

# Minutes of the LPWG

April 30, 2008 – 3 p.m.

McNeill 109

In attendance: Jack Gittinger, Steve Griffith, Nick Proctor, Amy Doling, Cyd Dyer, Steve Shafer, Jennifer Nostrala, Lydia Sinapova, John Bolen, Murphy Waggoner, Rick Spellerberg, John Pauley, Jared Kemper (student representative)

Steve Griffith called the meeting together and said that this would be Jack Gittinger's first meeting and the group welcomed representation from the Education Dept. Also representing the students is Jared Kemper. The dean thought that the group might get a couple more students. Jared said that as far as the summer goes, it may only be him as he is on campus this summer. However he thought that next fall there will be more students joining the process. The dean said that he had met with student Kyle Liske and that Kyle is going to form an academic affairs committee with student government. Jared confirmed that the student government already had done this. In addition, there will be communications for students i.e. monthly articles in the Simpsonian among other approaches.

The dean explained that depending on the outcome of this meeting we may break into small sections to work on various areas or ideas. We can start anywhere you wish.

Lydia Sinapova questioned if global awareness western culture also include US culture.

The dean said that he thinks where we're headed is formation of small groups to define and identify criteria to describe what that looks like. He asked if there were other questions.

Cyd Dyer said that she had several. She appreciated the way the report was put together and it helped her line things up, but she had a concern that she did not see information literacy.

The dean asked what she meant by information literacy. He asked for more clarification.

She said she would be happy to bring that forward. In whatever discipline a student should be able to find correct resources, cite correct resources, use good resources. Perhaps this is not a class of itself, but a part of LAS or some other area.

Amy Doling completely agreed that this would be an excellent skill to teach. It needs to be more than one session in LAS. Students have been taught to Google in high school but know little about research beyond that.

Jim Thorius asked if information literacy was something that could be part of writing across the curriculum.

Jared Kemper noted that he felt he was learning these skills in his corporate communication courses.

John Pauley didn't think it should be part of every course. Maybe the professor doesn't want the student to cite any other source, but rather work and think from the primary source. This could definitely be true for some of the Philosophy courses.

Steve Griffith said that many general education courses would contain components of information literacy. This also raises the question of how many courses should contain the information literacy component.

Cyd responded that she thinks of the LAS class and an intermediate class or two, but by the time you reach your senior capstone you should be well versed with information literacy. A student should be able to do the research on her/his own then.

Steve Griffith said, "So you're suggesting three? We could say a 100, 200 and 300 level course requirement."

Jared Kemper said, "A lot of courses wouldn't even have to be changed, right? Because many of my courses already have these."

Steve Griffith said that depending on how the criteria are crafted there may be many courses that will fall into the requirements.

Steve then said that he was going to put a new subject on the table. Many good institutions require a health and fitness course. Any thoughts?

Cyd said that students might take some sort of activity class or stress reducing class.

Yes, nutrition – exercise are types of courses. Some institutions are requiring this now of their students.

Should our students have knowledge of health and disease vs. active lifestyle questioned Amy Doling.

Lydia wondered about adding this component to LAS.

Nick Proctor felt like LAS was being asked to cover more than is realistically possible.

Jared Kemper noted that intramurals were very popular and covered the active part.

John Bolen could just see an avalanche of petitions to petition out of a required course like this.

John Pauley recalled that he had to be able to swim the length of the pool before graduating.

Murphy's picture of this is that there are a large number of students who are physically active because of varsity sports and intramurals.

Steve Griffith said that there are a large number of students who are physically active, but even those students may not know about health issues.

Steve Shafer would be hesitant to cover a list that is so all inclusive.

Amy Doling said that health issues can get out of control.

John Pauley said a class that requires fitness seems over the line.

Cyd asked if this is something that student development could implement as a part of their program, something we could accomplish outside of the course, per se.

Jim Thorius responded that there are a lot of things that go on at SC regarding health issues but there's no accounting about who is participating. Whether it's meningitis or obesity, whatever you could learn in 50 minutes would it be something that should be a part of the core curriculum.

Jared Kemper wondered if from a student's perspective maybe it could be fused with a US culture course that could address health issues of our country's past and current issues.

Amy Doling thinks it would be a hard sell.

Steve Griffith said he's not hearing any consensus for a health requirement or a fitness requirement at this point. If it's something we want to add in later, we can revisit.

