

## **LIBERAL STUDIES COMMITTEE**

### **Minutes**

**September 9, 2005**

Attendees: Jeff Berglund, David Best, Doug Brown, John Doherty, Jack Ferrell, Bruce Fox, Louise Lockard, Anne Medill, Marcia Metcalf, Laura Michael-Blocher, Tom Paradis, Shelly Pleasants, Karen Pugliesi, Ryan Rodriguez, Blase Scarnati (presiding), and David Sherry

Absent: Brandon Cruikshank, Aregai Tecele, and Eileen Mahoney

Guests: Katie Desmond and Paula Garcia

### **I. Welcome and remarks – Blase Scarnati**

- The Liberal Studies Committee (LSC) roster was passed around for editing.
- Mark Taylor will present a lecture, “Meeting Generation NeXt: Today’s Postmodern College Student,” on Monday, September 19, 2005, 9:00-11:00 am, University Union Havasupai A&B.
- The minutes from the April 29, 2005 meeting were approved with corrections.
- Last year we accomplished a great deal.
  - Developed rubrics to evaluate course proposals.
  - Reviewed twenty-eight courses and passed virtually all of them within a month.
  - Drafted, adopted, and are implementing an Assessment Plan for Liberal Studies.
  - Discussed Program reforms with the Faculty Senate Liberal Studies Review Committee.
  - Established policy for LS topics courses.
  - Proposed the establishment of a LS Advisory Board.
  - Modified the selection process for the summer reading program.
  - Revised senior capstone and junior writing policies to take into account the previously discontinued electronic portfolio.
  - Created a Strategic Communications Plan.
  - Met with the University Curriculum Committee to streamline the course submission process.
- This year, we have three priorities.
  - Strategic Communication Plan. We need to define what we do, how we do it, and how things are going with a particular focus on internal campus communications.

- Work on the LS Program website. We need to make more information accessible so that our activities will be more transparent. We need to improve the visibility of tracking information for course submissions.
- Course Review Process and communication. Continue to improve the efficiency of the review process and communication.

### **Remarks – Karen Pugliesi**

- The LSC should move from last year's internal focus on Committee reforms to an external engagement with the faculty and campus in a broader conversation on general education.
- There is a low level of discussion on campus around general education. Need to work with new faculty to bring them up to speed on their courses and LS. Need to work with advisors to raise the visibility of general education in the advising process. The LSC can be a leader in reinvigorating a campus dialogue on general education.
- Assessment of LS and its impact on our students is a continuing key goal. We need to document student learning in general education to ensure that the goals of the Program are met.
- There should be a faculty emphasis in our Communication Plan efforts. Faculty can serve as conduits to students, parents, and others. We may also want to include faculty from other institutions, such as Coconino CCC and Yavapai College, in these discussions.

### **Reports and updates**

- **Assessment Pilot Project Report – Katie Desmond**
  - Summer faculty consultants worked on drafting rubrics for assessing Critical Reading, Effective Oral Communication, and Effective Writing LS Skills. On September 10, there is a retreat scheduled focusing on synthesizing individual rubrics to create draft rubrics for the three LS Skills to bring to this Committee for consideration as part of the LS Assessment Plan.
- **Diversity Subcommittee of the University Curriculum Committee – John Doherty**
  - The Diversity Subcommittee has not yet met this year. Last year was very active, reviewing 120 courses and fewer than fifteen were not accepted. With the 2005 Fall semester students, Global and Ethnic Diversity courses are required.
- **Faculty Senate LS Review Committee – Blase Scarnati**
  - The Committee began meeting in Spring 2005 and is trying to jump start a campus-wide discussion on reform of the LS Program. Particular focus is narrowing on the Program goal of citizenship, relevance of the thematic foci, integrity of the distribution blocks, the number of skills, and other issues. The Committee hopes to make a proposal for reforms in Spring 2006.
  - A team of four Committee members and Karen Pugliesi had a proposal accepted and attended the Association of American Colleges & Universities General Education Institute in May 2005.

- Appendix A is a May 10, 2005 Report from the Committee on its work during Spring 2005 that was distributed to all faculty at that time and again in the first weeks of the Fall 2005 semester.
- **Collegiate Learning Assessment Project – Tom Paradis**
  - This project is designed to assess the ‘value added’ education that students receive at NAU. In other words, it is to assess how much students are learning while they are here. Office of Academic Assessment is currently recruiting 350 incoming freshmen, including statewide students, to take this computer-based test, which is designed to assess skills such as critical thinking, writing, deconstructing arguments, and so forth. These students must also agree to take the same test again in their sophomore and senior years. Students are compensated for their efforts. In addition to the data that we collect, there will be data from other institutions available for comparisons.

