

Minutes of the Undergraduate Studies Committee Meeting 9/28/05 2:00

Present Craig Bertolet (Chair), Chris Forhan, Cedrick May, Marc Silverstein, Isabelle Thompson, Don Wehrs, Julies Hinz

I. Announcements--

The CUS announced the Haley Center Poetry Project on October 4 and 5 from 10-2, and reminded the committee that advising would begin Oct. 3 and registration Oct. 6.

Cedrick May, who participated on the panel Jim Ryan organized on the process of applying to graduate school, reported that the presentation was well-attended and the undergraduates responded enthusiastically.

Julie Hinz announced that the deadline for submissions to The Circle would be extended through Oct. 1.

II. Approval of Minutes for 14 September--

The committee unanimously approved the minutes after some minor editorial changes.

III. Courses for 2005-06--

The CUS announced that there didn't seem to be any problem with offering another section of the Shakespeare courses, another linguistics/rhetoric class and the Senior Seminar.

IV. Assessment Discussion--

The CUS reported that portfolios were submitted for 48 of the 81 seniors graduating between Fall 2004 and Summer 2005, a response rate of 59%, down from the previous year's response rate of 84%. Only 38, or 79% of these could be evaluated for Outcome 1 (Students earning a BA in English will be able to analyze and interpret a text). Of these portfolios 19 (50%) were deemed "superior" or "acceptable," and 19 (50%) were judged as "needing work." This represents a drop from last year where 78% were acceptable and 22% needed work. For Outcome 2 (Students earning a BA in English will be able to use language effectively), 29, or 60% of the portfolios, were deemed "superior" or acceptable and 19 (40%) were judged as "needing work. This represents a drop from last year when 83% were acceptable and 17% needed work. For Outcome 3 (Students earning a BA in English will be able to complete successfully a substantial critical or creative project), 33, or 69% of the portfolios met the USC's definition of a substantial critical project and 9 (19%) did not. Of those deemed substantial, 17 (52%), were deemed "superior" or "acceptable," 15 (45%) "needed work," and one portfolio (3%) could not be evaluated. This represents a drop from last year 82% of the critical papers were acceptable and 18% needed work. Three of the creative portfolios (6%) met the USC's definition of substantial and 3 (6%) did not. Of those deemed substantial, 100% were deemed "superior" or "acceptable." Overall, 36 portfolios (75%) met the definition of substantial, an increase over 62% for last year. The senior survey results show that 100% of the 11 students who responded "agree" or "strongly agree" that they successfully meet all three outcomes as well as Outcome 4 (Students earning a BA in English will be prepared for careers that use their skills in writing, research, and speaking). As of this meeting no

alums from the class of 2000-01 on have responded, so we cannot assess their response to this last outcome.

The committee began a discussion about what to do with these results. One area of concern is that 21% of the portfolios could not be evaluated for Outcome 1. The committee took note of the number of assignments that don't call for textual analysis and /or interpretation and the possible links between this and the problematic number of portfolios that "needed work" when they were asked to write an interpretive essay. Another issue concerns the fact that we were clearly evaluating multiple papers from some students. While the most desirable situation would be for the committee to have one portfolio from each graduating senior, the CUS commented upon the fact that not all faculty with graduating seniors submit a portfolio, so there are some seniors we never evaluate at all while others receive multiple evaluations. Another issue we discussed was the problematic nature of evaluating papers discussing films. In some cases, when an entire class was writing on the same film, so it was very clear that each student didn't have a copy of the film, the discussion became so generalized and non-specific that it becomes difficult to evaluate those essays. We discussed the fact that while the 4000-level courses generally require the same amount of writing, there are very different requirements in the 3000-level courses (one of which didn't seem to require any paper at all). Although students don't necessarily take lower-division courses before upper-division ones, we discussed whether recommending some fixed amount of writing in the 3000-level courses across the board might help improve the quality of the portfolios we examine from the 4000-level courses. We also brought up the possibility of instituting a minimum GPA for undergraduate majors. These issues and ideas are all part of a preliminary discussion which we'll take up in future meetings as we discuss how we might change our assessment procedures and how to use the results we obtained this year. Finally, the CUS broached the question of whether going back to a paper survey (rather than its current electronic form) might generate more of a response from seniors. The meeting ended at 2:55.

---submitted by Marc Silverstein