

## **Minutes: CSOA meeting, February 28, 2005**

Attending: Colburn, Nelson, Baughman, Chatham-Carpenter, Berghammer, Reineke  
Regrets: Planells, Schmitz

**Reineke volunteered to offer a mini-version of the conference that she attended in the fall, "A Day at Alverno." In lieu of traditional minutes, pasted below is a copy of the handout for her presentation. *The handout is in italic font.* The summary of discussion in which the committee engaged, concerning the items on the handout and handouts from Alverno mailed to the committee before the meeting, is inserted in each section in regular font. Plans for the March meeting are at the end of this document.**

Note: because the note taker was an active participant in the conversation, she did not always make a note of who made particular comments. This is not an intentional oversight and committee indulgence of her poor memory is appreciated. Minutes will be happily amended if persons wish to take credit or deny responsibility for any that follows.

### ***Mini-Version: A Day at Alverno.***

#### ***I. Introduction***

*Questions: What does an "A" or a "B" mean? What does a bachelor's degree signify? How do we know if our students are learning?*

*Motivations: If we can explain to our students and for ourselves how learning will happen, students will learn better. The key reason to look at outcomes is not accreditation but commitment: teachers want to be effective in the classroom and to know that we are effective.*

#### ***II. Liberal Arts Curriculum:***

*Over the years, faculty at Alverno agreed on essential attributes of the liberally educated individual. These attributes are introduced in the LAC classes. Students continue to work on developing these attributes as they pursue their majors.*

Members of the committee commented on how they like the clarity of LAC goals at Alverno. There are 8 goals and these goals are readily available to students (as indicated in some of the handouts). Members of the committee noted that, at Alverno, students continue to work on their LAC skills in their majors. Major brochures include these 8 goals/skills as outcomes for majors (but at a more advanced level than in the core) and add additional major-specific outcomes. Considerable discussion ensued about how we could do something similar at UNI, which would enhance the majors and strengthen a university-wide commitment to and recognition of LA skills on campus. Ideas from committee members included:

- 1) Chatham-Carpenter suggested that it would be great to work on LAC shared outcomes across the university before working on major outcomes so that departments could include LAC outcomes (at a more advanced level) among their major outcomes. But since we need to work on major outcomes now, we will probably have to go forward. Colburn observed

that since the LAC outcomes are usually very general in tone, if departments in CHFA go ahead and specify some of their outcomes as LA outcomes, the language can be readily changed if the something like the 8 Alverno LAC skills is created for the LAC here at UNI but if different descriptors for those skills are used than those previously selected by CHFA departments. Nelson suggested that CHFA could come up with common language for LAC skills across all CHFA departments since so much of the LAC is represented in our departments. We could be a pilot for the entire university, should university-level efforts on assessment decide not to move toward a university-wide articulation of LAC outcomes in the near future.

- 2) It was pointed out by Chatham-Carpenter that Bev Kopper seems likely to take an active role in directing assessment and in overseeing the LAC Committee so that coordination of outcomes could be facilitated by her.
- 3) Some brainstorming ensued among the committee about whether the LAC Committee should take a role in initiating the discussion of outcomes. Reineke suggested that since the category reviews now need to be done on an outcomes model, faculty working on the category reviews could articulate shared outcomes for their category. Once all categories in LAC have become outcomes based through the review process, a focus group could be created representing faculty from all LAC categories. It could create a list of common outcomes for the LAC as a whole.
- 4) Consensus developed in discussion among the committee that the LAC experience would be enhanced if faculty and students across the university think about LAC outcomes as outcomes that develop over four years through being pursued at a higher level in the major and in a capstone experience (committee members felt a major capstone course might be more effective in this regard than an LAC capstone). Some faculty advise their students to get their LAC courses over with as soon as possible and some even suggest that students ease their way by taking courses at Hawkeye. A university-wide commitment to LAC over four years would help students appreciate the role of the LAC courses in relation to their major and would encourage faculty who don't teach LAC core courses to acknowledge the key role the LAC plays in preparing their students to pursue higher level LA outcomes in their majors.
- 5) Considerable discussion ensued about whether the QEP project could be a model for integrating LA outcomes across the curriculum. Some committee members had very positive memories of the QEP. Others noted that because the QEP operated outside of the formal, curricular process it ran into obstacles and was perceived negatively by some persons who didn't feel ownership in it. Nelson suggested that while the model itself might have some helpful points to contribute now, it probably would be best not to use the language of QEP to describe new efforts.
- 6) Reineke volunteered to share the committee's interest in an Alverno-like commitment to LAC outcomes across 4 years (including the major) with the university assessment group which will meet next week.