#### **Course review process – Blase Scarnati**

- A proposal for modifying the LSC course review process was distributed. The proposal was accepted with changes and is included as Appendix B.
- Approved courses need to go to the University Curriculum Committee by their January 24, 2006 meeting, so we need to act on all submissions in a timely manner. Blank rubrics will be available on the web for use by departments in preparing submissions.

#### **Subcommittee assignments – Blase Scarnati**

- LSC members should communicate their Subcommittee preferences.

#### **Strategic Communications Plan – Blase Scarnati**

A proposed Strategic Communications Plan was distributed and discussed by all. The following key points were emphasized.

- The goals need to be tracked and measured.
- The mission of the LS program needs to be clarified within the Committee before it can be communicated to everyone else. What is the definition of citizenship?
- We need to engage new faculty, teaching graduate students, and advisors. Perhaps host a breakfast or lunch.
- We need to communicate to students that the LS requirements, as well as the new diversity requirements, are positive aspects of their education that will give them an advantage over students at other universities.

#### **Summer Reading Program – Karen Pugliesi**

- Much thanks to Rebecca Cole and Laura Michael-Blocher for coordinating the program this year. The handbook they created for facilitators was very helpful.
- Facilitators and students liked the book that was read and discussions were good. We are currently gathering evaluation data from both the students and the facilitators.
- There were a few glitches that will need to be resolved for next year. For instance, it was held the Tuesday night of the second day of classes. The students

could only move into their rooms the previous Saturday, so they were often overwhelmed and distracted. There was apparently a delay in the mail, so letters to off-campus students were received about a week later than we expected them to be. In addition, Residence Life assigned the reading groups based on their dorm assignments, so gender-segregated discussions were inadvertently created.

### **Meeting adjourned.**

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Report from the Liberal Studies Review Committee**

May 10, 2005

(Members: Terence Blows, JeanAnn Foley, Peter Kosso, Dean Pielstick, Blase Scarnati, and Robert Trotter; Chair: Virginia Blankenship)

The charge to the Liberal Studies Review Committee is to “study the current requirements of the Liberal Studies/ General Education requirements...and recommend to the Faculty whether to continue those requirements as currently constituted.... “ Specifically, we were charged with recommending what to do with the three credit hours of Liberal Studies previously devoted to UC101 and currently being filled by any other Liberal Studies course.

We have met weekly in the Spring 2005 semester and have elicited input via email, in a meeting with the Liberal Studies Committee, and at an Open Forum (with 24 faculty attending) on April 28. The following is a preliminary report of issues that have surfaced and some potential solutions that have emerged:

#### 1. What is the purpose of Liberal Studies?

Liberal Studies is the shared core of the curriculum that makes the various Schools and Colleges into a University. There is a consensus that a Liberal Studies program is beneficial for students at NAU. However, among the faculty we have identified a tension between the desire for a coherent Liberal Studies program, which would require students to choose a coordinated set of courses, and diversity in program offerings designed to give student a broadening exposure to various disciplines outside their major. From written input and the stimulating discussion at the Open Forum there is enthusiastic support for the Liberal Studies program and more support for a diverse set of offerings (as opposed to a program that emphasizes coherence or integration of offerings).

#### 2. Is the structure of Liberal Studies at NAU optimal?

The current structure of Liberal Studies at NAU begins with an overall focus on citizenship, which is defined as providing students with “the skills and a broad understanding of key issues that will allow them to participate fully in public debates about the pressing issues of their times.” The program is further structure with three

themes (Environmental Consciousness, Technology and Its Impact, and Valuing the Diversity of Human Experience).

Generally, we found that faculty are unaware of the focus of Liberal Studies on citizenship and that they have found the three defined themes to be restricting rather than helpful in designing their Liberal Studies courses. When the focus of citizenship is made salient to faculty, they concur that it is an important outcome for students, but the three themes are generally viewed as problematic.

### 3. Are the current Distribution Blocks and the Essential Skills appropriate?

The input from faculty has been supportive of the current five Distribution Blocks:

Aesthetic and Humanistic Inquiry

Cultural Understanding

Lab Science

Science/Applied Science

Social and Political Worlds

These Distribution Blocks appear to be a good framework for providing students and advisors a way to choose the best offerings for individual students.

