be excluded? What about political science courses? Mr. Ross replied that the aim of the amendment is to highlight social scientific methodology. The amendment seeks to achieve a balance by making sure that students learn that methodology, while not being too restrictive and excluding too many other courses within the broad category of social science.

Idee Winfield (Sociology) said that part of the issue here concerns how one interprets certain goals. To her mind, the topics that Ms. Cormack brought up deal with culture and thus might more appropriately belong in the previous goal (III.2), which broadly covers the domain of culture. Social science deals mainly with empirical evidence, and so we can ask that materials in courses correspond with social science methodologies involving empirical evidence. Currently, she estimated that there are nine programs offering courses that would count as social science courses.

Jack Parson (Political Science) emphasized that the proposed amendment was not just a creation of the Psychology Dept., and that other departments were involved. He thought, too, that this debate was a good one, that it would help the Senate focus on what social science methodologies consist of. He acknowledged that some courses would be excluded (such as environmental ethics), that some courses in his department would be excluded, but that was okay because they would count for other goals.

Mr. Wilder noted that the term “methods” is in the amendment, which suggests a diversity of forms of inquiry, yet the wording is not so broad that it would allow for courses outside the traditional social sciences. Mr. Gentry noted that the phrase “social science” does not appear in the Gen-Ed document, but the amendment helps rectify that problem.
Ms. Cormack wondered if it would help to insert the phrase “quantitative and/or qualitative” in the amendment and asked for unanimous consent that the words be added. However, unanimous consent was not granted. Mr. Ross remarked that if the wording is too broad, it might inadvertently privilege some courses over others. He suggested that the wording be simple and straightforward.

Brian McGee (Communication) observed that courses focusing on textual analysis would be excluded by the wording of the amendment, yet some forms of textual analysis are empirical and scientific in their methodologies. He asked that it be noted in the minutes that such courses would be included as qualifying to meet the goal, though they appear to be excluded from the goal.

The Senate voted on Mr. Ross’ amendment, which passed.

Mr. Krasnoff said he would like more clarification about what courses would count toward meeting the requirements of the goal. He thought that courses in political science and religious studies would serve as test cases because of the diversity of methodologies used in both disciplines. Which political science courses and which religious studies course would count or not count toward the goal? Mr. Parson responded that the question is hard to answer off hand. Departments will have to think about this when they propose courses. Mr. Pothering offered as examples of courses that would not count two mock-trials courses taught by the Political Science Department. Mr. Ross cautioned, however, that such courses might count if they are empirically focused. If, for example, the courses offer a lot of empirical work on how juries act, they could possibly count. We don’t, he advised, want to rule out courses prematurely before seeing the details. Mr. Krasnoff replied that while he appreciates those responses, he does so only up to a point. He would like more clarification on what more or less will count as meeting the goal’s requirements.

Mr. Nunan said that what Mr. Krasnoff is asking applies to other goals. The question of what will count, or what will satisfy the requirements of each goal, is a general problem. For example, for the mathematical reasoning goal, no course currently meets all the requirements that would satisfy the goal. For the science goal, four content areas must be covered, and no one has explained how they will all be covered. At the end of the day, it’s probably going to come down to a judgment call by the Gen-Ed Committee as to what courses will count. Ms. Cormack agreed with Mr. Nunan’s remark, and said that the problem of what courses will count is especially bad with respect to Goal III.3, and that it is better to deal with it now, rather than create a big problem for the Gen-Ed Committee.

Mr. McGee noted that the goal, if approved in its current form, would break up the School of Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) because many social science methodologies are taught in other schools (e.g., Business and Education). Mr. Parson agreed, but applauded this change, saying it was not a bad thing. The same reconfiguring of boundaries applies to other disciplinary fields, which he thought was fine.

