

Minutes of the Faculty Forum on the Core Curriculum Models

December 3, 2008

Call to order/attendance:

The meeting was called to order by Vice Chairperson Tom Poundstone at 12:45 p.m. December 3, 2008. The following Senators were present: Chairperson Brother Charles Hilken, Vice Chair Tom Poundstone, Past Chair Carla Bossard, David Alvarez, Jerry Brunetti, Gerry Capriulo, Zach Flanagan and Ed Tywoniak.

Also present were: Dean Roy Allen, Associate Dean Shawny Anderson, Steve Bachofer, CTO Ed Biglin, David Bird, Sue Birkenseer, Jerry Bodily, Robert Bulman, Joel Burley, Vice Provost Jane Camarillo, Brother Kenneth Cardwell, Rebecca Carroll, Dean Tom Carter, Carmel Crane, Dave DeRose, Janice Doane, Provost Beth Dobkin, Andrea Eagleman, John Ely, Rebecca Engle, Peter Freund, Keith Garrison, Robert Gorsch, Rosemary Graham, Charles Hamaker, Jennifer Heung, Diane Hewlett, Brenda Hillman, Erin Hallissy, Christa Kell, Annalee Lamoreaux, Bill Lee, Helga Lenart-Cheng, Brother Donald Mansir, Catherine Marachi, Phylis Martinelli, Mary McCall, Tom McElligott, Molly Metherd, Steve Miller, Asbjorn Moseidjord, Dean Frank Murray, Shari Otto, Marie Pagliarini, Norris Palmer, Paola Sensi-Isolani, Joan Peterson, Torbie Phillips, Kathy Porter, Maria Ruiz, Nishi Safinya, Jim Sauerberg, Jeff Sigman, Carole Swain, Vice Provost Frances Sweeney, Mary True, Ted Tsukahara, Patty Wade, Roy Wensley, Ynez Wilson-Hirst, Dean Steve Woolpert, and Paul Zarnoth.

Introduction:

Vice Chair Poundstone thanked the members of the Core Curriculum Task Force (CCTF) for the work they have conducted over the past several years. Several faculty meetings have been held to discuss the Core Curriculum Models, and the Senate will continue to host future open conversations to allow as much feedback from faculty as possible.

Summary from CCTF:

Brother Donald spoke as a member of the CCTF. He encouraged faculty to discuss candidly the models put forth by the CCTF and to raise questions. The members of the Task Force were present to listen to the faculty.

Brother Donald summarized the work to date of the CCTF. In 2006 the Senate passed a resolution to create the CCTF. It was charged to undertake the thorough review of the general education aspects of the curriculum and to do so in the context to maintain SMC values while taking into account best practices across the nation. The first year the task force generated campus conversations about the general education at the college from faculty, staff, students, and alumni, reviewed the research and literature on general education, visited like colleges across the country and developed drafts of several models of learning goals derived from the conversations. The CCTF met at least twice monthly. In March 2007 a status report was generated and distributed to the undergraduate chairs and program directors. The report included a summary of the work to date and three models of learning goals statements. The next step was to propose a set of principles or axioms which would anchor the core curriculum as well as a definition of the core curriculum itself. From this work the CCTF developed a reconceptualization of core curriculum, coming to the conclusion to think of the core less in terms of course requirements and more in terms of nurturing the common undergraduate educational experience guided by the mission of the college and supported by all members of the campus community. This is in line with what is happening across the nation. The core

should include more than just general education courses. The CCTF conceived the core as courses common to all students, courses individually chosen to meet learning goals and experiences and competencies that may be met both within and outside the courses. In May the Senate approved the continuance of the work of the task force as well as its reconceptualization of the core, which would form the basis of its continued work.

