

Minutes of the September 17, 2002 Meeting Liberal Studies Oversight Committee (LSOC)

Members Present: Millie Abel, Jim Costa, Mark Couture, Fred Hinson (chair), Marsha Lee Holmes, Kathy Hosig, Don Livingston, Will Peebles, Richard Starnes, and Charles Wallis

Members Absent: None

Guests: Wes Bonds, David Butcher, Royce Woosley, Brad Sims, Anne Rogers, George DeSain, Christine Stevens, Cheryl Clark, Ann Johnson, Henry Mainwaring, Ken Burbank

Fred Hinson called the meeting to order at 2: 00 p.m. in the Rogers Room in the University Center. No guests were present for this initial part of the meeting. The minutes of the September 10 meeting were approved. Fred then distributed a handout describing the core and total requirements of the A.A. and A.S. degrees at the North Carolina Community Colleges. (All Liberal Studies requirements are waived for students transferring to WCU from a N.C. Community College with an A.A. or A.S. degree or having completed the “General Education Core” of such a degree.)

The meeting then moved to the Catamount Room, where the committee was joined by several guests for a discussion of the memo from George DeSain *et. al.* regarding the Liberal Studies science requirement.

Points made by the guests about the current Liberal Studies policy included:

- Inconsistencies in our policy for transfer students: If a student transfers in science requirements that likewise meet a program requirement, and the student has an A.S. or A.A. degree, then the student is not required to take additional hours. But if the student transfers the same courses without an A.A. or A.S. degree, or has A.P. credit, or takes the courses at WCU, then the student is required to take 6 additional hours of Liberal Studies courses.
- The EET program is involved with a number of distance learners. WCU is in competition with other schools, including ASU, for these students. The increased hour requirement could put WCU at a disadvantage.
- The current policy does not encourage students to move to a “higher level.”
- The Honors College is dealing with many questions from honors students with A.P. credit who wonder why they need to take more Liberal Studies courses when they have already met the requirements.
- Possible negative effects of the policy on recruitment, retention, and time-to-graduation.
- The purpose of Liberal Studies is to insure that our students are “well-rounded.” If a student’s program has several science requirements, is that aspect of Liberal Studies not already met?
- The EET program would like to require some non-science Liberal Studies courses such as Ethics and Technical Writing, but cannot afford the additional hours. It was suggested that the LSOC consider not just science, but to also consider the

- issue of “double dipping” more globally.
- Science belongs with Mathematics in the Core.

There were several points of discussion between the LSOC and the guests, including:

- Fred raised the question of whether the “old policy” worked under General Education, when a higher level science program requirement could satisfy the General Education science requirement (and hours). The guests replied that the policy worked well and would be happy should that policy be re-instituted. In fact, they would be satisfied with that policy, regardless of whether or not the science requirement were ultimately kept in the Perspectives category or moved to the Core (as is suggested in the proposal to the LSOC).
- It was observed that Liberal Studies is unusual in general, because a student’s Liberal Studies requirements could change as a result of changing majors (or even by declaration of major).
- The Liberal Studies program seems to encourage some redundancy in our course offerings. For example, is there truly a need for both CHEM101 and CHEM132?
- One committee member raised the question: What makes the science area different from the other Perspectives areas? And why were the sciences not originally placed in the Core? George DeSain, who was on the original planning committee for Liberal Studies, offered that the science area was in the Perspectives under General Education. At one time, a Math-Science Core was considered, but the idea got “lost” along the way. Henry Mainwaring concurred; when serious discussion was being given to dropping the science requirement to 4 hours, the idea of the Math-Science core became secondary and was dropped.
- One Committee member expressed approval of moving Science to the Core as a way to lessen the likelihood of double dipping in general. By moving the sciences to the Core, the exception is institutionalized.
- This proposal is not about us (the faculty and our program); the proposal was developed for the benefit of our students.
- We should treat our National Merit and Honors students (those students bringing in A.P. credit and transfer credit from courses taken at a community college their senior year in high school) as well as we treat our general transfer students.

At the end of the discussion, Will thanked the guests for the thought that went into the proposal, and in particular for offering a solution (moving the sciences to the Core) as a potential way to fix the problem.

The members of the LSOC then returned to the Rogers room for further discussion.

It was observed that the General Education Core of the A.A. and A.S degrees requires two more hours than WCU’s Liberal Studies program.

The comment was made that moving the sciences to the Core would be essential in implementing the policy. Allowing double dipping for one Perspectives area and not another would open a “can of worms” and would appear to give a special privilege to certain majors.

Q: If the sciences are moved out of the Perspectives area, will the gates be opened for other departments to request to be moved to the Core?

Response: Other departments will have to make their case.

Returning to the issue of special privileges, is it equitable that students with science requirements can double dip, whereas students with History or English requirements cannot? (Related question from another member): Again, what differentiates science from the other Perspectives areas?

Response: Two points differentiate the sciences:

1) The science programs require a distribution of courses outside of their major more broadly than other programs.

2) The science courses are sequential.

Clarifying question: In your area, do you have any courses with prerequisites outside of your major?

Q: Are there any other similar areas outside of science that we are neglecting to consider in this discussion?

Response: If so, they can come forward and present their case.

Q: I still want to know why the original LS Committee kept the sciences in the Perspectives.

Some discussion ensued about bringing in previous Committee members to discuss their reasoning. But another member asked what the point would be in doing so. The Liberal Studies Document is a living document, and should speak to the present. The case brought to us was legitimate, convincing, and motivated out of concern for students and not out of “turf protection.” We have sufficient information, and we can reason for ourselves.

Richard volunteered that he had already spoken with Curtis Wood, and his impression was that Curtis did not necessarily feel that the previous committee was trying to deliberately set a precedent by placing Sciences in Perspectives instead of the Core.

The point was re-made that the proposal was not a special treatment for particular majors, but was intended to serve a broad group of students. Two particular anecdotes were shared about the current policy being a discouragement to students enrolling at WCU. (In one case, a student could get requirements out of the way faster by transferring courses to SCC for an Associate’s Degree first instead of transferring to WCU directly, and in another instance, a student lacked 2 courses for an Associate’s Degree, transferred to WCU, and then needed to take several additional courses at WCU as a result.)

Fred pointed out that there would be other issues to deal with if the Sciences are moved from Perspectives to the Core. In particular, do we begin to allow freshman seminar courses and upper-level perspectives courses in the Core?

The comment was made that we should first vote on the proposal, and then handle the details of the implications if the vote is positive.

A motion was made and seconded that the Committee accept the proposal, with an appropriate change in wording of the second point to be parallel to the wording of the Liberal Studies Mathematics requirement:

- 1) The sciences be removed from the perspectives area and be placed in the Core.
- 2) This requirement can be satisfied by any two higher level science courses.
- 3) Departments will determine which sciences best meet the needs of their students.

Further discussion clarified that this change would no longer require students to take sciences in two different areas.

The LSOC then voted on the motion. The motion passed with no members opposed and with one abstention.

Fred announced that he would most likely be out of town next week. Will Peebles agreed to chair the committee next week, when the LSOC will continue discussing potential implications/repercussions of moving the sciences from the Perspectives area to the Core.

The meeting adjourned at 3:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Charles Wallis