

### **Minutes, May 4, 2005 meeting of the CSOA:**

The committee expressed appreciation for the Dean's office providing the committee with a luncheon in the Commons in conjunction with the final meeting of the year.

#### **A) Continue discussion of FAQ from Faculty New to SOA:**

The committee worked with a new question from a faculty member in another college who will be involved in SOA work during the coming school year. The criticism of SOA expressed by this professor boiled down to this: "The academic enterprise to which we are all deeply committed is violated and corrupted when we are required by persons with "teeny tiny managerial heads" to engage in student outcomes assessment. Why should we consent to this?" After chuckling about the teeny tiny head phenomenon, committee members articulated the following responses

- 1) SOA is not really an external mandate. Many of our fields are incorporating assessment into field-specific teaching enterprises. For example, national meetings feature faculty enhancing their pedagogy with use of SOA processes.
- 2) We need to discuss what we do as teachers and how well we are doing it. We are already doing "assessment" even if we don't use the terminology whenever we have conversations about enhancing student learning in our courses and majors. These conversations preempt conversations about assessment initiated by "outsiders." Because assessment already belongs to us as a faculty activity, that we would be "corrupted" by it gives power to persons who really don't have that power.
- 3) It is a good thing for people who care about teaching to talk about our teaching and how to teach in ways that enhance our students' learning. One of the positive aspects of being a member of the faculty at UNI is that when we want to talk with colleagues about our teaching and strategize ways to be more effective, we generally have no problem finding conversational partners who welcome this kind of discussion. Whenever we have these conversations, we are participating in an ad hoc assessment process. Formalizing assessment means that we make a commitment to have these conversations at regular intervals and to maintain some kind of record of these conversations so that we can look back to see if a pedagogical brainstorm really has resulted in improved student learning. Formal assessment enables us to keep track of successes, failures, and dead ends so that we can do more of what works and less of what doesn't work.
- 4) It is not a bad thing to engage persons outside of the university in conversation about what we are doing. It helps to know how others perceive us and to hear their concerns. When parents wonder if their children are learning, or when legislators wonder if tax dollars are being well spent, or when educational experts with "teeny tiny heads" ask us how students are doing, we should respond. Outsiders aren't the "enemy." We should be willing to share with them what we are doing.

- 5) If we show that we are doing assessment and can respond to questions from outside, we may be able to avoid what has happened in other states when legislatures have imposed outcomes testing on universities.
- 6) We may think that assessing outcomes is something that people with teeny tiny heads do, but if we lack concrete evidence to back up our claims that our students are learning, we may be the people who have teeny tiny heads! [Here it would be relevant to recall how grading differs from assessment].
- 7) We have a lot of options for direct and indirect measures of student learning. It seems more and more likely that each of our departments can arrive at assessment processes in which we believe and which genuinely aid our teaching. The one-size fits all model of a decade ago no longer exists. With great diversity in assessment activities, that our efforts to be effective teachers will be distorted/corrupted by assessment is increasingly unlikely.
- 8) We need to have (and it looks like NCA may be giving us) open-ended options for reporting on NCA outcomes. Open-ended questions enable us to customize assessment to fit our fields, disciplines, and ways of talking about teaching and learning common to our colleagues in our specific fields and disciplines.
- 9) Outcomes assessment needs to allow for failure. We need to be able to try new ways of assessing student learning and new strategies in the classroom to enhance student learning without fear. Our learning (and its failures) needs to be integrated into the assessment process itself.

## **B) Preliminary goals for next year:**

We shared with each other on a preliminary basis goals we think that each of our departments may have for next year:

Comm. Disorders: We will try to identify a measure for use in assessing outcomes.

Comm. Studies: We have a department committee that is looking for department-wide outcomes across all our programs. We hope to bring some results of our work to the whole department in the fall. We are thinking of collecting data for portfolios and using these.

Music: We need a new committee and we need to revisit our goals.

Theatre: We have revised our curricular outcomes for our core. We are going to look at aligning outcomes with courses. We are going to look at how outcomes could be assessed in specific courses and have a couple of people pilot a direct measure.

English: We need to identify outcomes. We have the model from the LAC work on writing competencies. We need to look at outcomes that cut across our curriculum. We might have a portfolio or projects on the Alverno model.

Art: We need to reconstitute our committee and start afresh. Our BFA show is a model of outcomes assessment for which we have faculty buy-in. But that doesn't measure enough across the breadth of our majors. We also need to have baseline measures on our incoming students, for one thing.

Philosophy and Religion: We are going to revisit our goals to make them less cumbersome. We want to align them with our curriculum and then figure out a direct measure for our program majors. We do not anticipate being able to test that measure during the coming year, however.

Modern Languages: Not reporting.

### **Agenda for September 12:**

- 1) Review, claim, modify, or reject chair's notes on departmental goals (as roughly sketched at our May meeting and typed up over three months later!).
- 2) Update on college website and on Martie's one bright idea from summer.
- 3) Discuss Allen – Do we need to review? Can we start with Chapter 4 at our next meeting?
- 4) Share inventory (as available) of interests with Martie for her research purposes. Example: Martie has found a wonderful new book on using portfolios that may expedite the actual assessing of portfolio contents.
- 5) Discuss a possible further iteration of the dean's report template in response to the suggestion last spring that we correlate our report with the new NCA "conversation questions." Their format may be more user-friendly than what we have.
- 6) Discuss our thinking on college level workshops for the coming year. ? Other business?