Discussion of p. 11 ended, and the Senate turned its attention to p. 12 of the Gen-Ed Proposal, which covers Goal III.4 Perspectives and Contributions of Academic Disciplines.
Mr. Overby remarked that it was “odd and silly” that there are “Defining Characteristics” for the goal, but no “Requirement” to show that students have achieved them. Ms. Kattwinkel (guest) responded that there is a requirement, which is that students complete a major. “What,” replied Mr. Overby, “does having a major have to do with Gen Ed?” That reason struck Mr. Overby as being inappropriate. He then moved to strike p. 12 (Goal III.4) from the Gen-Ed. His motion received a second.

John Huddlestun (Religious Studies) asked if someone could explain why p. 12 is in the document. Ms. Eichelberger (guest and former chair of the ad hoc Gen-Ed Committee) said that the goal comes from a set of holistic goals, that it is part of the overall educational aim that we have for students. Goal III.4 expresses the idea that the major and general education go together. The list of goals is in part for the benefit of students to remind them of the larger educational objective.

Jose Gavidia (guest) remarked that the C of C catalog specifies three forms of requirements (one for Gen-Ed, one for the major, and one for electives), and that listing the requirement for the major in the Gen-Ed document was redundant. He was also concerned about the size of the Gen-Ed requirement, adding that room needs to be made for students to meet all three forms of requirements.

Paul Young (Mathematics) noted that the rationale for Goal III.4 came from the January 2007 draft of the Gen-Ed Proposal, which seemed to conceptualize the major as a part of Gen Ed. He also pointed out that the earlier Gen-Ed draft tied the major to the on-line record, which would allow students to track the disciplines in which they had gained some level of knowledge.

Mr. Ross asked what the implications would be of deleting p. 12 from the Gen-Ed Proposal. Mr. Pothering responded by first explaining that an effort was made to lay out for students the overall context of their education and to show that the major is integrated with Gen Ed. It is important, he said, to reinforce the idea that the major is a part of a larger, cohesive educational experience. It is a good idea to make this clear somewhere in the document and that is why p. 12 exists. Mr. Krasnoff said that it was not clear that students would see this document, which is mainly for us. If we, the faculty, need it, then we should keep it. If not, we should get rid of it. He found the argument that it was for students unpersuasive.

Ms. Eichelberger spoke to the issue of how and when students would learn the Gen Ed goals. She said that some version of the Gen-Ed document would be integrated with their on-line record and probably be part of an on-line worksheet, which would serve as a reminder of their educational goals and indicate what goals their courses are working toward. It was hard, she said, to see what the harm is in keeping p. 12, which shows how their majors and Gen Ed are integrated. Including p. 12 seems generally helpful. Darryl Phillips (at-large) said that one problem with the wording of p. 12 is that it defines what majors do, not what we should be doing. He added that the upcoming International Studies major probably might not conform to the Approval Criteria of the goal. He also thought that keeping p. 12 does do some harm because it specifies what majors are supposed to do, which may not accord with what they actually do.
Mr. Parson wondered why we are talking about the major in the context of Gen Ed. He thought that Mr. Overby’s question had not yet been satisfactorily answered.

The Senate then voted on Mr. Overby’s motion to strike p. 12 of the Gen Ed document. The motion passed.

Discussion of p. 12 ended, and the Senate turned its attention to p. 7 of the Gen-Ed Proposal, which covers Goal II.2 Social and Cultural Analysis. Speaker Kelly reminded the Senate that at the October 23 meeting, the Senate had voted to postpone consideration of this page until it completed its review of all other pages of the Gen-Ed Proposal up to and including p. 12.

Mr. Wilder remarked that the question raised with respect to p. 12 applied also to this page: why is it here? The goal listed on p. 7 struck him as redundant and unnecessary.

Ms. Eichelberger asked the Senate to look at p. 36 of the Gen-Ed Proposal, which clarifies the idea that different kinds of critical thinking skills are needed. It is important to distinguish among those different critical thinking/reasoning skills, and p. 7 lists one mode of critical reasoning in which students should gain some expertise. Mr. Krasnoff replied that p. 36 lists a set of requirements. It is better he said to have a system that tracks neatly with the goals. It was not a good idea, he thought, to have a goal without a requirement that indicates how one meets the goal.

