

University of Denver
Faculty Senate Minutes
March 6, 2009
International House

Senators (or proxies) present: Bill Anderson, Don Bacon, Arthur Best, Rodney Buxton, Victor Castellani, Frederique Chevillot, Bonnie Clark, Sandy Dixon, Judith Fox, Katherine Freeman, Sylvia Hall-Ellis, Michele Hanna, Jennifer Hoffman, Peggy Keeran, Ray Kireilis, Brian Kiteley, Maciej Kumosa, Frank Laird, Tiffani Lennon, Scott Leutenegger, Michael Levine-Clark (President), Chris Malloy, Don McCubbrey, Keith Miller, Sarah Morelli, Mia Mulvey, Rahul Nair, Kim Newman, Paul Novak, Maik Nwosu, Linda Olson, Colleen Reed, Charles Reichardt, Dean Saitta, Linda Tate, David Thomson, Gordon von Stroh, and Kate Willink.

General Education Review– Dean Saitta

I appreciate the time and effort that the Review Committee invested in creating its proposal. The counter-proposal is intended as a contribution to the broader discussion about General Education at the university. The following concerns and criticisms have been shared with the committee and there's been no substantive response. This lack of response is troubling, since Gen Ed reform is arguably the most important and controversial issue we consider as a faculty collective.

The committee proposal *might* be a good proposal for General Education at DU, but it's not a good proposal for Liberal Education. There's a difference. General Education is easy; Liberal Education is hard. We need to decide as a faculty which way we want to go. Not only as a matter of principle, but because the choice has implications for how we use our professional schools, and whether we're serious about "synergizing" liberal and professional learning—something that DU is uniquely positioned to do. I'm for liberal education not general education, and that's why I took the time to produce an alternative set of ideas for organizing a common undergraduate curriculum.

My issues transcend the specific proposal at hand, but the basic concerns are these:

- The proposal is inconsistent with the university's Learning Goal as articulated by the UPAC Mission and Goals Task Force. The counter-proposal explains why. The Goal calls for significant expansion, not contraction, of interdisciplinary work on campus. The Learning Goal should significantly shape what we do with the common curriculum.
- The proposal doesn't consider some wonderful environmental scanning research conducted by another UPAC task force, work that has significant implications for the project of general education. The scanning research supports the interdisciplinary project embedded in the Learning Goal. The Environmental Scanning research is available in "white papers" that are available to the campus community.
- The proposal doesn't respect its own background literature that's posted on

Portfolio, especially the AACU material. This material reinforces UPAC recommendations for doing more rather than less interdisciplinary teaching and research. There's lots more literature that could have been consulted beyond the executive summaries of AACU reports and a couple of You Tube videos. I sent the committee some recommendations, including references to some good analyses that have been produced by the Teagle Foundation.

- The wisdom of the proposal is debatable not only at the high end, but also at the low end. The proposed “matrix” is conceptually problematic. Its language and structure do not harmonize with our mission and values. I explained why in the online *Faculty Forum* weblog.

In summary, the official proposal is not a recipe for educating liberally; it's a recipe for educating vocationally. It's not research based, its agenda- and self-interest based—meaning the agendas and self-interests of divisions and departments. The proposal is about making the *entire* undergraduate experience at DU safe for majors and minors, when we should have at least one robust piece that *tests* what's being learned in the disciplines and that challenges students to move beyond disciplinary ways of thinking to ways that are genuinely *transdisciplinary*. This is the essence of liberal education. The existing Core is the best mechanism we have for strengthening liberal learning, a claim that's substantiated by evidence. It's shameful that we're gutting Core without a conversation about what it's accomplished and what it can still achieve as concerns building student capacities for critical and creative thought. We need *multiple* high end contexts and opportunities for building these capacities. A single “Advanced Seminar” is insufficient.

An anecdote from the recent AHSS meeting to discuss the proposal suggests the depth of the challenge we face to overcoming unit self-interest in the cause of educating liberally. When an AHSS colleague asked why the year-long NATS Foundations sequence once again remains unchanged he was pacified by a chorus of others saying it doesn't matter, because the elimination of Core requirements means that “now we have our majors and minors back.” This response is disturbing, because it puts the territorial interests of academic units above the long-term interests of students. It ignores the “best practices” for Gen Ed recommended by pretty much all the professional experts, and with what's happening in the world of ideas. It's shameful that we once again—for the third round of curriculum revision in a row—hold science constant while we tinker with everything else, as if there were no alternative views of what it means to teach scientific literacy.

To conclude: the Senate should do everything in its power to make sure that we do right by our students by taking time with the process of proposal review. It should sponsor more and better debates of *any* and *all* ideas that faculty have about the philosophy and the structure of the common curriculum. These debates should include the important discussion of whether we want our students to be educated liberally, or just “generally.”