

2013-14 FACULTY SENATE
GRADUATE STUDIES POLICIES COMMITTEE
MINUTES
05 November 2013
Approved 19 Nov 2013

Members Present: Barakatt, Blanton, Cowan, Hamilton, Heather, Hembree, Miller,
Reddick, Sprott, Wassmer, Newsome, May, Steinwert

Members Absent: Kaplan

Guests:

1. **Call to order:** Called to order at approximately 8:30 a.m.
2. **Minutes of 1 and 15 October 2013:** Approved with edits to correct errors.
3. **Information Items:**
 - a. **Chair's Report:** Nothing further has gone forward to the Senate. There has been no progress on the credential course credit hour definition as we have yet to hear from Dr. Pia Wong.

4. **Report from Dean of Graduate Studies:**

- a. Sac State has begun working on the WASC accreditation process and is looking for volunteers to form subgroups that will examine the measurements of student success, degree qualifications, and core competencies as defined by WASC (the above-mentioned categories may change). It is hoped that the subgroups and a steering committee will be formed by spring semester. These committees will clearly be a long-term commitment.

Newsome feels it is very important to have graduate programs represented on these committees to move the graduate agenda forward. Miller agreed strongly and wanted to formally register her concern as, the last time a review of graduate programs took place, the chair of GSPC was supposed to have been included but no invitation or notification was ever made to participate in the discussion for WASC.

Reddick noted that when competencies for WASC are determined, one of them is sure to be writing.

No report on the Graduate Council as it has not met.

5. Report from Statewide Senator Chris Miller:

- a. Miller reported that she wrote a resolution for the Statewide Faculty Senate that was not forwarded. It regarded the percentage of units that need to be completed in residence in the CSUs. The idea of 70% for undergraduates is not in contention, but the language for graduates needs to be changed. As it currently stands, it refers to 'courses organized for graduate students.' This needs to be changed to 'courses organized for graduate studies.' The current language requires that 50% of graduate courses must be completed in residence, but it is agreed that figure is too low, so Miller proposed that be changed to 70%. However, this was not adopted by her colleagues in Statewide. The issue is that some small grad programs do not have the faculty to teach coursework at the grad level without piggybacking on their undergraduate programs. The Miller resolution is waiting to see whether graduate deans and graduate coordinators across the state will support it.

Hembree did not believe that there would be any teacher credential issues with the resolution since the credential courses are offered at the 200 level as paired and blended courses, and that other credentials offered, such as education administration, special education, etc., are also not applied to a Master's Degree. Newsome noted that, indeed, these courses aren't at the graduate level being applied to a Master's Degree, only toward the credentials, so they are undergraduate courses.

The committee agreed that a graduate degree should be earned through graduate-level courses and that at least the majority of them (> 50%) should be in residence. Newsome informed the committee that Sac State has no policy stating that paired-blended courses should contain graduate-level work.

6. New Business

- a. **GWAR:** The goal is for GSPC to form the graduate writing policy, and possibly to move it forward quickly to accompany the undergrad policy when it's presented to the Faculty Senate. However, the undergrad policy is currently under fire for being policy and procedure together. It will take time to separate those pieces, so the GSPC may have more time. Or, if GSPC isn't ready to go with the undergrad policy, then that will be all right. Most important is a good policy for graduate writing requirements.
- b. Discussion ensued on what GSPC wants for that policy. What the committee does not want is for students to begin a thesis or project and find that they can't write to a graduate standard. A writing diagnostic was a key element to the idea that by the time graduate students begin the culminating experience, they are certified as adequate writers befitting their level of education. The culminating experience should not be the certification. The committee considered that the GWAR should be a 3-step process:
 - i. Diagnostic
 - ii. GWI course

iii. Culminating experience

The issues are to understand what is being diagnosed, then what the remediation has to be.

c. Conversation follows:

Hamilton: The math program can do the diagnostic for its grad students. Can GSPC develop a diagnostic if a program wants one? Perhaps a diagnostic can be developed that a department can choose to send students to take, if they wish, or develop one of their own that is program-specific. A department could also choose to have a GWI course of its own or send students to the proposed graduate writing center for a workshop that students would pay a fee to attend. Programs could even choose to have a GWI course that all students take, so a department prepares all its students for writing. Hamilton acknowledged that some programs screen out applicants whose writing is unacceptable.

Cowan: Education does that.

Hamilton: Math does the same. Some programs use writing samples or GRE scores as diagnostics, and if a student's writing score isn't high enough, s/he is not admitted. That's a tool to reduce admissions to grad programs. Or, if departments are in charge of screening and improving writing in a discipline-specific way, that could also work.

Cowan: The whole Education program is writing-intensive, and the faculty members see what they need to do for their students to develop student writing. A GWI course should be about writing in the discipline. A workshop would be a writing class that just looks at general writing. So, the best solution might be diagnostics given within departments and that departments take responsibility for the students who can't write. The department then decides whether to use a GWI course to teach writing in the discipline or to send the students to a workshop for writing in general. Then the culminating experience is the final certification of the GVAR. This way, each department decides the criteria that need to be met, the standard for good/acceptable writing in the discipline, and the department decides on the necessary intervention (workshop or GWI course).

Discussion: Online courses are a possibility.

Newsome: Online but offered by Sac State online. The university buys the software, administers the course, and controls the quality of it.

Heather: But these tend to be sentence-level instruction, and that's not what GSPC/grad programs want. Essay level is necessary, the level of a scholarly paper.

Cowan: If you can't write, you can't be successful. You can't be a leader because you lose respect, you're not effective.

Discussion: GSPC would like, however, to avoid a writing diagnostic as an entry criterion to grad programs.