Mr. Overby said that he saw II.2 as an important goal, but the numbering seemed off to him because it seemed to be linked to the next section. Acting on this observation, Ms. Cormack moved to re-number the goal, changing it from Goal II.2 to Goal III.0, and to strike the “Requirement” and “Approval Criteria” from the page. The motion received a second.

Ms. Winfield spoke against the motion, arguing that p. 36 shows that there are two different kinds of reasoning, which, though distinct, overlap each other. We need, she said, to maintain the distinction. Mr. Pothering noted that the current number shows that there are overlapping contributions made by different disciplines to multiple goals.

Mr. McGee asked for a clarification about the proposed amendment: is the intent to change the number on p. 36 as well as on p. 7? Ms. Cormack responded that that was her intent.

Carol Toris (Psychology) thought that the amendment was helpful. She remarked that the organization of parts of the document was mystifying. For example, on p. 6 the goal is numbered II.1 and III.1, as if to suggest that III.1 courses (history courses) would satisfy the Goal II.1/III.1, but they wouldn’t.

The Senate voted on Ms. Cormack’s motion to change the number of Goal II.2, which failed.


The Speaker asked for unanimous consent to strike Requirement #2 of p. 13, but it was not given.
Ms. Cormack asked for unanimous consent to change all use of the term “countries” on p. 13 to “countries and regions.” Unanimous consent was granted.

Next, Ms. Cormack moved to strike Requirement #2, arguing that a foreign language course and a culture course about a foreign country are not the same. The motion received a second. Mr. Nunan said that he was puzzled why unanimous consent to make this change was not given when the Speaker asked for it because the Senate has made the same change in other parts of the document. The motion to strike Requirement #2 passed.

Expressing some skepticism about the usefulness of Goal IV.1, Ms. Cormack moved to strike p. 13 (and thus Goal IV.1) from the document. She argued that some courses (such as a course on Canada), though they might involve some kind of focus on another country or region, may not provide an international perspective at all.

Mr. Parson thought the motion was a very bad idea. He said it was important to give students some knowledge of life outside the USA. He added that what is missing from pp. 13 and 14 is knowledge of international life provided by the social sciences. There is a lot emphasis on literature and culture, but less on politics and economics.

Mr. Krasnoff asked if double-counting and triple-counting were allowed. Mr. Pothering said “yes.” However, Mr. Overby remarked that double- and triple-counting were not guaranteed because the Gen-Ed Committee, which would approve such counting, has not yet been established. Mr. Nunan responded that he could not conceive how at least one of the courses in this section of the Gen-Ed Proposal wouldn’t also satisfy a humanities requirement. The problem, he said, was getting students to see that they will double-count.

Darryl Phillips (a-large) observed that courses meeting the history requirement would also meet the requirement of Goal IV.1. A course, say, on Egyptian history could meet the criteria for Goal IV.1, in which case the goal is redundant and should be struck. Mr. Hopkins responded that since p. 13 references the USA, it implies that only parts of the world at least coeval with USA would count as areas of study for the goal. Thus a course on ancient Egypt would not count. Mark Long (Political Science) thought it was important that students focus on places beyond the USA today. That seemed to be the spirit of the goal and he supported it. Mr. Nunan advised that the Senate rely on the common sense of the Gen-Ed Committee to determine what counts as international. Scott Peeples (English), echoing Mr. Long’s point, said that we are writing up not just a list of requirements in the Gen-Ed Proposal, but also a set of symbols. Goal IV.1 is symbolic of the importance of gaining an international perspective on life and of the College’s commitment to ensuring that students learn about the world beyond the USA.

