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Minutes, Arts & Sciences Academic Affairs Committee Meeting, Wednesday, December 2, 2009

Arts & Sciences Academic Affairs Committee

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AAC Minutes – December 2, 2009

In attendance: Jim Small (Chair), Wendy Brandon, Chris Fuse, Laurie Joyner, Barry Levis, Tocarra Mallard, Sebastian Novak, Dawn Roe, Don Rogers, Steven St. John (Secretary)

Guests in attendance: Jim Eck, Sharon Lusk, and Pat Schoknecht

The meeting was called to order at 7:32 a.m.

Announcements. Laurie asked if the Academic Calendar had been brought to Executive Committee. Jim recalled that he had brought it to EC, but that he would verify. Wendy reported that she had been unable to locate, in either her notes or the AAC minutes, the decision AAC made last year on the structure of the second phase of the Curriculum Committee. The members who served last year agreed that it had been decided to select 2 members from each division and to maintain continuity from the Phase I committee, but AAC was likely to have to call a new vote to settle the issue. Jim announced that the Colloquium on the Masters of Planning in Civic Urbanism would be held following the 12/9 Faculty Meeting. He also suggested that AAC needed to meet one more time this semester. The regular Wednesday meeting time was impossible with three members scheduled to be out of town, so it was agreed that AAC would meet on Friday, December 4 at 7:15 am in the Warden Dining Room.

Minutes. The minutes were approved unanimously pending three minor changes.

Old Business.

Grade Appeal Case

Jim reviewed the Bylaws that indicated that Grade Appeals do indeed come to AAC, and that several documents were now available concerning the specific case forwarded to AAC by Karen Hater two weeks ago. Jim then read language from the faculty handbook that defined the appropriate issues for adjudicating a Grade Appeal. The relevant text is: "Further appeals beyond the chair of the department will be allowed only when the student can furnish evidence that the final grade was affected by the student's opinion or conduct in matters unrelated to academic standards, bias based upon matters unrelated to academic standards, or the failure of the instructor to follow his or her own stated policies or College policies."

AAC first reviewed whether or not Professor had failed to follow "his or her own stated policies" with regard to a make up exam. The syllabus provided to AAC specified a make up policy that was consistent with the events described by Student in the appeal. Because this procedure was followed, there was not a question of whether the final grade was affected "by the student's opinion or conduct in matters unrelated to academic standards" or "bias based

upon matters unrelated to academic standards” – the final grade was affected only by Student academic performance calculated in a manner consistent with the syllabus.

AAC determined that there was no basis for appeal, and so voted unanimously to deny the appeal.

Maymester Re-Authorization

Laurie provided AAC with a summary document and proposal for the re-authorization of Maymester for May, 2010. In brief, Laurie proposed that AAC authorize Maymester for Spring, 2010 with the following changes: 1) an open call for courses not limited to general education courses, with enrollment numbers determining courses that would meet, 2) a clarified faculty compensation structure based on enrollment and anchored to intersession and overload compensation pay schedules, and 3) the addition of two instructional days and a Saturday exam. The Background portion of the document provided data on Maymester 2009, including student and faculty feedback, a comparison of short summer sessions at peer institutions, and the budgetary impact of Maymester. These issues had been discussed in AAC on 11/18.

Jim compared the current fall and spring semester structure – 14 weeks, 42 class meetings at 50 minutes each, and noted this came to about 35 contact hours, and that the Maymester term came to about 37.5 contact hours. Barry noted that a student taking 2 courses in Maymester would be working 100 hours a week combining in-class hours and out-of-class hours of expected work per credit. Sebastian asked if there had been complaints or difficulties with students taking two courses in Maymester 2009. Laurie reported that 16 students took two courses and that neither these students nor their professors were dissatisfied with student performance. Barry suggested that this could be due to the academic standards not being rigorous enough. Barry did not believe a Humanities course could be effective in such a short period of time. Students would not be able to engage deeply with the material.

Chris asked if perhaps all Maymester courses could be brought to the New Course Subcommittee, so that an arm of AAC would be charged with verifying the academic rigor of Maymester courses. Wendy suggested that perhaps the Maymester 2009 professors could be invited to an AAC meeting to give their perspective.

Barry said he was uncomfortable making the two-course option the default, and that perhaps students should assume they could only take one course but have to appeal to take two. Laurie indicated such a procedure could be possible.

Don disagreed with Barry. He noted that an intensive format changes the learning context and for many students actually improves their performance. He also felt that students should be able to sign up for two courses at their option, though he noted that if so, Maymester should include a schedule of two possible exam time slots. Barry maintained that students could not absorb material in that amount of time, and Don countered that this may be so for some courses but not necessarily for all courses.