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### **III. Accountability to students:**

*Students track their own progress through levels of the liberal arts attributes and in their majors. Research shows that students learn better when they know why they are doing something and how they will meet learning goals. Students also can explain to parents the outcomes they have learned.*

*When students complete rubrics for abilities, they participate in a powerful feedback loop. If a student scores herself highly on “I took an active role in discussion,” and the professor does not see that she did, stated objectives for what “active role in discussion” looks like, assists the student in learning and the professor in effective teaching.*

Considerable discussion ensued about whether self-assessment, as practiced at Alverno, would work at UNI and should be considered along with major outcomes assessment. One handout distributed to the committee before the meeting shows all the LA outcomes at Alverno and divides them into levels of difficulty. Students must satisfy a specific number of level outcomes for each of the 8 LAC skills in order to graduate. They maintain portfolios and track their progress. Reineke reported that students take considerable pride in tracking their progress on outcomes, particularly oral communication outcomes which are maintained in a digital portfolio.

In response to questions from the committee, Reineke also clarified that, at UNI, an outcomes plan for a department does not necessarily need to include a self-assessment process for students. Individual departments might elect some version of self-assessment such as practiced at Alverno if they felt that it would enhance student learning. She said that other departments may focus more generally on major outcomes, sampling student efforts without maintaining individual portfolios. She indicated that Philosophy and Religion, while not embracing formal self assessment by students, is probably going to revise its literature for the major so that courses in the major are described not only in terms of content but also in terms of outcomes. This may entail sequencing courses, as the department begins to align their outcomes with their curriculum. Faculty are thinking that even if students do not formally participate in self assessment, students may value knowing more why they are taking a course and what learning goals they may achieve in a certain course. An outcomes approach may be easier for students to comprehend than the approach based on “content covered.”

#### **IV. Sample assessments (from History, Business, Art)**

*Course embedded assessment is common at Alverno. Within a given course, certain assignments combine multiple assessment outcomes and function as benchmarks for student learning in the course.*

*Courses have ability levels listed in their outcomes so that students know that they can take certain courses to obtain proficiency in specific abilities (LA and major).*

The committee looked at two embedded assessments from Alverno. The small business assessment is a capstone assessment for seniors in business at Alverno. Students design a small business plan and present it to a banker at a Milwaukee bank. Assessments of the plan are conducted by the student, peers, professor, and the banker. LAC skills and major specific skills are demonstrated. The other example was from history. It is one of four in an American history course. Students write a curriculum guide for a high school which wants to use “Mary Silliman’s War” (a film about the civil war) in a course. On the assignment handout, skills students must demonstrate are listed by LA core category and level.

Questions were asked about how graded assignments can also be used as assessment data. Reineke explained how individual students are graded on the four course assignments that are also being used for assessment in the American History class at Alverno. They get not only a course grade but also an evaluation of whether they have successfully met the category/level goal for the specific LAC skills being assessed on the project. In her recollection, students may pass a course but may not pass an LAC assessment goal. They may need to work on that goal

in another course. Students may also “pass out of an LAC level if they perform at a higher level of proficiency than has been expected at a particular course level.

For college-wide assessment, all of the projects that have functioned as assessments will be collected. Assessment data from several courses will be reviewed in terms of an assessment rubric that targets particular college-level outcomes that the assignments used for assessment all share, notwithstanding that they come from different courses. At this point, individual students are anonymous and courses/specific instructors are not the focus. Instead, assessors are looking at how students collectively (in their class year) meet or do not meet college outcomes.

It was asked how individual agree on what counts as success in a category of assessment. Reineke said that faculty select one category (of the 8 skills) on which to focus for 2-3 years (based on teaching or research interests [faculty at Alverno tend to publish about their teaching]) and the faculty meet once a semester to norm the skill for assessment purposes, compare assessment strategies in class, etc. Alverno’s office of Institutional Research is also focused on keeping track of assessment data on a multi-year basis. Within the majors, the faculty regularly meet to discuss assessment and embedded assessments within their courses. So there is a strong feedback loop from assessment to curricular improvements.

### ***Developing assessment***

- 1) *defining learning objectives*
- 2) *aligning objectives with the curriculum*
- 3) *developing direct and indirect measures*
- 4) *making sense of the data*
- 5) *creating a feedback loop for program improvement*

Near the end of the meeting, Reineke shared with the committee a new book that she has found very helpful as an assessment “cookbook.” The list above duplicates the book’s main chapters. She said that she had tried out some of the sections of the book in her own department and had received a positive response from faculty who appreciated the clarity of the presentation of ideas in the book. Reineke indicated that the dean is supportive of purchasing the book for each department in the college and suggested that she would like to review the book at the next committee meeting with an eye to making that decision. She distributed handouts that showed graphs from the book and indicated how those handouts would be the focus of the next meeting. Committee members liked the look of the graphs and voted to request the book immediately, rather than delay its purchase by another month.

Next meeting: We will meet on the Wednesday after spring break, March 23, from 1-2 p.m. in Baker 132. The topic of the meeting will either be an overview of the book we have ordered OR a beginning discussion of the book (if copies arrive shortly). If committee members wish to propose other agenda items, please do so.