

11-24-08
UEPC

Discussion of the Proposed Core Curriculum Models:

A) A discussion regarding the overall process and issues not related to any one specific proposed model:

This initial discussion proved to be useful, and the UEPC spent significantly more time discussing it than was originally planned. Chair Zarnoth did not plan to include any discussion of the Learning Goals since they had already been approved by the UEPC and the Faculty Senate at the end of the previous academic year. He expressed regret that many in the faculty did not get involved in the discussion of learning goals last year before they were approved. However, Asbjorn Moseidjord pointed out that the Senate-led discussion the previous week was largely focused on serious concerns about the proposed Learning Goals. He stated that, judging by the faculty who spoke at the Senate meeting, there may not be sufficient community-wide support for the Learning Goals 9 through 12. Charlie Hamaker said that he didn't see a lot of opposition to the Learning Goals but rather doubts about whether it is appropriate to assign the "affective" learning goals to the academic sector of campus life. Mary True pointed out that the CCTF spent over a year reviewing the best practices in higher education, and the learning goals under discussion incorporate current best practices in the field. In addition, the value of social justice also stems from the Catholic teachings. She also said that she (speaking for herself rather than the CCTF) now wishes the CCTF had used the wording "awareness of the common good" rather than "commitment to the common good" in the learning goals. There was some difference of opinion within the UEPC about the value of making "commitment to the common good" a required part of the curriculum.

Sue Fallis raised the question about whether or how the degree of faculty buy-in would be assessed. The UEPC has no plans to measure this, but some in the Faculty Senate have been discussing the issue. Norm Bedford suggested that the survey be developed by individuals with expertise in survey design, and he also wondered whether many in the faculty have learned enough about the issues to be prepared to respond to a survey at this time. Asbjorn Moseidjord asked how the final selection of a model would be made. Ed Tywoniak reported that the Faculty Senate has not yet decided upon a process.

Mary True also reminded the UEPC that WASC has been critical of SMC in the past in the area of "inclusive excellence." WASC will likely be very critical of the College if "inclusive excellence" is rejected by the faculty as an element of a revised core curriculum. Accrediting agencies are becoming more and more interested in engaged learning, which is incorporated in the "habits of being" learning goals. Saint Mary's has also not updated its core curriculum since 1985, which means that we have largely been unable to keep the College up to date with modern pedagogy.

Patrick Downey argued that "advancement" or a "progressive" approach may not be the best or only option. A different model could emphasize a return to the classical idea of the liberal arts.

Frank Murray reported that the themes identified in the proposed models stem from three sources: the Mission of the College (first and foremost), ideas that appeared to have strong faculty support in earlier discussions, and best practices in higher education. He also said that the learning goals are woven throughout all three models. Changing the learning goals at this time would require that all three models be rejected and the faculty would need to decide whether to try again, starting the process again at the beginning with a new committee.

Charlie Hamaker: “You refer to these models as reflecting best practices. Best practices according to whom?” Frank Murray and Mary True cited several sources, including colleges (such as Santa Clara, Earlham College, Cabrini College and Augsburg College) and books and articles (by sources such as Derek Bok, Loren Pope, the American Association of Colleges and Universities, Carol Schneider, George Kuh and Project Deep). They mentioned that a longer list of resources and names of the various books and articles can be made available to anyone who is interested.

Mary True: The last four learning goals may push many of us beyond our zone of familiarity, but they may be necessary for the 21st century. Not everyone would need to include all of the learning goals in all of their classes. The students would need to have taken courses that touch upon each of the goals at some point in their four years at SMC. Frank Murray: None of the models or learning goals would require that anybody grade morality or measure goodness. Some faculty who spoke at the previous Senate meeting appeared to be confused about that point. Norm Bedford: Many faculty do not seem aware of the urgency of the matter, and if they were aware they would probably take it more seriously than they are now.

B) Comments regarding Model A:

Elena Escalera was concerned because it appeared that critical thinking would only be addressed in Collegiate Seminar, and the development of critical thinking in Seminar has not been assessed. Frank Murray pointed out that the materials related to Model A did not mean to imply that Seminar was the only place where critical thinking would be addressed, only that it is one of several places where students may develop critical thinking skills. Model A does recommend a somewhat reduced reading list in the first seminar to enhance the development of careful reading and critical thinking skills. Elena Escalera said that she would be more comfortable if a second way in which critical thinking skills are developed would also be explicitly listed in the description of the model. Mary True suggested that the critical essay in English Composition could perhaps serve as a second opportunity to develop these skills.

