Minutes of the Core Review Committee
3 November 2009

The CRC met on 3 November 2009 at 11:00 AM in the GIS conference room (SLC 143).

Members present: Brian Whitman, Ellen Flint, Susan Hritzak, Gina Morrison, Amy Patton, Philip Simon, Ernie Trujillo

Guest present: Rachel Duda (intern accompanying Susan Hritzak)

Dr. Whitman called the meeting to order at 11:15, when a quorum was reached.
The minutes of 8 October 2009 were approved.

Old Business

Computer Literacy Skills Assessment

Dr. Whitman introduced the “Computer Literacy Outcomes” draft prepared by Barbara Bracken, as requested at the previous meeting. The CRC appreciated the additions to the list, in particular the Ethics section. The Committee suggested that “Do no harm to others” (eg, impersonation, cracking, virus creation, cyber-bullying, accessing files of others without authorization, etc) and “Do no harm to self” (eg, posting compromising pictures from a party) be added. Similarly, “Develop an understanding of privacy and security issues...” might best be moved from the Consumer Orientation section to Ethics.

There was discussion of whether these outcomes are appropriate for the broader Computer Literacy assessment, which can be fulfilled through courses other than CS-115. If so, should the CRC develop an assessment rubric from these outcomes, or should it ask the Math/CS department to? As the Committee is proposing changes to The Core, it was judged best to develop a rubric within the Committee, and thereby ensure full ownership of the changes. To avoid problems such as those encountered in last year’s assessment cycle, however, the CRC will request that Math/CS supply example questions or assignments of the type that would be used for assessment.

Communication with the Deans’ Council

Dr. Simon met with the Deans’ Council over fall break. He reported that the Deans will give the CRC their full support, including making department chairs and instructors aware of assessment materials that are needed. They ask, however, that the CRC let them know what specifically is needed.

New Business

Skills Tests to Satisfy GenEd Skills Requirements

Dr. Simon reported that he met with Ellen Flint, who represented the FYF Task Force for Transfer Students. Through this task force, the University is trying to streamline transfer procedures for students who have completed two year degrees. Many students come to Wilkes with course credit (or experience) that could satisfy a GenEd skills requirement, but there is no mechanism to evaluate these skills. The Task Force desires that each department creates an exam for the GenEd skill satisfied by the department’s 101-course, thereby allowing students to test out of that skill requirement.

In discussion of this request, the distinction between a skills test and a course challenge exam was underscored: a skills test indicates proficiency or competency at a skill, and may be taken without charge. In contrast, a course challenge examination focuses on the content of a specific course, and may be used to satisfy a GenEd distribution requirement (vs a skill requirement). Additionally, challenge exams have a fee (currently $90/credit). In practice, a department could conceivably give the same examination as both a skill test and a course-challenge exam.
GenEd courses for which skills tests would be appropriate include CS-115, COM-101, ENG-101, and MA-101. Dr. Simon noted that, were incoming students to satisfy some requirements through skill exams, there would be fewer students taking the 101-courses, reducing the backfilling problem and, eventually, the need for adjuncts to teach these courses.

Dr. Whitman noted that these skill tests are included in the GenEd description passed in 2002, which also dictates that “guides for practice courses” (ie, lists of skills required) be available. It was therefore judged best that the CRC, rather than the task force, request these materials from the programs. Dr. Flint will have the task force formally request that the CRC do so.

Proposal to Modify the Bulletin Description of FYF

A proposal to require successful completion of a first-year-foundation course for advancement to sophomore status was discussed. This proposal aims to close a loophole through which freshmen can delay their FYF course until a later semester. Although the FYF description currently states that it is only open to students who matriculate as freshman (≤ 23 transfer credits), nothing stipulates that the course be taken during the first year. Given the design and purpose of the FYF courses, the presence of sophomores in the class is disruptive.

Dr. Whitman noted that the penalty for putting FYF off lacks teeth: other than being required to register with the freshman, a student could conceivably maintain freshman status until graduation. The committee brainstormed other penalties: could students be barred from upper-level courses (≥ 300-level)? Ms. Hritzak noted that this would be difficult to enforce; the checking would need to be done manually. Might a waiver from the Academic Standards Committee be needed for students who do not complete it their first year? Might a block, similar to those imposed for financial reasons, be imposed on a student’s record? This also would need to be done manually. Ms. Patton pointed out that any actions should occur in early January, to give non-compliant freshmen time to adjust their spring schedules.

This problem, it was noted, is generally the result of bad advising, rather than of poor students compliance. Ms. Hritzak underscored the need to establish periodic refresher sessions for advisors, which could include this point. Dr. Flint added that FYF information needs to be covered in more depth during the summer Advisor Orientation sessions held by University College.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:43 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

— Ernie Trujillo