Jim said that at some point we have to trust our faculty. We entrust individual professors all the time with the responsibility of structuring a course to meet the course goals. If they are convinced their course goals can be met in an abbreviated semester – and such intensive semesters are common at our peer schools – then academic standards are not an issue. Jim suggested that we “try it one year” and re-evaluate again with an eye toward these issues.

Laurie asked if this would go to the faculty this year or would it be authorized by AAC and EC and only go to the faculty next year? She suggested that, like with new courses, it takes a couple of iterations to determine if the innovation should be maintained. Barry felt that this would make the faculty unhappy (to have Maymester authorized without a full faculty vote). Laurie disagreed – she was sensitive to the concerns of faculty but felt that information about Maymester 2009 had addressed many of these concerns.

Don moved: That AAC forward the proposal as written (adding the second exam date) to EC with the recommendation that Maymester 2010 be authorized and evaluated the following year by AAC. The motion was seconded and passed 8-1 (Barry in the minority).

Blended Learning Initiative

Jim recounted that Professional Standards Committee had asked AAC to review the Blended Learning Initiative before it reviewed proposals. Jim Eck apologized for the manner in which the BLI was released to the faculty. He stated that he was hopeful that AAC would feel comfortable enough with the BLI to recommend to PSC to proceed immediately with the proposals rather than, as PSC had suggested, making a recommendation first to the full faculty.

Jim Eck then described the BLI process and goals. He noted that Rollins has a long history of pedagogical innovation, and, in the wake of a report from Kaludis Consulting, he and a small working group began to investigate ways to provide “multiple entry points” for students to enroll in the Holt School. For example, instead of 14 week terms, Holt could consider 7-wk terms. He and his committee examined blended learning. Jim Eck clarified that a blended learning course has the identical number of contact hours as a standard course, but that half of the meetings are “virtual”. He also noted that exploring blended learning was not a “paradigm shift” given that Ed LeRoy, Roger Ray, and Sue Easton already offer or have offered blended learning courses at Rollins, in both Holt and in Arts & Sciences.

Jim Eck handed out a document summarizing some of the pedagogical research on blended learning. He summarized that professors who are trained in blended learning achieve similar or even better learning outcomes for their courses than standard courses. He noted that blended learning is not appropriate for all courses, but that could be appropriate for certain courses.

Jim Eck’s proposal was that AAC communicate to PSC its approval for PSC to review proposals submitted by Sue Easton, Rick Bommelje, and Margaret McLaren for consideration for this summer. He noted that the topics – communication, listening, and ethics, were appropriate for the blended learning format and were already approved courses. This pilot would be evaluated

by the Holt School Dean in cooperation with whatever body of governance (AAC, PSC) recommended. He noted that Easton's course had already been delivered in blended format.

Barry noted that Jim Eck referred to this as a "pilot" but that another pilot, the RP pilot, was voted on by the full faculty. Barry noted that if this was an important initiative, faculty should be engaged.

Don disagreed. He felt that "data collection" should come first to inform the faculty. He said that innovation only works if you gain hands-on experience. Don stated that this program was consistent with the Rollins values of excellence, innovation, and community. He did not believe that innovation could be accomplished in a bureaucratic fashion.

Wendy also did not agree with Barry in the comparison of the BLI to the RP pilot. She felt a more similar comparison was to the service learning designations discussed earlier this year.

Laurie reiterated that as a faculty development initiative, the BLI should have clearly come through the governance committees initially. She asked Jim and Pat for clarification on what their view was on that issue. Jim and Pat agreed. Initially, Jim Eck did not see this as a curricular issue, but was in complete agreement to work with the governance committees. Laurie asked for clarification on the "blended learning committee" referred to in the BLI proposal. Jim responded this was himself, Sharon Lusk, David Richard (for a time), Sue Easton, Pat Schoknecht, Carrie Schultz, and Ed Huffman.

Pat described a bit about the training associated with the courses. She stated that doing a course in the blended format was more complicated than simply using the same syllabus with every other session virtual. The training would help faculty make decisions about what material could be delivered online and what was best delivered in the classroom, and also how to manage the online discussions. She noted that indeed it might be that, after training, a faculty member might decide the blended format is inappropriate for his or her course.

Laurie noted that Sue Easton, a faculty member, would conduct the training sessions, not an IT staff member. She suggested an additional benefit of this education would be emergency preparedness – obtaining skills to permit continuance of courses in the event of college closing due to a major hurricane or a disease epidemic.

In deference to the time, the discussion was ended to be resumed on Friday.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:40 am.