

EPAG Minutes

April 7, 2011

11:30 to 1:00

Campus Center 207

Kendrick Brown, Janet Folina, Gerbrand Hoogvliet, Taren Kingser, Ann Minnick, Kathy Murray, Jayne Niemi, Sonita Sarker, Patrick Schmidt, Chad Topaz, Tom Varberg, Harry Waters Jr.

1. The minutes from the March 31st meeting were approved.
2. Prior to the approval of the minutes, there was discussion about the upcoming faculty meeting, its agenda, and the likelihood of finishing all business during that meeting.
3. We should expect to work on the response letter to the proposers of the 3-1-1 program with the Humphrey Institute, the response letter to the cognitive science concentration proposers, and the Philosophy Department's external review response. Pete Ferderer is presenting the Writing report on Friday, and on Friday, April 15th the Serie Center is hosting a breakfast session with a noted Writing professional. We also are anticipating the Library review report and response, and have the Critical Theory concentration that is in progress. Tom will inform the Critical Theory folks that they need to do the program request and collect letters of support before we will consider the proposal fully. We have 4 more meetings and a plethora of things to fill them.
4. The Writing report: We launched into a discussion of reactions to the Writing report. Some of the reactions:
 - As a scorer/reader – it was eye-opening!
 - Acknowledge that this is complicated to measure. There are complicated stages in student writing and other experiences.
 - This is a cross-sectional, not longitudinal study, and it compares W to non-W. We haven't tested for value-added.
 - The report is credible. The problems seem to be structural, but the recommendations aren't all structural.
 - Would a writing director from the faculty really work?
 - Looking forward to Erik Larson's report on the FYC experience and writing.
 - Do we have the resources to put on an effective writing program?
 - What about the students who need the *most* help?
 - Is one “composition” course really effective? Some might want to require both a general composition course and a course in the discipline.
 - Writing is learned by practice sustained over a number of years.
 - Perhaps our expectation of the Writing requirement is too high.
 - Faculty are “workshopped” to death.
 - The writing pendulum seems to be swinging back to requiring a composition course. Thirty two sections of courses would be needed to accommodate this.

- There is an acknowledged disconnect between what faculty expect and what the MAX Center is delivering.
- Is the crux of issue this: As faculty, what do you want to accomplish with the ONE course that delivers writing instruction, and how does that work here at Mac.
- The variance in writing work in the FYC program was acknowledged.
- Writing is a process not an outcome. There's a huge variance in writing assignments in W courses too. We learned a lot. Assessment is an iterative process.
- Back to the resource issue. The report was presented to the Board of Trustees. Their response was positive to the work done thus far and they were very supportive of whatever seems necessary to "fix it".
- It's perceived by students that there is not much of a distinction between the W and non-W courses. There is an arbitrary nature of when a course is a W or not. A student's realization that he or she is not a good writer might come later. It's not surprising that students feel confident about their writing. A good grade on a paper may not reflect "good writing".
- What about detaching the W requirement from course grade? There are examples such as portfolios. How does a portfolio system impact instruction?
- Flagging students in the FYC is a good idea.
- Capping the enrollment in W courses brings up more complex issues. (see Tom's handout, for example)
- What is the motivation for a faculty member to offer a W course? Is more instruction a disincentive to participation by the faculty? The mix of W and non-W students in a W course can be difficult.
- Are contents and mechanics being separated? They should be integrated. What is "writing"? There are acknowledged disciplinary differences. The W doesn't always indicate writing instruction, but just assignments.
- We returned to the idea that the requirement is about argumentative writing. Argumentation – evidence-based writing that makes a claim and supports it. There was some friendly disagreement about the role of writing in the FY Course program.
- Now the ball is in EPAG's court. We need to discuss what the next step(s) might be. What should take the form of faculty motions and what can be recommended to the Provost?

Adjourned at 12:55

Respectfully submitted,
Jayne Niemi, Registrar