Murphy Waggoner wanted to reiterate some concerns of hers as she will be absent for the summer meetings. The concern is the reasoning for a Western Traditions course as a requirement. She said that the argument that states that you can't understand other cultures until you understand your own is a pedagogical argument. What is the necessity of having a western traditions course? She reread the strategic plan and she doesn't see it there. Also, the HERI survey ranks it low.

Nick Proctor said that the dominant part of the world is the western part. There are other important parts and he thinks that students should learn about the dominant part and they should learn about one of the other parts.

Lydia said students would benefit from a comparative course of the two cultures.

Nick said that students entering college have a select understanding of the culture they live in. They understand discrete aspects of western culture already. They understand consumerism, they understand individualism, they don't understand rule of law, they don't understand democracy, and they don't understand critical thinking. They have a selective understanding of the culture they live in which is sort of just where they are in their lives. So Nick thinks that part

of the mission of Simpson College should be to explore the fullness of the culture the student inhabits and educate them about this. He also said that he thinks comparing cultures would work best if a distinct aspect or two were chosen to compare i.e. how the ideas of rights, freedoms, and obligations works in the west and here's how the same work in the Confucian culture. He thought that a longitudinal comparison of the western culture vs. the eastern culture could overburden a course.

Jared Kemper thought that he could tell the difference when he took a class that was focused on eastern cultures. He thought it seemed as if unnecessary classes would be formed.

Steve Griffith said that he thought we were headed toward forming courses that would include the embedded skills rather than focusing the course on the criteria itself.

Steve Shafer said that it occurs to him that we're looking at bullet points on a piece of paper and everyone has a different conception about what is under those individual bullet points. Do we need to form sub-committees to flesh out the sub points of each of the bullet points?

The dean said he thinks that is where we are headed.

Nick said that one of the transitions from the short list to the longer list that he wonders about is what does an ethics, values, and moral reasoning component look like in an LAS class?

Steve Griffith said he thought that across the curriculum should start early and he put the bullet points on the list.

Amy Doling is concerned about the implications of tagging on the end of a course the requirements/criteria the course meets which may continue the checkbox approach and dilutes the course. She thinks we need to be careful in identifying the courses.

Nick said that not only is this an instructor issue but it is also an instructional issue.

John Pauley said that moral reasoning is embedded in many of the courses already.

Nick said that this is true for Hum 101 but for a course like Physics 101 it becomes more of a challenge. Some courses are more suited to ethics and moral reasoning.

John Pauley said that he thought we were going toward a more autonomous first year course.

Murphy then interjected, "You mean if I choose to teach my passion for first year which is discrete mathematics and it did not include this criteria that I could not teach it?"

Dean Griffith said yes, if it did not meet criteria established for LAS courses, it would not be taught for LAS. It could be taught otherwise, just not selected as an LAS course. What do we want LAS to do – what is the common experience?

Nick said in terms of Murphy's question that he wants to put forward that this is a major issue that needs to be hammered out.

Murphy said that she thinks that we need to be careful that a course has 3 or fewer designations about criteria met at any time. We have to be careful not to let a course be everything.

Jim Thorius said that we have to be sensitive to student's planning. The courses need to be stable, i.e. if Murphy teaches calculus and her course meets the writing component, but another professor teaches the same course and that calculus course does not meet the writing component.

Cyd questioned the language of passion based course – what does that mean?

Steve Griffith said it was used as shorthand to identify it as a traditional course in the curriculum and that an instructor would fashion a course at the 100 level, possibly LAS, to teach something the instructor was very interested in. There was not 100% agreement to have passion based courses but rather this was an idea proposed and is something we would have to flesh out.

Jim Thorius asked what do we mean by writing I?

Cyd said we were embedding it in LAS.

Jim questioned but what does writing I and quantitative reasoning I mean?

Murphy said that we have not established the details yet.

Jim Thorius noted that we've got bullets – we better define the bullets.

Steve Griffith said that when an institution has a xyz across the curriculum it means that you have xyz across the curriculum – it doesn't make any difference what scores you come in with – that's not part of the xyz across the curriculum. Persons need to take focused writing courses while here regardless of what they come in with.

Nick said just to clarify – something that would be a writing I course would not be like Eng 101 now, right?

