

Educational Development Committee
Summary of May 2003 Curriculum Conversations
Reported to Faculty at the May 14, 2003 Meeting

Since the April faculty meeting, in which the EDC distributed a report detailing progress toward curriculum revision, we have had three meetings in which members of the faculty have had an opportunity to respond to the ideas presented in that report. Thirty-two members of the humanities and fine arts faculty participated in a curriculum conversation on May 5th; sixteen members of the natural sciences faculty participated on May 6th; and thirteen members of the social science faculty participated on May 7th.

The committee found it very useful to hear the concerns and interests expressed in these meetings. We met afterwards to review our notes and to consider additional email communications and conversations we have had with individuals about the 4.9.03 report.

Below I will describe ten points we have taken from these conversations, and then I will present our plans for continued work.

1. We believe that there is strong support for the notion that our general degree program should reflect an underlying theory that will help students understand what they are accomplishing as they fulfill their requirements. It should inspire students to think about their own educational aims and help them think about these in more sophisticated ways.
2. We believe that there is general acceptance of the ACE model. Faculty last year and again this year seem to agree that this model can serve well as a foundation for a set of general education requirements.
3. Although we discern general agreement about the usefulness of the model, we also have noted serious concerns that frame interesting arguments about:
 - which abilities should be required, and which should be encouraged; which abilities should be achieved by multiple exposures in many courses, and which should be the focus of individual courses; how we will satisfy ourselves that the agreed-upon set of abilities are achieved.
 - How we will define engagement and what kinds of engagements we will want to credit.
 - How we will designate courses, especially with regard to the ability and engagement components.
4. For the most part, we discern that the faculty is supportive of a tripartite division of content domains, although we will be considering ideas for how the domains and their intersections should be labeled.
5. We find (as we found last year) widespread agreement that courses should be designated as belonging to one of the domains (or to an intersection) based on the material covered in the course, not based on the department in which the faculty teaching the course has an appointment.

6. We heard little disagreement with a curriculum that puts our Search and Life sequence of courses at the center, and that asks those courses to “set the stage” for the student’s general degree work by:

- clearly describing the set of abilities that students will be expected to develop in those courses.
- introducing students to various ways that people have made their experiences meaningful in each of the three content domains.
- helping students begin to think in sophisticated ways about diversity of traditions for making human experience meaningful.
- helping students understand their responsibility to become engaged in applying what they learn to their experiences outside the classroom and to real concerns in the wider community.

7. However, we recognize that we need to continue to work in concert with the Search and Life faculty to specify which abilities will be the focus of these courses and how the courses can serve these four goals.

8. We heard positive reactions in the natural and social sciences to the proposal that we credit student work based on our expectations for the amount of time we expect them to spend on a course, rather than on the amount of time we keep them in the classroom. This aspect of the proposal did not get much attention in the humanities/fine arts discussion, however, and this is an area in which we would like to have additional faculty input.

9. We heard few objections to the notion that we should attempt to design a set of requirements based on the idea that we have approximately 40-45 hours of the student’s time for 14 weeks in each of 8 semesters. However we ultimately decide to credit student work, our judgments about the amount of work or the number of things that we can require can be guided by this understanding of a student work week.

10. Overall, we believe that the faculty has affirmed our attempt to move to a curriculum that gives more attention to important educational experiences that occur outside the classroom (including time spent discussing ideas and time spent participating in a variety of campus activities). We believe there is general support for our attempts to encourage the integration of campus and off-campus educational activities with the content students encounter and the abilities they develop in our classes

Discerning a general faculty support for the direction we are taking, the members of the EDC have made plans to work during the summer. We will take the suggestions we have received both in the meetings we held last week and suggestions from individual faculty members, we will do some additional reading about curriculum reform efforts at other American colleges and universities, and we will get together for three days of intensive work. It will be our goal to develop a proposal that we can bring to the faculty for more ‘curriculum conversations’ during the Fall 2003 semester. We will hope to take the

feedback we receive from those conversations into one or two more intensive work days, with the goal of having a proposal ready for faculty vote early next spring.

Respectfully Submitted,

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