

Educational Policy Committee (EPC)
November 17, 2010

Present: Professors Siouxsie Easter, CJ Koepp, Ernie Olson, Tom Stiadle; Student Representative Alex Schloop '12; Provost Leslie Miller-Bernal (chair); and Associate Provost Cindy Speaker

The meeting began at 9:38 am.

1. Minutes of November 10, 2010 were approved with minor corrections.
2. The meeting focused on themes for each year of students' time at Wells, with most of our time spent on discussing the first year theme. It was noted that the new Gen Ed program will be phased in, with the class of 2015 being the first to be held to the new requirements. This should help by giving faculty time to develop seminars tied to each year's theme. An exception might be capstone experiences since major fields are already working on changing them and perhaps they could be tied to a theme for the senior year. We plan to discuss capstones in the spring.
3. The suggested theme for students' first year was Meaningful Lives. Further discussion led to a desire to stress the connections between students and their communities, which we thought would be clearer if we added a subtitle—Meaningful Lives: Relationships between Self & Society. While this is a purposefully broad theme, it ties into students' developmental stage of being concerned with their identity. We would also want to tie in issues connected to students' transition to college. Students should realize that at Wells they are not just a number; we respect individual differences. There are also multiple communities at Wells, including residence halls, affinity groups, and the village of Aurora.
4. We discussed whether all current or recent WLLS 101 seminars would fit this first-year theme and came to the conclusion that with minimal adjustments, they could. WLLS 101 learning objectives are compatible with this theme. We noted that faculty might be provided with a fuller description of our goals that would not necessarily be shared with students. For example, we might want to ask faculty to address "big questions" in their seminars—What's a good life? What's a good society? This theme might be continued in second semester courses, but spring courses are different from WLLS 101 seminars since they are open to students in other years.
5. We discussed ways that we might continue focusing on the first-year theme throughout students' first year, i.e., not just their first semester. We considered possibilities such as repeating WLLS 101 sections in the spring so that students would take two different sections over the year (a suggestion that was modified to--only some sections, if some faculty wanted to), designating seminars that deal with the theme both in the fall and the spring, and modifying various major fields' introductory-level courses to deal with the first-year theme. We noted that while it might be desirable to repeat WLLS 101 sections, faculty would be concerned about covering areas within their major fields, an issue that seems more pronounced at Wells than at other colleges, perhaps related to the College's very small size. Staffing one-semester WLLS 101 seminars is already difficult.

6. Other ways we envision extending the first-year theme beyond the fall semester include one week at the end of January, prior to the beginning of spring semester, in which the broad theme is incorporated into a “learning community,” perhaps called “Living & Learning Together.” We still like the conference model, with workshops students can choose from, performances, upper-class students’ making presentations on their theses or other capstone experiences, service learning opportunities, etc. Another way of extending the theme is by having the second half of WLLS 111 take place during the first seven weeks of the spring semester.
7. We discussed themes for the second year more briefly. We want to introduce a more deliberate discussion of complexity and difference which ties to our mission statement. It is a time when students need to be thinking more globally; they are also making connections to majors. We thought these issues might be summed up by calling the theme Local & Global Interconnections.
8. In students’ third year, we want to focus on ethical issues. Ethical Behavior, Humane Action, Civic Engagement and Social Responsibility were some of the titles considered. The one that seemed to get the most support (our working title) was Contemporary Challenges & Ethical Engagement. We noted that service learning is an important component of this theme.
9. In students’ fourth year, we want the focus to be on synthesizing, having students reflect on what they have learned and prepare themselves for their post-Wells futures. One image we had was jumping off the dock. Launching into the Future was mentioned, but we agreed we need to come back to the fourth year theme’s title.
10. Chair Miller-Bernal said she would develop a list of questions we would try to answer about our proposed new Gen Ed program before we hold the open meeting with faculty on December 7. We have only one more meeting of EPC before our discussion with faculty at large.

The meeting adjourned at about 11:05 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Leslie Miller-Bernal