

Minutes of the Undergraduate Studies Committee Meeting 10/6/06

Present: Craig Bertolet (Chair), Chris Forhan, Cedrick May, Jim McKelly, Bonnie Shamp, Marc Silverstein, Isabelle Thompson

I. The CUS announced that registration for priority students, honors students and athletes began 10/5, and registration for seniors would begin 10/9. He reported that he had spoken with newly-declared majors and would report back to the USC on the number of majors after registration. He also informed us that he had turned in our assessment materials to Jim Ryan.

II. The USC approved the minutes of our last meeting, 9/22/06.

III. The CUS announced that we'll have 45 minutes of the faculty meeting on 10/11 to present our recommendations to the faculty based on assessment. We have decided to alert the faculty to the various problems we have seen over a number of years with the long papers our majors write. We want to recommend that the faculty be mindful that students in upper-division classes range from those who have yet to take World Literature to graduating seniors, and that this range of experience suggests that we need to develop pedagogical methods to address the issues of how to write longer papers—such methods deemed most appropriate by the faculty member for the goals and objectives of her/his specific course. We also discussed a variety of ways we might get a more statistically revealing number of portfolios submitted by our graduating seniors. We ultimately decided to add a line under the English major core section of the plan of study form to check off whether students had given the portfolios to their advisors. We'll also add the request for portfolios to our website, and hopefully these measures will increase the material available for assessment. This is an issue that the new CUS and the committee may want to revisit next year should these measures have no effect.

We also decided to recommend to the faculty that they allow students who self-identify as wishing to pursue graduate study in English, divinity, law or other related fields to contract with them to fulfill one of the essay assignments in a particular class by writing a 15-page research paper. We make this recommendation in response to students who have voiced concerns that they have either not written a research paper for the department or have not written a sufficiently lengthy paper to serve as a writing sample for their graduate school applications. Since students often don't realize they'll be asked for a writing sample prior to the application process, we are further recommending that the faculty address this issue on their syllabi and that advisors inform their advisees who declare an interest in graduate studies of the need to have a writing sample that is often specifically required to be a 15-page research paper.

IV. With the Dean of Liberal Arts' determination to have the college adopt a 2.5 GPA requirement in order for students to maintain their standing within the college, our department could conceivably lose 70 majors if this requirement were enacted immediately. It is unclear if the Dean would accept a probationary period in which majors could attempt to raise their GPA; if she would be amenable to grandfathering all current majors and only apply the requirement to new majors; or if she would ask

departments immediately to cut loose students who fell below the 2.5 GPA. There is a possibility that not only would we no longer be able to add classes each year, as we have been, but we might have to drop two classes from the yearly rotation. The CUS will keep us apprised as more details become available.

On this apocalyptic note, the meeting ended at 3:23.

--Submitted by Marc Silverstein