Charlie Hamaker said that he and the Seminar Board are, with some misgivings, receptive to the idea of moving the first seminar to the second semester. However, this would increase the responsibility placed upon English Composition 4 to intentionally address critical thinking and shared inquiry.

Patrick Downey directed everyone’s attention to the goal of integration. He was unsure when this could be done other than in the first seminar, when students see it done in the reading by Aristotle and, to a lesser extent, Plato. Mary True replied that one change that the CCTF has made to the curriculum in all three models is to build up the focus on integration during the fourth seminar.

Charlie Hamaker pointed out that the way that goals 6, 7, and 8 are included in model A is essentially a realignment of the area courses around goals rather than disciplines.

C) Comments regarding Model B:

Ed Tywoniak said he likes model B because it seems to maintain the best of what we are currently doing while also introducing the benefit of overall themes. Paul Zarnoth had the opinion that model B might be the most attractive to prospective students and the distinctive features of the model might help SMC stand out from the rest. Charlie Hamaker also expressed support for model B. He believes that it directly addresses the Habits of Being goals in a way that allows for a lot of flexibility and a lot of approaches.

Sue Fallis and Paul Zarnoth brought up the challenge that model B would create for Jan Term, which would need to assess which learning goals and themes are adequately addressed by each course – and this would need to be redone every year as new Jan Courses are introduced. Ed Tywoniak added that it could result in a hierarchy of Jan Term courses, some of which would be more desirable because they could address a greater number of goals.

D) Comments regarding Model C:

Christ Kell (who was not at the meeting but sent her input) supported model C because she believes it does the best job of recognizing the value inherent in the “affective” learning goals.

Elena Escalera did not like model C because she was confident that it would either require that several new faculty be hired to monitor and assess the portfolios or it would dramatically increase the workload of the existing faculty. She also feared that the inherent subjective aspect of the portfolios would result in many students trying to do as little as possible while arguing loudly that they should receive credit for one goal or another. She is also worried about the possible reasons behind why a number of colleges who have used portfolio systems have either abandoned them or are in the process of giving up on them.

Ed Tywoniak believes that a new level of staff could be hired to keep the workload manageable; however, he feels that the assessment of portfolio quality would be problematic. He sees this model as having the most exciting engagement of student learning, but he believes that the benefits would get watered down in practice. He believes it may be a great model for a school that is smaller than Saint Mary’s.

Asbjorn Moseidjord introduced a very different concern. He believes the model to be extraordinarily complicated while, at the same time, asking students to take the greatest degree of control over their education. Because so many students would be unable to understand the curriculum, the advisor may actually end up with an even greater degree of control over the student’s education, leaving the student with less control. Ed Tywoniak agreed that effective advising would be critical to the success of this model. Students without an effective advisor would likely be lost. Sue Fallis pointed out that many students do not take responsibility to meet with their advisors, so these students would be left confused as well. Paul Zarnoth suggested that frequent meetings with an advisor could be made a requirement as part of a .25 credit course

every year. However, the introduction of a large number of .25 credit courses could also result in an increased faculty workload.

Charlie Hamaker reported that the Seminar Board unanimously rejected this model, partly due to the changes it makes to Collegiate Seminar, changes which the board believes will lessen the benefit of seminar for our students.

E) Straw Poll

Each UEPC member (save for one abstention) ranked the four models (including the current model) from first choice (“1”) to fourth (“4”). Several members opted to label some models as “unacceptable” rather than ranking them.

The UEPC made these rankings with the understanding that this is NOT a final vote on the models. If Model A, B, or C is ultimately chosen for further attention, significant aspects of the model will require additional clarification and development. Any final version of a new model will require approval by the UEPC and Faculty Senate before it is implemented.

Therefore, this vote only represents the committee members’ views about which models appear to show the most promise.

One UEPC member believed it was too soon in the process for even a tentative vote and chose to abstain.

First Preference:	Model B	6 1 st choice rankings 2 2 nd choice rankings 1 3 rd choice ranking 1 “unacceptable” ranking
Second Preference:	Model A	1 1 st choice ranking 7 2 nd choice rankings 1 3 rd choice ranking 1 “unacceptable” ranking
Third Preference:	Current Model	2 1 st choice rankings 0 2 nd choice rankings 4 3 rd choice rankings 4 “unacceptable” rankings
Fourth Preference:	Model C	1 1 st choice ranking 0 2 nd choice rankings 0 3 rd choice rankings 1 4 th choice ranking 8 “unacceptable” rankings