Several faculty have suggested that the nine Essential Skills (effective spoken communication, reading critically, thinking critically, thinking creatively, engaging in quantitative analysis, utilizing the logic of scientific inquiry, reasoning critically, writing effectively, and using technology to enhance learning) can be simplified by combining related skill. Within the Open Forum, from email input, and during discussion within the Liberal Studies Review Committee, it was proposed that the Essential Skills are more naturally combined into a smaller number of interrelated skills, consisting of critical reading, effective writing, effective speaking, and analytic/quantitative/scientific reasoning.

There is an overwhelming desire among the faculty that the Liberal Studies program be simplified wherever possible.

### 4. Are the current foundation courses (English 105 and the mathematics requirement) meeting the needs of students and faculty?

The foundation course in mathematics is viewed as appropriate, especially as it has recently been changed to meet the needs of various majors in the University. However, there is considerable support for the re-institution of a two-course sequence of English courses to replace ENG 105. This could take two routes, returning to ENG 101 and ENG 102 or having a freshman and sophomore set of courses (ENG 101 and ENG 201). The desire for students to have more foundational education in reading and writing is often mentioned in faculty emails.

### 5. What is the place for a required freshman course within Liberal Studies?

Faculty who taught UC 101 report that they enjoyed teaching the course. However, department chairs were frustrated with having to staff the courses with full-time faculty who had been teaching other important courses in the major. Student response to the

required course became increasingly negative, setting up an unpleasant teaching experience for faculty. Feedback indicates that the implementation of the freshman course was flawed. There was not sufficient institutional support during a financial crisis at the University. It appears that prescribed course content for faculty squashed creativity and academic fulfillment, and the lack of choice for students doomed the course. Future discussion of a freshman course within Liberal Studies should take all of these past experiences into account as we decide what to do with the 3 credit hours currently being filled with any other Liberal Studies course.

#### 6. How should Liberal Studies courses be assessed?

Assessment of any program is a required and useful process for improvement. We believe that trying to assess the current goal of citizenship would be very hard to demonstrate, and that the Liberal Studies outcomes need to be defined more broadly.

These observations are preliminary. We plan to begin holding additional open forums for faculty, students, and other “stakeholders” in the Fall 2005 semester. We hope that our report will elicit response and discussion. Please send your input on these topics to any of the committee members or the chair of the committee: Virginia.Blankenship@nau.edu. We welcome your input.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Liberal Studies Committee Course Review Process**

Adopted by the Liberal Studies Committee with changes (September 9, 2005)

1. There will be three standing Course Review Subcommittees organized by the LSC Chair from the voting members of the Liberal Studies Committee (LSC). Each Subcommittee will have an appointed Subcommittee Chair.
2. Proposals are assigned for review in rotation to each Subcommittee by the LSC Chair who will try to avoid assigning proposals to Subcommittees with members from the same department.
3. All proposals are reviewed by each Subcommittee using the rubric adopted by the LSC:
  - New course rubric
  - Junior-level writing rubric
  - Senior capstone rubric

4. After each member of the Subcommittee evaluates the proposal using the appropriate rubric, the Subcommittee meets to discuss and reach a consensus on a rubric for the Subcommittee as a whole.
5. The Subcommittee will determine, based upon the consensus Subcommittee rubric, whether the proposal falls into one of three categories:
  - a. approved
  - b. approved with minor revisions requested of faculty and/or chair of department
  - c. continued work with faculty and/or chair of department
6. The Subcommittee Chair will contact the faculty and/or chair of department about necessary changes and establish a date for completion of revisions within a period of thirty days.

If needed, the consensus Subcommittee rubric may be forwarded to faculty or chairs by the Subcommittee Chair. No individual Subcommittee member's rubric should leave the Subcommittee.

7. Revisions within thirty days that address the concerns of the Subcommittee are reported by the Subcommittee Chair to the LSC Chair who will report the submission as approved by the LSC. Subcommittee Chairs must forward final copies of all proposals to the LSC Chair.

Approved submissions are forward by the LSC Chair to the University Curriculum Committee (UCC) for approval as a consent item in its next meeting. No courses are officially approved until final acceptance by the UCC. Subcommittee Chairs should remind faculty or chairs of this policy.

8. If revisions that address the concerns of the Subcommittee have not been completed within thirty days, the faculty or department chair will be invited to meet with the full LSC at the next possible LSC meeting.
9. As an outcome of a meeting with the full LSC,
  - a. further revisions may be agreed upon to be submitted by an established date
  - b. a vote is taken to not approve the proposal
10. Proposals that are not approved may be revised and resubmitted to the LSC.