Tim Carens (English) suggested that the word “contemporary” be added to p. 13 to take care of the issue raised by Mr. Phillips. Mr. Hopkins then asked if it was the intention of the ad hoc Committee on Gen Ed that Goal IV.1 focus on the contemporary world. Mr. Pothering responded that it was. Then we should keep the goal, Mr. Hopkins said, and make clear that the focus be on the contemporary world. John Huddlestun (Religious Studies) agreed with and underscored Mr. Hopkins’ idea.
However, Frank Morris (at-large) objected to limiting the focus to the contemporary, pointing out that an understanding of current events usually requires understanding the past. For example, one couldn’t understand the Middle East by looking solely at the present. An understanding of the region’s history is also needed. Mr. McNerney underlined Mr. Nunan’s point that we need to have faith in the Gen-Ed Committee to use common sense in selecting courses that match the spirit and intent of the goal. He, too, stressed the importance of providing students with an international perspective.

Mr. Gavidia suggested that it would be good to go beyond the study of a single foreign country, and that the goal needs to be broader and more international. Trish Ward (at-large) noted that instructors may design courses that cover more than one foreign country. Mr. Carens observed, too, that the words “one or more countries” in both the Defining Characteristics and the Approval Criteria address Mr. Gavidia’s concern and allow for courses that are internationally broader in their coverage.

At this point, the Senate voted on Ms. Cormack’s motion to strike p. 13, which failed.

Mr. Wilder moved to extend debate on p. 13 by fifteen minutes. The motion received a second and passed.

Mr. Young observed that with the removal of Requirement #2 the document makes no comment on double-counting. He wondered if the purpose of Requirement #2 had been in part to comment on double-counting. Mr. Pothering responded that the idea was to make sure that every student should take a foreign language course at the College, not to comment on double-counting.

Mr. Phillips said that the Senate needs to clarify whether the intent of Goal IV.1 is to focus on the contemporary world. In response, Mr. Wilder asked for unanimous consent to insert the word “Modern” in the title of the goal, but unanimous consent was not granted. He then moved to insert the word in the title and the motion was seconded.

Mr. Krasnoff observed that the term “modern” can be regarded as a historical period that goes back one hundred years. Mr. Morris argued that the title of the goal shouldn’t be changed at all, and that it was important to keep a historical perspective open for understanding the present. Mr. Nunan thought that the key was to keep the focus on the present without excluding historical perspectives; and he thought Mr. Wilder’s proposed amendment accomplished this.

Mr. McGee asked if the intent of the motion was also to change p. 36 as well as p. 13. Mr. Wilder answered that that was his intent.

Jerry Boetje (Computer Science) agreed with Mr. Morris that nothing more needed to be changed, and that a proper analysis of events in the present often required some historical analysis.
Rohn England (Mathematics) said that if the aim is to understand the present, then the word “contemporary” would be better. It stressed the present, but would still allow for the use of history. Frank Cossa (Theatre) agreed with the view that “Modern” is a problematic term, and noted that for scholars in some fields the modern period is already over.

Doryjane Birrer (English) stated that if Mr. Wilder’s motion fails, she will move to insert the word “Contemporary” in Goal IV.1. Mr. Hopkins then asked if Mr. Wilder would allow the word “Contemporary” to replace the word “Modern” in his proposed amendment, and Mr. Wilder said that he would. Mr. Hopkins asked for unanimous consent to replace the word “Modern” in Mr. Wilder’s motion with the word “Contemporary.” Unanimous consent was granted.

The Senate voted on the motion to insert the word “Contemporary” in the title of Goal IV.1 so that it would read “Knowledge of Contemporary International and Global Contexts.” The motion passed.

Ms. Winfield asked for unanimous consent to strike the phase “that country’s” from Defining Characteristic #1 on p. 13, and unanimous consent was granted.

Mr. Long asked why literature is prized in the Defining Characteristics and Approval Criteria of Goal IV.1. Literature is part of the larger category of “culture,” which is also listed on p. 13, yet literature is singled out from that larger category. Why single out literature and not other aspects of culture, such as sports or cuisine?

It was now 7 p.m., the scheduled end of the meeting. Speaker Kelly announced that further debate on p. 13 would resume at the next meeting devoted to the Gen-Ed Proposal, scheduled for January 15 of the next term. The Senate adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Terence Bowers
Faculty Secretary