In the second year, the Senate asked the CCTF to review the current general education requirements and to assess them in light of the task forces reconceptualization of the core. The CCTF was asked to identify what is working well and what might be revised based on the study of best practices across the country, visits to institutions, meetings with faculty, students and staff, public meetings and through feedback on the web page. The result was a proposal with twelve learning outcomes. The CCTF recommended the learning outcomes based core to replace core-based general education. The proposal was shared across the campus and presented to the Senate May 2008. The Senate voted to approve the direction of the CCTF and encouraged the CCTF to continue with the tasks for the third year.

In preparation for this year, the CCTF arranged for a workshop to be conducted by colleagues from Cabrini College, who were selected because they are a college similar to ours and they are three years ahead of SMC in this process. The CCTF developed models for the implementation of the approved learning outcomes. In developing the models several common threads surfaced. The CCTF distributed a green paper describing the common assumptions to the campus community and held an open meeting in September 2008. The CCTF has introduced the three models to the campus community one at a time, hosting two meetings for each model. The December 3rd forum is the second organized by the Senate in order to provide additional opportunities for the faculty to share their concerns and for members of the CCTF to hear from the faculty. The formulation of the learning outcomes has been based on best practices and serious research into the core curriculum at a number of schools considered similar to SMC: Amherst College, Hamilton College, Santa Clara University, Cabrini College, Holy Cross College, Bates College, Kenyon College, University of San Francisco, Notre Dame University, Harvard University, Wesleyan College, Valparaiso College, St. Anselm's College, Providence College, among others. Several common components have been found within the colleges core curricula, inter-disciplinarity and multi-disciplinarity, a thematic approach to general education requirements, writing across the curriculum, connection to the larger community, and a knowledge of the world from multiple perspectives as an approach to inclusive community and cultural diversity, non-core based and outside the major experiences, and civic engagement. The models distributed are possible strategies for the implementation of the learning outcomes approved by the Senate in May 2008 and endorsed by the Board of Trustees. As required by the Senate, the CCTF has completed its assessment of the current general education requirements and the document recently distributed as the white paper. There is much to be praised in what SMC has been doing, and it was the intention of the CCTF to build on the strengths of the curricular programs. Many meetings have been held with departments and programs, chat rooms with the campus-wide community and with students, meetings with the undergraduate chairs and program directors, the brothers' community, staff, students and faculty. The CCTF has heard about the importance of shared inquiry, the value of seminar and travel abroad experiences, opportunities to promote social justice, and promotion of the three traditions of the college.

A status report will be distributed describing the response of the task force to each of the tasks mandated. In January the task force will schedule discussions on readings relevant to the core curriculum and best practices. Speakers will be brought to campus to share their experiences

developing the core curriculum at their campuses. It is incumbent on the CCTF to describe how aligned SMC is with best practices and directions across the country. As a result of the many discussions, the CCTF will listen to the community and will meet to develop two models to be presented in the spring. Many occasions will be provided for input on the two models prior to making its final recommendation to the Senate in late spring.

Brother Donald thanked the faculty for its participation, and encouraged feedback. He explained that several members of the CCTF were present to listen to the faculty.

Questions, comments, and discussion:

Vice Chair Poundstone opened the floor for discussion. He posed the question, “what do you like or what don’t you like in the core?”

Past Chair Bossard - She likes the seminar as proposed in Model C, but she doesn’t care for any other aspects of Model C.

Shawny Anderson - The structure being used for the discussion is not the best format for vetting the issues; not enough interaction, dialogue, or deliberation. She suggested including a different format to address the issues in the future.

Rosemary Graham – She found the written department responses to the models very helpful. She is resistant to the idea that a grading of a student’s performance in a class would not be evidence enough, but rather be placed into a portfolio to be reevaluated by a committee. Model C would require too much supervision.

Paolo Sensi-Isolani - Many faculty have issues with the learning goals. The departmental feedback indicates that many departments do not agree with the learning goals. This issue must be addressed.

Vice Chair Poundstone - It is not out of the question that the learning goals be revised. The original resolution for the CCTF calls for an entire year of discussion on the learning goals.

Chair Brother Charles - Faculty now have questions about the learning goals because faculty are worried about the consequences of the learning goals being implemented.

