

## **GEAC RETREAT (AUGUST 2007)**

### **COMMITTEE MEMBERS SUMMARY OF FACULTY REACTIONS**

#### **1 - EVALUATION OF FACULTY RESPONSE TO FIRST-YEAR SEMINARS (PREPARED BY JENNIFER KOUSED)**

##### Component A: First Semester Seminar

50 either fully support or support with reservation (12; 38)

There is overwhelming support for the idea of a first-year seminar, modeled like forum but for credit.

Support for folding English 101 and 102 into this seminar is divided. A few liked the idea, more hated it, and others expressed reservations. Faculty expressed support for the idea of writing across the curriculum, but they were divided about the role and fate of English 101 and 102 in such a program. Some believe that separate writing courses are necessary; some want them more integrated; some worry about adjuncts; all reject any proposal that would denigrate or marginalize writing.

Support for mentors was mixed, leaning more toward the negative than the positive. Reservations about this program include worry about training for the mentors, and faculty control over their mentors.

Support for the advising model was mixed. A few loved it. However, there was concern that those who do know what they want to major in would miss out forming bonds with their department. Also, because of the complexity of education certification, advising for Education students would have to remain in Education.

No support for 5 meeting times per week.

##### Component B: Second Semester Seminar

43 either fully support or support with reservation (10; 33)

Even though the numbers here are not radically different than the numbers above, my sense from reading the comments is that the reservations are graver. Reservations include overly complex, too scripted, limited freedom, large class size, difficulty of coordination and implementation.

Same comments (both positive and negative) about student mentors appear here as above. Same comments about the writing component (both positive and negative) appear here as above.

#### **2- CONCERNS ABOUT FOUNDATIONS - COMPONENT II C (PREPARED BY KENNON RICE)**

- Too much of a tax on the sciences to offer 2 courses instead of one.
- The sciences are unpopular so if we make students take two we may drive away some potential Albright students.

- This model will undermine the need for some currently offered courses – especially in the humanities.
- The divisions are too broad. Students should have to take a literature and a history course.
- It assumes a unity of divisions that does not exist and thus does not capture breadth well enough.
- Wants more writing integrated
- Concerned with loss of courses to the humanities (X2)
- Concerned about breadth in one's home division since students are essentially excused from everything in their home division outside their own concentration
- Does not like the idea of separate sections for concentrators and non-concentrators

### **3- CONCERNS ABOUT THEMATIC CLUSTERS - COMPONENT II D (PREPARED BY KENNON RICE)**

- Doubles the number of required science courses may create a need for more science faculty (X4)
- Some disciplines may not be able to contribute easily leaving some out and potentially putting undue burden on others (X3)
- Possible reduce to include only 2 divisions (X2)
- Clusters that are too “loose,” taking them across three semesters or choosing from too long a list of course options within a cluster may result in a “laundry list” not so different from what we have now (X4).
- Finding time for course development is a concern
- Desire to see more examples – how would clusters be determined (X2)- can they be designed in such a way as to be practical to teach and for students to register for (X3).
- Should be noted on the student transcript
- Must have a mechanism to insure collaboration
- Creating enough choice for students could be difficult (X3)
- Must include the arts (not sure if this is based on a misunderstanding of the presentation, or if they really want a mandatory arts course here). (X4)
- Loss of courses that do not fit into a cluster? Loss of faculty creativity by having to fit courses into clusters and therefore loss of flexibility (X3)
- Can students change clusters without losing courses?
- Can a student design their own cluster (X2)?
- Could a thematic capstone replace the senior capstone?
- Can students double count to get a program and a cluster? Does it effectively replace programs?
- Could this be replaced by 2 IDS courses (perhaps linked?) (X3) IDS makes students see links more explicitly
- Difficult to explain to students
- Many expressed concerns about how students would be able to schedule to get the courses they need.

**Notes:** I found comments to be generally positive among those with reservations. Most seemed to be concerned about things that can be resolved through the specification of detail rather than questioning the wisdom of the clusters in general. A great deal of the concern was about clusters being so “tight” that students could not fit the required courses in their schedules, or so “loose”

that they fail to accomplish their intended goals. Similarly, there was significant concern about how clusters would be formed and if we could create enough of them to meet student demand and interest while not overly limiting faculty flexibility.

Many of those who “Did not support” had the least to say to explain their positions. Very few of the “Did not support” group had substantive criticism to go along with their rejection. Make of that what you will.

There was also some very enthusiastic support to offset the negativity.

