

Core Curriculum Review Committee
Friday, November 19, 2004 9-11 AM AMU 254
Approved Minutes

Members Present: Drs. Deahl, Ropella, Lueger, Ksobiech, Moyer, Hay, Laatsch, Snow; Mr. Lowrey.

Members Excused: Drs. Block, Eckman, Hathaway, Steinmetz, Ramey, Griffin, Vater, Quade; Rev. Laurance, SJ; Ms. Russell. Also excused: Dr. Bloom.

The meeting was called to order at 9:05 A.M.

1. Dr. Deahl read the opening prayer.
2. Dr. Snow asked for changes to the minutes of 11.1.04. Dr. Ropella requested two changes. Dr. Ksobiech noted that a quorum of voting members was not present. Dr. Deahl asked that it be noted in the minutes that those present decided to proceed with a meeting in the absence of a quorum. Dr. Snow agreed that it would be so noted and asked for a motion to approve the amended minutes. Dr. Laatsch moved to approve; Dr. Lueger seconded. The amended minutes passed by a vote of 6 in favor, none opposed, and no abstentions (Dr. Moyer was not present at the time of the vote).
3. Dr. Snow reported on progress in putting together faculty focus groups. A list of faculty whose courses were remanded has been compiled. Dr. Snow contacted the Registrar's Office for a list of names of faculty who taught Core courses during AY 03-04 and the fall semester of 04. That list should be ready by the beginning of December.
4. Dr. Snow turned to a discussion of the Report on the Formative Evaluation of the First Year of the Core. She informed the committee that the report had been presented at the meeting of the University Assessment Committee on November 12, 2004, and would be presented at the Academic Senate, probably at its meeting in January, 2005. The report would also be presented to the academic affairs subcommittee of the Board of Trustees on December 8, 2004. She asked committee members how they wished to proceed and suggested going through the report item by item. Members agreed. The first part of the report consists of findings and conclusions from a review of assessment files. Dr. Snow read through seven findings with an accompanying conclusion for each finding. Committee members interjected questions and comments on several points. Dr. Hay inquired how the decision to call a moratorium on the assessment of Core courses had been reached. Dr. Snow explained that she had recommended a moratorium to Dr. Bloom after reviewing the assessment files. Dr. Bloom, who had also reviewed the files, agreed that a moratorium was needed in order to step back and refocus assessment efforts. Dr. Bloom drafted an e-mail calling for a moratorium that

was sent to Provost Wake and the Deans for commentary. That e-mail was eventually sent to all faculty. Dr. Snow indicated that it became clear to her, on the basis of a review of information from the assessment files, input from North Central, faculty surveys, and personal communication with Core teaching faculty and chairs, that the current process of assessment was labor intensive and time consuming for faculty, and that, to faculty involved in the process, the pedagogical benefits of assessment did not justify the investment in terms of time and effort. Further, because of the diversity of assessment methods and variation in what was assessed, it is impossible to reliably aggregate data to assess the Core as a whole. Reliable aggregation is impossible for most knowledge areas. Dr. Snow indicated her belief that it would be irresponsible to continue a process involving so much faculty time and effort that was simply not working. Calling a moratorium communicates that faculty concerns are being heard and should generate good will which, Dr. Snow hopes, will be translated into faculty buy-in and input into the focus groups that are planned for next semester. Dr. Lueger shared his thoughts on a process for assessment of Core courses that would involve departmental monitoring. Dr. Snow agreed with that process, and volunteered her suggestion that faculty in the focus groups should be asked to craft one learning objective or outcome that they wish to achieve in their Core courses, and be asked to assess only that objective and report data back to the Core Director on some feasible schedule. She gave her own Core course, Philosophy 104, Theory of Ethics, as an example. Her objective is that students should demonstrate the ability to think critically about ethical issues. This objective is sufficiently general so that more specific knowledge area learning objectives feed into it. Moreover, existing assignments allow for assessment of that objective. One of the goals that she has for the faculty focus groups is to encourage faculty to come up with one single measurable learning objective for their Core courses. Dr. Hay explained that some faculty thought the moratorium indicated that a broad survey instrument would be used for Core assessment. Dr. Ksobiech indicated that course-based assessment would not provide data for assessing the Core as a whole. Dr. Snow agreed, and indicated that the University Assessment Committee would likely be working on a survey instrument to be administered to students after they had completed the Core. Thus, there would be two checks on the Core: course-based assessment, with data reported to the CCRC, and assessment of the Core as a whole by means of data gathered from the survey instrument, which would be undertaken by the UAC in conjunction with the CCRC. The UAC will also assist in the development of major and program assessment. Dr. Deahl remarked that Dr. Bloom had made an excellent power point presentation on assessment at the Dean's Council meeting. Dr. Snow commented that Dr. Bloom had shared that document with the UAC, and indicated that she would request that Dr. Bloom share this with the CCRC at its December 6 meeting. Dr. Deahl also remarked that Dr. Bloom had shared a useful book, Assessment Clear and Simple, by Barbara Walvoord.

