

Minutes of the Undergraduate Studies Committee  
Monday, October 4, 2004  
2:07 to 3:37 p.m.  
HC 9030D

Members present: Craig Bertolet (Chair), Chris Forhan, Justin Lowery, Cedrick May, Jim Ryan, Dennis Rygiel, Marc Silverstein, Isabelle Thompson, Don Wehrs

Business

1. Approval of Minutes for 13 September

The minutes of the September 13, 2004, meeting were not yet available.

2. Announcements

Craig Bertolet asked members to encourage participation in the Haley Center Poetry Project.

3. Courses for 2005-06

A sheet with proposed course offerings for 2005-06 was distributed, and some informational questions were raised and answered. There was agreement that two courses in Spring 2006 should be moved from the 2:00 TR slot to earlier times in order to reduce potential scheduling conflicts (four courses were listed for 2:00 on Tuesday and five on Thursday). As a result, ENGL 2140, Understanding Fiction, was tentatively moved to 9:30 TR, and ENGL 4710, Popular Genres, to 11:00 TR. It was also suggested that a third section of ENGL 4720, Topics in Literature, be offered in 2005-06 rather than a second section of ENGL 4710.

4. Assessment Discussion

- a. 2003-04 Outcomes
- b. 2004-05 Outcomes

There was a wide ranging discussion that at least initially tended to move between the 2003-04 outcomes and the 2004-05 outcomes. Some of the discussion focused on procedural matters, some on the outcomes themselves and what we are going to do with the results. Since four of the committee members are new to the committee this year, the discussion dealt at first with the history of the committee's assessment efforts. From there the focus moved to the online surveys of graduating seniors and alumni. Based in part on the relatively small number of responses, especially to the alumni survey, and in part on questions about the usefulness of the survey questions, it was suggested that both surveys be changed. The survey of graduating seniors would deal with outcomes 1-4 but not with questions related to careers. The alumni survey would have just two questions: "Did the major help prepare you for your career?" and "What is your career?" It was also suggested that the alumni survey be sent to graduates five years after graduation rather

than two years after. Finally, given the problems and issues that the committee is still dealing with, Craig Bertolet suggested that the committee limit itself to the outcomes we have been working with and not add new outcomes dealing with formal features and genre. However, an item dealing with formal features, genre, and historical contexts can be added to the checklist for outcome 1.

The discussion then turned to procedural matters. It was suggested that, for outcome 1, committee members assess only those papers with an interpretive intent; and that, for outcome 3, they assess only papers that the Chair has deemed to have met the definition of “substantial.” For outcomes 2 and 3, it was proposed that separate rubrics be developed for poetry. For outcome 3 it was also suggested that an operational definition of “substantial” be developed both for fiction and for poetry. On another procedural matter, since the Chair functions as tie-breaker in cases where committee members differ in their assessment of a paper, it was proposed that the Chair not participate in the initial round of assessment of student papers but serve only as the tie-breaker. A final suggestion had to do with preparing committee members before they begin their individual assessments of student papers in order to develop a shared understanding of how to carry out the assessment.

At this point the discussion shifted to larger questions about assessment, notably, what we are going to do with the results for outcome 1, particularly if a significant number of our students are not demonstrating that they are able to interpret a text. A question arose about whether the professorial faculty is interested in serious discussion of goals and standards for the major. A follow-up question was how an English major is distinguished from other majors that involve interpreting texts, e.g., women’s studies, history, psychology, sociology. An answer—bringing a special type of expertise to bear in the interpreting of texts—led back to consideration of formal features in outcome 1, which in turn led to a question about whether we are all operating with the same definition of formal features. This part of the discussion ended with a comment that progress depends on our learning how to make assessment work for us.

The committee then discussed the potential usefulness of gathering and reviewing syllabi and writing assignment sheets for all courses in the major.

Submitted by Dennis Rygiel