#### **4- SECTION III: DIVISIONAL CLUSTERS – FACULTY RETREAT COMMENT SUMMARY (PREPARED BY STEVE MECH)**

The majority of the comments were negative. Faculty seemed to believe that all (or a majority) of the methodological courses would have to be either created or heavily modified to fit this model which would place an extreme burden on the faculty. They questioned if we had the capacity to teach these courses (in terms of faculty time) as well as the pressure on the students to take this number of courses. As the faculty understood the proposal, these courses would be taken in the sophomore and junior years leaving the freshman alpha students particularly at a loss. Along similar lines, some faculty commented on the possible negative impact of this model on combined concentrators. A great many comments questioned the need and/or desirability of taking so many methods courses. Some commented that it would be better to integrate the methods in a simplified manner into the survey course while others discussed the difficulty of getting majors, let alone non-majors, to successfully complete a methods course. Finally, there was one comment suggesting that this model would encourage students to select more-or-less random courses (although I am not sure what the basis for this idea is).

#### **5- SECTION IV F AND F1: OTHER REQUIREMENTS (PREPARED BY AL CACICEDO)**

##### **IV F**

Concern that requirements seem tacked on (8X)

Language a major concern, mostly from perspective that a full year should be required (7X)

Ethical values and cross-cultural understanding should be merged (4X)

Support for placement assessment, although with proviso that such instruments are already available and don't need to be reinvented (5X)

Not clear (6X)

Support because like what we require now (3X)

Caveats about much more careful advising (2X)

The reservations most often expressed among the supporters involve the notion that the requirements ought to be more central, not simply tacked on. That is especially the case in

relation to language, although at least one statement included math as something that should be central.

#### **IV F1**

Most of the comments expressed sense of lack of clarity in one way or another—even when the writer supported with reservations (11X)

Support for the possibility of double dipping (3X)

Do not support (4X); support but am confused (3X)

#### **6- SECTION IV F2 & F3: OTHER REQUIREMENTS ALTERNATIVE 2 AND ALTERNATIVE 3 (PREPARED BY DAN FALABELLA)**

- Alternative 2 not supported
- Alternative 3 supported somewhat but with reservations
- Our presentation of these alternatives was not clear. Faculty were confused by what we were trying to do here. Many felt that this section was a throw-in and we didn't think it out well enough in our model.
- Goals of the section were supported.
- Some sort of competency/placement testing could be of value in the foreign languages.
- Foreign language should be an entire year, regardless of where students place.
- Computer skills competency important.
- Advising would need to be monitored more closely.
- What about experiential learning?
- Support for measuring competency rather than just requiring a number of courses.
- These other requirements should be included in the clusters.
- Similar to what we have in place already.

#### **7- COMPONENT V G: SENIOR CAPSTONE (PREPARED BY FOUAD KALOUICHE)**

A large number of the faculty think that there should not be a GE senior capstone (25 rejected the model outright while only 9 supported it), but within the 20 responses that supported the model with reservations there is a strong support for either integrating the GE senior seminar objectives into existing Concentration Senior Seminars, or replacing it with a Junior Capstone where the “Senior Experience” as described would be transferred. So there is support for the experiential learning part of what we proposed, but not for a separate course as such.

The last year should really be about the concentration, according to many, but the reflection on GE (and/or other assignments with essential outcomes) could be a required as an assignment (such as a paper) integrated into all senior seminars across disciplines.

There is enough support, however, to require a GE course with content in the senior year, and that course could fulfill the reflective goals as well as other goals, but it cannot be designed as proposed or as tasking as a senior seminar.

## **8- COMPONENT VI: END PRODUCT (PREPARED BY FOUAD KALOUCHE)**

This is an odd category as 34 faculty members did not respond to this question, while only three approved the end product as is, and 4 rejected it as is, with 20 providing the following comments:

- The most important change is the freshman seminar year, with the interdisciplinary focus, and that should be implemented as soon as possible. Integrating general studies courses at the end of the student career is also a positive addition. But in between, we should keep the current distribution requirements instead of clusters.
- The for-credit freshman seminars and the interdisciplinary focus are positive.
- One faculty explicitly supported, besides the freshman seminar and the experiential learning as a GE Capstone, the divisional clusters!!!
- Maintain rigor and do not dilute the existing breadth of GE curriculum.
- Keep choices for students and for faculty.

Overall, from the limited feedback, the freshman seminar is popular, including the interdisciplinary component. We have not as a committee been as convincing with the clusters (foundations and thematic). And the experiential learning is not rejected along with the senior seminar idea; it could be integrated into a junior year requirement.