Dr. Lueger commented on a statistic from the compilation of student surveys, which comprises the second section of the Report on the Formative Evaluation of the First Year of the Core. He noticed that 58 of 291 student respondents found their Core courses to be a waste of time. He suggested that efforts be made at student orientation to explain the value of the Core to students. Dr. Hay suggested making a video. She and Dr. Ropella suggested inviting students and alumni to participate in the video. Dr. Snow suggested that pre-major advising sessions could also be used as a venue for highlighting the Core's value. She also noted that 138 student respondents found the learning objectives for their Core courses to be clear and useful, and noted that some student respondents had made connections between their Core courses. Turning to the third section of the report, the summary of faculty surveys, Dr. Snow remarked that a substantial number of faculty respondents, some of whom were negative about the current process of Core course assessment, had taken the time to write thoughtful comments about how the process could be improved. She reviewed the general conclusions and recommendations of the Report. She summarized changes that need to be made in the present Core. First, the process of Core course assessment needs to be revisited. Second, the learning objectives in some knowledge areas are not useful to faculty. This issue needs to be addressed. Finally, the process of Core course revision needs to be simplified. Input on these points should be sought from faculty in the focus groups next semester.

Dr. Laatsch asked about the timing of the focus groups and urged that they be planned at times of the semester that are convenient for faculty. Dr. Moyer noted that some members of his department were unaware of the process and did not know where the Mathematical Reasoning learning objectives came from. Dr. Snow expressed puzzlement, since the process was well publicized, and wondered how significant faculty participation might be solicited for the focus groups next semester. She remarked that she and Dr. Bloom would be visiting department chairs, and noted the importance of buy-in and input in the process on the part of Deans and Chairs. Questions relating to the focus groups include: how to determine their membership; what are the goals of having the groups; and what questions should be asked.

Dr. Snow commented that attendance was poor for this CCRC meeting, and that this has been an issue for the Committee for the past year or two. She stated that she understands that faculty are busy, but said she would put out a plea for attendance at the meeting on December 6, since input from the entire Committee on questions pertaining to the focus groups is needed. She noted that she had suggested downsizing the CCRC to the Task Force on Faculty Governance, because the large size and occasional lack of attendance impairs the Committee's ability to do its work. Dr. Lueger suggested that a Steering Committee or Executive Committee perform the routine operations of the Committee, and the larger Committee could meet only occasionally, perhaps once a semester, for important votes. Dr. Hay suggested that some votes

could be taken by e-mail. Dr. Snow said that she would be comfortable with either downsizing the Committee or allowing an Executive Committee to meet to perform regular operations, provided that the group is well functioning and efficient. Dr. Laatsch suggested that Dr. Snow formulate some ideas about goals, questions, and focus group membership to start the discussion on these issues at the meeting on December 6. Dr. Snow agreed to do so. She thanked the members for attending.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:35 AM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nancy E. Snow, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Philosophy
Director of Core Curriculum