

Educational Policy Committee (EPC)

March 17, 2011

Present: Professors Easter, Olson, Stiadle, Student Representative A. Schloop, Provost Miller-Bernal (chair), and Associate Provost Speaker

The meeting was called to order at 9:33 am.

1. Minutes from March 10, 2011 approved with a minor changes.
2. Subcommittees' Progress
 - A. January Week Subcommittee
 - Olson, Easter, and Schloop met on March 15. Joel McCarthy and Susan Tabrizi, also members of the subcommittee, were unable to meet at that time.
 - The subcommittee developed a student-led model based on our current orientation program.
 - The subcommittee thought that for the first year, which effectively serves as a "trial," the week could be shortened to three days: Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. Student leaders would arrive to campus on Tuesday for training.
 - The subcommittee drafted a rough schedule for what the week might look like. Each day would start with some kind of morning meeting: a keynote speaker on Wednesday, some kind of major meeting on Thursday, and a plenary session on Friday. Lunches would be split into "table talk" discussions, allowing students to engage in dialogue with peers in an informal setting. Afternoons would be focused on some sort of service learning or community service component and sessions run by students, staff, or faculty. (We noted that all clubs under the Collegiate Association must complete community service every semester, and concluded that this week might be useful time to utilize for that purpose.) Student performances would make up evenings, with built-in free time after dinner.
 - The subcommittee proposed that the January week be a one-credit experience.
 - B. Scientific Literacy Subcommittee
 - Three members of the subcommittee met on March 11 and 16.
 - The subcommittee reviewed information from 15 peer colleges—also used last spring for strategic planning—to assess what scientific literacy requirements, if any, other colleges are using. Almost all of these colleges require some kind of scientific course, most of which are lab-based. Very few had a specific "scientific literacy" course. This works much like our WLLS 101 system: *content* is needed to learn form.
 - The subcommittee noted that many schools have specific learning objectives listed with the course requirement. Wells currently does not do this but can in the future.
 - EPC discussed at some length the type of course that the scientific literacy requirement would fit into.
3. Themed Seminars

A. Third-year Seminar Description

- The committee reviewed description proposals for the third-year seminar and concluded that the final description will roughly include: "The world we live in today is full of challenges; poverty, war, political unrest, gender inequality, illness, illiteracy, exploitation of natural resources to name a few. In these third year seminars, students will examine the various concepts and processes of ethical reasoning through a focus on particular concrete social or global issues. The accompanying service learning component will encourage a deeper understanding of the impact of individual actions and choices as one engages with the self and others."
- Professor Stiadle volunteered to "smooth out" this rough description.

B. Senior Year Interdisciplinary Course: Practical Issues

- The committee discussed possible course set-ups and concluded that one course per division might be a plausible solution.
- These courses could be team-taught. If Wells has three divisions, this would mean six faculty members for an approximated 150 senior class. Each course, then, would have about 50 students. Faculty pairs do not have to be from the same division. As an alternate to team-teaching, each course could be taught by a faculty "coordinator" who could bring in interdisciplinary guests. This might be less work for faculty than team-teaching.
- The committee discussed the practical concerns of the level of credit for the course, the length of the course (half or whole semester), and a course registration cap. The committee concluded that credits granted from this kind of course would not count toward a major field but would work similar to WLLS 101.
- Discussion among the committee highlighted the already burdensome workload of the faculty. A solution to this workload problem might be having three faculty members become coordinators for the courses. These faculty members could count the course as one of three classes of the teaching load.
- The committee iterated learning objectives for this type of course, which include: utilizing a variety of critical approaches, observing interdisciplinary connections, and reflection and integration of liberal arts in the service of lifelong learning.

4. Capstone Survey Review

- The committee discussed the Visual Arts comprehensive exams and found that they are conducted during senior week.
- The committee discussed the purpose of comprehensive exams. There is a stated purpose in the course catalogue, but it may be idealized. Comprehensive exams can serve as a reflection piece that works to tie together experiences within a major field.
- Some major fields are currently using an oral defense of the thesis as comprehensive exams. (Presenting during science colloquium, for example.) This is problematic, as comprehensive exams should serve as an additional part of the capstone experience. The course catalogue used to state this explicitly.
- The committee noted the interesting, student-designed system of the Film and Media Studies major. Under this system, the questions themselves can also be evaluated.

- The committee made recognition of the distinct difference between length and quality.

The meeting adjourned at 10:50 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Alex Schloop
Secretary, pro tem