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Sent Tuesday, December 23, 2008 5:37 am
To Linda Tate <Linda.Tate@du.edu>
Cc Rodney Buxton <Rodney.Buxton@du.edu>

Subject Re: Gen Ed Process and Substance

Linda, Rod—

One more thought before I bury myself in holiday merry-making. It's about the "committee resources" used in the review. Reviews such as this obviously work best when they are informed by fairly thorough background research. I think the Portfolio site should reflect that thoroughness if faculty are to be confident about the review's outcome. The committee resources identified in the Portfolio site include internal DU documents (some of questionable utility), AACU manifestos that are now 5 years old, and a couple of YouTube videos. Attached is a list of stuff relevant to Gen Ed review that I collected from reading the Chronicle of Higher Ed, Inside Higher Ed, and some other regular sources over the past few months, and by doing some casual Google searches. Obviously this is just the tip of the iceberg.

My interest in the quality of research informing the curriculum review is shaped in part by the "History of Core" document on the Portfolio site. I remember some things a bit differently than is reported in that document. I don't believe that the sciences ever "argued persuasively" that a year of science was essential for students to understand scientific inquiry. Students might come to understand the scientific "mode" or "method" (assuming that a single mode or method exists, which is debatable), but that doesn't equate to becoming a scientifically literate citizen. On my reading of the current NATS course descriptions a student can take a year of science at DU and come away with little to no understanding of 4 of the following 5 topics of great, continuing public concern: (1) Evolution, (2) Climate Change, (3) Genetic Engineering, (4) Biodiversity and extinction, and (5) Technology's social causes and consequences. I don't believe this state of affairs on our campus best serves the cause of scientific literacy. I believe the case by the Sciences needs to be much better made this time, or other models explored. I think the same goes for the case for downsizing the interdisciplinary piece of the curriculum. There is now a sizeable literature on interdisciplinarity's importance and how it can work in practice. I think the articles about scientific literacy by Greene and Trefil, and Menand's essay on interdisciplinarity are especially thought-provoking with respect to these two issues. So too are the Teagle Foundation reports about the state of liberal education in various disciplines, and in general. In fact one of these reports (relevant to English and Languages majors) is discussed in today's Inside Higher Ed at <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2008/12/23/teagle>

Certainly the History of Core does get a number of things absolutely right: (1) the "public relations" problems produced by the initial Core course approval process (which have probably left a lingering bad taste for some faculty), (2) the structural problems with involving faculty from the professional schools, and (3) the failure of the Provost/Deans

"Administrative Council" to step up and support the curriculum. That Core is, in my experience, succeeding in its aims despite these impediments and obstacles is strong testimony to the power of the original vision and the quality and dedication of the faculty teaching in the curriculum. Which is why I think we should find the nerve, and the will, to continue to evolve it.

As always, feel free to share what you will with the committee. Best for the holidays,
Dean

Resources relevant to Gen Ed review:

- June 1, 2008. Put a Little Science in Your Life, by Brian Greene, *The New York Times*. http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/01/opinion/01greene.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=brian%20greene&st=cse
- Spring 2008. Science Education for Everyone: Why and What, by James Trefil, *Liberal Education*. http://www.aacu.org/liberaleducation/le-sp08/le-sp08_Trefil.cfm
- Sept. 5, 2008. General Education in the City. *Inside Higher Ed*. <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2008/09/05/temple>
- Sept 15, 2008. Reforming the Requirement-Free Curriculum, *Inside Higher Ed*. <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2008/09/15/brown>
- Sept-Oct 2008. Specious Learning Outcomes, by Daniel J. Ennis, *Academe*. <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/academe/2008/SO/col/facfor.htm>
- Oct. 21, 2008. A Core With a Catholic Twist, *Inside Higher Ed*. <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2008/10/21/setonhall>
- Nov. 6, 2008. Encouraging Interdisciplinarity, *Inside Higher Ed*. <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2008/11/06/interdiscipline>
- Nov. 10, 2008. Interdisciplinarity and Anxiety, by Louis Menand. <http://humanities.princeton.edu/fds/>
- Dec 5, 2008. The Disciplines and Undergraduate Education, by Stanley Katz, *Chronicle of Higher Education*. <http://chronicle.com/review/brainstorm/katz/the-disciplines-and-undergraduate-education>
- January, 2009. From the Horse's Mouth: What Scientists Say About Scientific Investigation and Scientific Knowledge, by Siu Ling Wong and Derek Hodson. *Science Education* 93 (1): 109-130. (Accessible online via Penrose Library).

- A bunch of stuff available on the Teagle Foundation's website.
<http://www.teagle.org/learning/publications.aspx#disciplines>