Jennifer Heung – Concerned with issues of diversity, should be very clear what is meant by diversity, and there is no mention of gender.

Kathy Porter – What she likes about the models is that math should be taken within the first two years. She is concerned whether students will be able to distinguish between quantitative goals and mathematic goals.

Catherine Marachi - Is it possible to keep the current curriculum with a few changes? Br. Donald answered that a move from a course-based core to an outcomes-based core has been approved, but the final decision will be made by the Academic Senate.

Chair Brother Charles responded that the CCTF has had buy-in all along; the question remaining is the implementation.

Kathy Porter – At prior departmental meetings, they were told that there would be a choice to choose none of the models, and she is of the opinion that there has not been buy-in.

Robert Bulman – The CCTF is moving in the direction of asking faculty to think of their courses in terms of learning outcomes. Each model emphasizes the degree to which it is a learning outcome focus or a course based focus, each model addresses this differently. The CCTF wants to have a model that is driven by learning outcomes.

Senator Tywoniak – It is important to reflect on the curriculum, the faculty own the curriculum. He agreed with Shawny Anderson that it is critical to engage in different kinds of dialogues. There are options available: alter any of the three models, accept any of the three models, modify the current curriculum, or opt to not change the current core. Regardless of the outcome, a faculty body has thoroughly researched and evaluated the core per the WASC recommendation.

Shawny Anderson – The CCTF has well represented the faculty thus far. We now move into the realm of inclusion. Some are not completely happy. She said that there is an organization, Future Search.net, that carries out massive deliberation processes for large institutions. This would require a large commitment.

Senator Capriulo – Learning goals are skills and methodologies and not based on the reason the university exists, which is to seek truth and disseminate it. That way to do that is through disciplines. The question is, what disciplines matter, and in what combination.

Molly Metherd – Is this a secondary model of assessment, placed side-by-side to the academic disciplines? Or does this supplant academic disciplines?

Provost Dobkin - The core curriculum is about the common, shared student experience. It does not supplant disciplines, it does not supplant majors, it does not eliminate disciplines. It is about what we as a community feel to be a common student experience at the undergraduate level at SMC. It does not threaten or challenge the disciplines, but it does ask the disciplines to think how they might contribute.

Robert Bulman – The learning outcomes were developed over a two-year period. The primary driving force was the Mission Statement; all of the goals are derived from the Mission Statement.

Catherine Marachi - There is not a single language class included in the models. Robert Bulman responded that the foreign language requirement remains the same as it is under the existing model for all three models.

David Bird – He likes all of the learning goals as animating principles. He is concerned that the students will experience four years of a complicated check list of items to be satisfied.

Joel Burley - some of the changes are large enough to consider resources. Several of the models require a great deal of advising, which did not work for the cohort program. At what point do we consider the additional resources required for the models?

Jim Sauerberg – The important thing is for faculty to work together to fix what is not working throughout the process. Once the model is implemented, there will be ongoing assessment to monitor the outcome, which will be revised or amended as needed.

Joan Peterson – She likes Seminar, suggested that more be done with Seminar, perhaps a year-long course, a course to include more context, or allow interdisciplinary discourse.

Bill Lee – the current curriculum is easy to explain to perspective students. He worries that the new models could be too complicated.

Senator Flanagan – Likes the developmental element of the models and the idea of a reflective or integrative experience. He likes the goals, but he doesn't see any space in the models to fulfill the goals. He said any of the problems pointed out with the current core could be solved by supplementing the current core. He likes the thematic growth experience contained in Model B, but there is no way to fit the four courses in with the current core.

Kathy Porter – Several of the models are very time intensive for faculty. We would have to rethink how the role of faculty would change.

Adjournment:

Vice Chair Poundstone announced that the Senate will discuss the models at the meeting December 4, 2008, and will continue open discussions through the spring.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:00 p.m.

Submitted by:
Cathe Michalosky
Faculty Governance Coordinator