Hembree: Wants to see support of a grad student writing center.

Newsome: This would speak to the notion of a research culture. The center could perhaps help students write for grants, research proposals,

research for publication. Maybe a writing and research center? Teaching writing through goal-oriented projects and critical inquiry?

Discussion: Choices for students who need writing remediation -

- i. CCE or online could be the triage, the remediation, and the research/writing center would work with students who have already attained a higher level of writing and could use the help with developing research, etc.
- ii. Test writing prior to admission and use it as a block to grad entry if students need remediation. Send them back to the JCs.
- iii. Admitting students conditionally with the condition being that they take writing courses and pick up their skills.
- iv. Admit students into departments with the departments developing their skills, discipline-specific or not.

The point is to have a writing standard that means a grad student from Sac State meets a certain standard of writing.

The system-wide requirement is that Sac State has a writing assessment. Where the institution goes from there is the question.

Sprott: The last time GSPC went through this, the programs complained they don't have the time to be sure students meet grad level writing. But they also said they need to have students write well in their discipline. The trap last time was that it was decided there would be a diagnostic, then students would be sent to someone to help them learn to write. But the resources for that writing help weren't there.

Hembree: The elephant in the room is that we say we admit students who can write, but they can't.

Heather: There has to be support for the process of helping the students. We need to decide what we're looking for and then on the best ways to see that students meet the criteria we set.

Wassmer: Business uses the GRE as the department doesn't have the faculty to help improve writing. They look at verbal scores and the analytic writing (they accept nothing below a 4), and the math. Then they teach discipline-specific writing to people who already have an acceptable level of writing.

Barakatt: Some departments want control of the diagnostic and the remediation. Other departments want a diagnostic to use as a screen for student entry.

Hembree: Historically, this institution wanted to be an institution offering access. No one wanted to be a university that throws up barriers. The culture seems to be shifting back to elitism.

Newsome: WASC will be asking Sac State to talk about degree qualifications at the Master's and Doctorate levels. GSPC asked departments to look at qualifications as framed by the Lumina document, to have some sort of assessment that described how students stacked up to those measures. There is a definite sense that grad and doc students should

be value-added. Holistically, from a degree standpoint, what do we want our students to be able to do, what level are they meeting?

Sprott: We want to admit students and teach them but conversely, we want to keep them out if they're not good enough so we don't have to teach them. And that's what the programs are saying. We have the issue of pre-screening and whether or not to admit them based on their level of writing, the issue of assessment coming from WASC, the graduate writing-intensive course issue is problematic, and the culminating experience that may or may not have writing required.

Miller: We don't have an access agenda anymore, we have a completion agenda. If we diagnose and keep them out, that meets the completion agenda.

Hembree: If we don't have the tools to help students meet criteria, then we shouldn't be admitting them.

Sprott: We must have a diagnostic for students. Then we admit them and take responsibility for seeing that they meet criteria. There was talk about a series of courses that made a program writing intensive.

Miller: Writing-intensive programs make a standard of writing meaningless because they teach writing for the discipline, not WRITING. A degree means something beyond the major. Taking a series of courses in the major doesn't make a graduate degree meaningful. It's a way for some programs not to address the problem. They get students through the program, but are not certifying that they can write. There is no assessment that proves a program is teaching writing.

Sprott: Then we must have some sort of program assessment that proves students write to a certain level, so the program has to teach to a standard and assess meeting it.

Cowan: Education has a writing sample from every single course. They have proof, assessment, of students meeting targets.

Newsome: Does the committee sense that programs only want to teach to their discipline?

Heather: Most departments haven't thought about whether their students are meeting critical thinking, writing standards, etc. They only think about meeting their goals.

Miller: The professional programs especially are likely to think that way. They are content-specific.

Blanton: Speech Pathology and Audiology is a professional program, and entry is so competitive that we meet larger goals by accident. And we are not a program of access, but of completion. We are exclusionary.

Newsome: But we need to change that. WASC is looking at university-level standards, the emergence of a doctoral culture. WASC doesn't just want programs and the university to check off a box. They don't want programs to look alike, but how does each program assess and make sure that students are meeting broader standards as well as discipline-specific needs?

Hembree: But as grad programs, we specialize. It's more difficult to meet a broader standard.

Cowan: We create a grad standard and have a program-specific standard as well. Look for the common elements that can be held to a standard. Academic writing at a Master's degree level shows that students are capable of pursuing a doctorate, and that they can also write at a certain level in the discipline as well.

Heather: So the standard would be set at the college level?

Cowan: No, there should be a standard for writing academically that could be applied across the campus. A rubric that can be applied to all colleges, programs, etc. But programs write their own rubric for discipline-specific writing. The diagnostic could be singular, but the remediation could be two-fold, addressing academic writing and discipline-specific. The culminating experience for Education is the writing assessment sample and the certification of completion.

Newsome: Being able to write to a guideline for grants, for example.

Reddick: We need to ask the programs what their culminating experience is, how they judge it, and what it means to them. There is a sense that WASC is asking for a narrative about what is going on and how students are taught. We need to tell our stories better and talk about what we do.

Cowan: A blended process, that's where we start. What if we created an on-line questionnaire to find out what folks are doing as we're not sure where we are at this point?

Reddick: Frame the questionnaire in terms of WASC and programs needing to send in information for that reason.

Miller: Look at Lumina again and another document, plus look at our grad learning goals that were never forwarded by exec. A value rubric for writing?

Heather: This is a time-consuming process. We're reinventing a process in a different climate.

Sprott: Will we have any resources this time to follow through with a policy that we form? Support for the requirements?

No answer.

7. Other Business: There was no other business.

8. Adjourn: Meeting was adjourned at approximately 10:15