Steve Griffith said yes, that would be correct. He also said that maybe if he took away the #'s and just said that you would have 3 W's while here it would be more understandable.

Jim Thorius asked if there is any concern about what the outcome is for students concerning the competencies.

John Pauley said that this is where this all started.

Jim Thorius asked if there was some level of competency or level of ability that come into play. He asked if we're trying to get everybody on the same playing field when they graduate from Simpson.

John Pauley said that when we break into smaller groups we will hash out what is required in each criterion. Right now we are determining the overall goals i.e. every student graduates with good critical thinking skills. All of us have an idea what a good critical thinker is. If you look at the better schools, you find that they have the experience at the college – they don't bring in a competency.

Jim said that when you look at the competencies it's good to look at what a student comes in with and not just what they do at Simpson. He said that his son went to Gustavus, a good school, and he went in with 4 years of German. He never touched language while he was at Gustavus. It's not the same for some of the competencies.

Jared Kemper said that many high school students put the extra effort in taking college classes or extra language to come into college ahead of the game. He noted that he had done this to go to a higher level and he feels that if this prep work is not recognized the student is punished for their previous efforts. He said he could have taken art and P.E. his senior year.

Amy Doling said it's not about being ahead of the game – it's about thinking at a higher level. It's not about checking the box.

Jennifer Nostrala has noted that she has had students who have taken AP courses but arrive at college and don't know how to write at this level.

Amy Doling said that she'd like us to hash out what students could come in and comp out of to make sure we're all in agreement. Also we would need to consider these points with the transfer credits.

Cyd said she was not sure what a minimum competency in language does for the student.

Steve Griffith said that we should focus on the language issue at another time – every time we visit this, we get stuck. There is the sense of minimum competency – you give them a test and if they pass they don't need to take a language class.

Cyd is concerned that there will be much more testing.

Murphy noted that some students will choose not to test and just take a language.

Steve Shafer said that language in college offers that other view of culture.

Amy Doling said we're also not a trade school so not everything needs to be 100% practical for every student. Being a well educated person isn't necessarily related to what you're going to do in your everyday life.

John Pauley said he would be concerned about the foreign language piece as related to admissions and recruiting.

Steve Griffith asked how do we argue value vs. practicality of requiring foreign language.

Nick said that in terms of why we value it is that we get another dimension of a culture. How is that different than the global awareness that we currently have? I would argue that the last bullet be struck and that certain foreign language classes should be able to fulfill global awareness.

John Pauley argued that an educated person is not put off by a language that is foreign to them and that they need a significant amount of being in a context of hearing people speak in a different language and then they need to synthesize that with understanding of the culture. It would be a language/culture type of course.

Nick said if you're going to argue that then aren't you saying a student would have to do it here.

John said yes. A class like this would have serious value.

John Bolen said we should maybe get away from the language competency because you really don't achieve competency.

Jared Kemper said he thought if students were tested for language competency they should also be tested for writing skills competency. Why would there be any difference? He does agree that everyone should be up to Simpson standards.

Steve Shafer said that he's not sure that it's "Simpson standards" that we seek, but rather practice and growth as far as writing is concerned – to grow past where you're at. You can always grow as you write and writing is something you do your whole life long in whatever endeavor you are in.

Jack Gittinger agreed with Steve that writing was a very important skill. He recalled that he spoke German in high school, but he can't now. At some point he no longer had connection to the language. But writing is something you'll never walk away from. He said that he didn't mean to sound blasphemous but when he looked at the list writing stood out to him as very important, but language has no inherent benefit unless you connect it to something such as culture or looking at the world through other's eyes.

Lydia said, "So students could opt out of Span 101, but they will not be able to opt out of a course that would study Chinese culture through language?"

John Bolen said he's not sure about that but he would like to see it focused more on language through culture. "And to be perfectly honest", he said, "I think it important for us to be educating students in this culture of ours today to have an experience where they know what it's like to be listening to something that they don't understand at all". (general laughter)

Steve Griffith drew everyone back into the group asking what do we want to do. He reviewed the several ideas.

Amy wondered if we should keep the current requirements or change this to a lower level. Or do people wish to go a ½ level up?

The meeting was adjourned to bring back up the issues of foreign language competencies again in the future. The next meeting will be Wednesday May 14, 2008 at 3 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Shelly Priebe