

ARTS AND SCIENCES SENATE CURRICULUM COMMITTEE

To: Executive Committee, Arts and Sciences Senate

From: Robert Cerrato, Chair, Undergraduate Curriculum Committee

Re: 1999-2000 Annual Report

Date: 9 October 2000

The curriculum committee met 24 times during the 1999-2000 academic year. Committee members were: Elizabeth Stone (anthropology and chair of the committee), Olufemi Vaughan (history and Africana studies), Robert Cerrato (marine sciences), Andreas Mayr (chemistry), Judith Lochhead (music), Sarah Sternglanz (women's studies), Arlene Feldman (Transfer Office), Elaine Kaplan (College of Arts and Sciences, ex officio member), and Kathleen Breidenbach (College of Arts and Sciences, ex officio secretary). A student member, Andrez Carberry, was identified but never attended.

Routine matters are handled by the secretary and announced to the committee at each meeting. There were a number of routine matters chiefly involving changes of course titles or descriptions to bring them in line with current teaching.

Significant Curricular Initiatives

Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences major

The committee approved extensive revisions to the basic curriculum to take into account changes in the discipline and approaches to undergraduate education.

Honors College

On taking over the directorship of the Honors College three years ago, Ruth Cowan was charged with revising the curriculum to make it challenging and appropriate for some of the University's best students. Preliminary revisions were approved last year but this year, the College submitted major changes to the freshman year and sophomore year courses, to add both intellectual rigor and a sense of continuity and cohesion in the curriculum. The committee welcomed those changes and applauded Cowan's efforts to strengthen the program.

Mathematics

The mathematics department submitted major revisions to course prerequisites to make clear to students what mathematical background would be required to succeed in the courses and to make those requirements more realistic. In addition, the committee approved an extended drop/add period for students in first-year calculus courses, since the department is working hard to ensure that students are appropriately placed.

American Studies

The committee approved a new major, minor and course core in American Studies. The major provides another alternative for students interested in interdisciplinary studies, drawing on

existing courses from a variety of disciplines, including languages, philosophy, literature, history, sociology and political science.

Education courses

In part as a response to changes in the teacher certification guidelines, the Professional Education Program, the foreign language and the English teacher preparation programs submitted new courses primarily concerned with clinical experience, in which students develop instructional methods and materials and then implement them on an experimental population to discover the value of those methods.

General science courses

The committee approved for D.E.C. categories H and E, three new courses developed by the mechanical engineering department, courses designed to appeal to non-science students.

General Education

The committee spent many meetings in the fall and spring semesters on the issue of the SUNY general education mandate, beginning with a slight revision of the definition of D.E.C. category K. For Stony Brook's initial response, the committee approved the removal from various categories of approximately one-third of all the courses that had satisfied different D.E.C. categories, removing courses that students would have been unlikely to take to satisfy a particular requirement since, for instance, in completing the prerequisites to the course, the student would already have satisfied the requirement. Courses that had been seldom offered and not recently offered were also removed. The committee approved a change in title and definition of D.E.C. category K from "American Pluralism" to "The American Experience in Historical Perspective," with the intention that courses in Stony Brook's category K satisfy the requirement for a narrative of American history. In addition, the committee approved revisions to the descriptions of courses in category K to make clear that the courses treat of their particular material from an historical perspective. Regular consultations with Associate Provost Mark Aronoff kept the members informed of developments in Albany and the reactions to Stony Brook's response to the mandate. The committee made it clear that if the revisions to D.E.C. category K did not satisfy the SUNY Provost's requirement for a narrative of American history, we would return category K to its original definition and require students to earn either an 85 or higher on the American history regents exam or complete, as part of their D.E.C. category F requirement, one of a handful of courses identified by SUNY as satisfying the American history requirement. In response to SUNY's requirement that students have an 85 or higher on the Regents exam in a foreign language, the committee approved a revision to the University's entry skill 3 elementary foreign language requirement, requiring students to earn an 85 or higher on the Regent's exam rather than the previous 75. Finally, the committee approved the recommendation that selected courses satisfying D.E.C. category H-K incorporate experience for students in public presentation toward SUNY's requirement for oral communications.

Committee Initiatives

Distance Learning

The committee devoted several meetings to inviting members of the University community with expertise in distance learning, chiefly through the Web. Guests included Doc Watson, School of

Nursing; David Pomeranz, associate provost and chair of Provost's Task Force on Distance Learning; Patricia Baker, School for Professional Development, director of Distance Education program; Joseph Brannin, dean of the libraries; Nancy Duffrin, director of instructional computing; David Ferguson, CELT.

The committee set about to investigate four general areas:

1. What is distance learning?
2. What is the relationship between distance learning and regular instructor teaching? How does it differ in experience? And what is its impact on faculty teaching load?
3. How can distance learning benefit the university and students? What kinds of courses lend themselves to distance learning?
4. What are the potentials for abuse?

Results of investigation:

There are several types of distance learning:

- asynchronous seminar type--small courses with lots of written interaction between students and instructor
- asynchronous "large lecture" where great numbers of students enroll with little or no instructor contact. "Lectures" are essentially "canned" and students learn on their own through reading the material.
- synchronous instruction--conducted either via the Web or video, which largely replicates in-person instruction and could be either "large lecture" with little or no interaction or small seminar with considerable amount of interaction
- combinations of these and combinations with live instruction
- Distance learning does not save an institution money. In fact, distance learning requires an investment of funds to develop the infrastructure and to provide faculty with the support needed to make the transition to new modes of instruction. Money might be generated if the distance courses or programs attract students who would not otherwise attend Stony Brook.
- The medium does not seem to provide anything that cannot be provided in person, with the great exception of the location/timing of instruction.
- Courses designed to accommodate large numbers of students are of some concern since most disciplines/materials do not lend themselves to self-instruction, which is in effect what this would be.
- Distance instruction of the type employed by SPD (small seminar format, asynchronous) are very time consuming for the instructor and the students because of the amount of written work that must be done.

- Foreign language and certain types of beginning mathematics instruction might be two areas where the university could take advantage of the technology to divert faculty resources to more advanced courses.
- Instructors need development incentives and technical support to be able to develop courses for delivery in the new environment.

In essence, the committee determined that Web instruction is useful as a supplement to many courses but that most disciplines do not lend themselves to distance education methods as the sole mode of instruction. The university should pursue a link with industry to develop instructional software. Members believe there should always be an interactive and active component--that learning should never be entirely passive. The real value of distance learning seems to be in our ability to provide specialty knowledge to students from diverse areas.

Peer Education

The committee received several proposals for peer education courses, often with the identified instructor as someone from the student services area. Members were troubled by the courses, in part because of their lack of understanding of peer education. The committee met with several instructors of existing peer education courses and developed basic guidelines for peer education courses, in essence saying that they should be comparable to other academic courses at the same level in terms of readings (quantity and quality), instruction methods (lecture, seminar), and grading bases (papers, exams). Courses not meeting these basic requirements should be offered as non-credit workshops. In addition, the committee discussed instructor qualifications. The committee plans to develop a general policy in the coming year.