

**Minutes**  
**Undergraduate Studies Committee Meeting, November 9, 2005, 2:00**

Members present: Craig Bertolet (chair), Chris Forhan, Julie Hinz, Marc Silverstein, Isabelle Thompson, Don Wehrs

Announcements

Craig Bertolet reported on the status of Spring 2006 courses. All upper-division classes have “made,” and most courses are full and have waiting lists. Among literature courses, those with the fewest students enrolled have fifteen students on the roster (the cut-off point is twelve). As of November 9, the department has 288 majors (272 enrolled, 16 non-enrolled)—a significant increase in the number of majors over the same time last year.

Minutes

The minutes of the October 26, 2005, meeting were approved.

Writing Test and Portfolio Assessment Proposals

The committee devoted the remainder of the meeting to a discussion of two separate proposals:

1. Miriam Clark’s proposal (first presented to the committee on October 26) that the department adopt a writing test as a requirement for the B.A. in English.
2. Craig Bertolet’s proposal that, as a means for assessment, the department require graduating students to submit a portfolio of their best work (i.e., their final project for their upper-division writing course, their exam for the course which satisfies their linguistics or rhetoric requirement, and their major paper for a 4000-level literature course).

In a wide-ranging discussion of the two proposals, the committee considered a number of issues, particularly:

- Whether the two proposals might be conflated, with the contents of the assessment portfolio also being used in some way to function as an exit exam.
- What sort of prompts might be used in a writing test—how they would need to be designed specifically to produce writing that the department could evaluate according to criteria for effective writing that are relevant to any student, regardless of that student’s concentration.
- Whether the writing test would be impromptu or whether students would be given an opportunity to prepare in advance (e.g., by being given notice of the writing prompt).

- Whether only a single piece of student writing, produced in a controlled situation under time constraints, would be an adequate sample for evaluating the student's writing ability.
- What sort of logistical difficulties (for instance, concerning when and where the exam would be given) the institution of a writing test might present.

Some committee members indicated that a required writing test would have value at least in that it would focus students' attention on writing. On an informal question of whether members were interested in the department considering an exit exam of some sort, three members voted yes, and two members voted no. Dr. Clark's proposal, as written, was defeated by a vote of four to one.

The committee decided to table Dr. Bertolet's proposal concerning an assessment portfolio until the next meeting, scheduled for November 16.

The meeting adjourned at 2:55

Reported by Chris Forhan