Minutes of the Core Review Committee
12 November 2009

The CRC met on 12 November 2009 at 11:00 AM in the GIS conference room (SLC 143).

Members present: Brian Whitman, KarenBeth Bohan, Greg Castelli, Susan Hritzak, Andy Miller, Gina Morrison, Philip Simon, Ernie Trujillo

Guest present: Rachel Duda (intern accompanying Susan Hritzak)

Dr Whitman called the meeting to order at 11:07. The minutes of 3 November 2009 were approved.

Old Business

Computer Literacy Skills Assessment

Dr. Bohan pointed out that Computer Literacy is a skills requirement, not a specific course requirement. Since there is more than one way to fulfill it (CS-115, a higher CS course, or 2 Computer Intensive courses), the outcomes for the requirement cannot be course-specific. As CS-115 teaches “the basics,” Dr. Miller asked whether one might assume that students in higher courses already knew them. According to Dr. Whitman, the Math/CS department has stated that its higher courses do not cover the basics.

Dr. Bohan suggested that a skills test might be the best option. This could take the form of a placement examination that would both fulfill the GenEd requirement and exempt students from CS-115. Such an examination would distinguish the computer-savvy and -phobic populations of freshmen. Moreover, by reducing the number of students enrolled in CS-115, it would help the Math/CS department with its backfilling problem. Dr. Simon warned, however, that such a proposal would have staffing implications and might result in backlash from the department, as lower enrollments would be reflected in its service “dashboard.”

Dr. Whitman will communicate the following to the Math/CS Department: 1) The outcomes should have a “do no harm (to self or others)” ethical component. 2) As there is more than one way to satisfy the requirement, there should be an examination to measure the CL outcomes. In addition, he will ask what they are doing for their assessment.

During the discussion above, Dr. Simon asked whether advisors instruct their students to put off GenEd courses and focus on their major courses. Dr. Miller noted that he has commonly observed this with theatre majors. Dr. Whitman commented that the sciences, math, and engineering are very hierarchical, hence students must begin the major courses early. He will obtain data from Brian Bogert to determine if there is indeed a trend of students putting off GenEd courses. If so, this would be an appropriate topic for the Advising Workshops discussed last meeting (also see below).

Assessment Workshops

Dr. Whitman informed the Committee that the first Assessment Workshop was canceled, for lack of attendance, but the Associate Provost’s office should be organizing more. Dr. Bohan wondered whether the poor attendance was due to timing, a lack of interest, or both.

New Business

CRC Representative for the University Assessment Committee

When Vernon Harper, the Associate Provost, spoke with the CRC on 6 October 2009, he indicated that an ex-officio member of the CRC should be on the University Assessment Committee. Dr. Whitman
stated that he recently met with Dr. Harper, who now has asked the CRC for a nominee. Dr. Morrison was willing to serve on the UAC. Dr. Whitman will communicate her name to Dr. Harper.

Writing Across the Curriculum Assessment

Dr. Bohan’s memo, “Suggestions for Contents to be Included in WAC Assessment Reports to CRC” (distributed 30 October 2009) was brought up for discussion. The need to keep the assessment questionnaire and process simple was underscored. Dr. Simon suggested that Tom Hamill’s “Grading Guidelines” is an extremely useful document which could be extrapolated into an assessment tool. Dr. Morrison noted that the Pennsylvania Department of Education has similar guidelines. As the MAPP exam includes writing skills, Dr. Simon pointed out, it would allow monitoring of the progression from freshman to senior year.

Since WAC considers writing to be a discipline-specific skill, Dr. Miller asked why the CRC, rather than each department, was assessing writing. Dr. Bohan responded that the CRC is assessing the departmental plans, not the writing skills: Do they have outcomes? How are they using them? Are their students meeting them? The CRC would only summarize the departmental WAC data, just as the Summer Subcommittee did the COM-101 data.

For the next CRC meeting, Dr. Bohan will write a request for data to be sent to the departments, asking for a report and providing guidelines. Dr. Whitman will submit this request to the Deans’ Council, to ideally reach the departments by the end of the semester. He stressed that the request should include a page limit.

Dr. Simon suggested that we include a sample rubric. Dr. Miller noted, however, that each department’s WAC plan includes an assessment plan. Few departments, Dr. Simon countered, actually have one, hence we should include a broad list of skills or a rubric. Ms. Duda agreed: there is a marked discrepancy of writing skills across students with whom she has collaborated on projects. Dr. Bohan, however, pointed out that it would be best to let programs use their own, in order that the assessment feel bottom-up, rather than imposed from above.

Other Discussion

Advisor Retraining/Refresher Workshops

The advisor refresher-sessions mentioned at the end of the previous meeting were discussed. There was consensus that a mandatory retraining/refresher for advisors is necessary. Topics could include registration for FYF (and that students should not drop their FYF course), placement information, the importance of fulfilling skills requirements early, and how GenEd requirements may be satisfied outside the standard means (eg, performance ensembles, skills tests, CS classes other than 115, etc.). Although the Advisor Workshop run every summer by University College has a different focus — transforming the role of Advisors from traditional course advising — a one-day refresher/retraining workshop might be offered through it every few years. Alternatively, Ms. Hritzak suggested, it might be more effective to speak to departments individually. Whatever the communication means, however, an Advisor’s Handbook (or cheat-sheet) would be very useful.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:55 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

— Ernie Trujillo