Minutes of Revised Undergraduate First-Year Experience (FYE) committee meeting, 3/16/09

Present: Erik Craft, Joanna Drell, Joe Essid, Libby Gruner (chair), April Hill, Dan Palazzolo, Joan Neff (ex oficio)

The meeting began with a review of plans for the series of open forums, which will start next week. As a reminder, here’s the schedule:

**Topic #1: Goals of FYE**
- **Monday 3/23** 9:10 – 10:10 a.m.
- **Tuesday 3/24** 12:30-1:30 p.m.
- **Thursday 3/26** 3:00-4:00 p.m.

**Topic #2: Design of FYE #1**
- **Tuesday 4/7** 3:00-4:00 p.m.
- **Thursday 4/9** 12:30-1:30 p.m.
- **Friday 4/10** 9:10 – 10:10 a.m.

**Topic #3**
- **Monday 4/20** 9:10-10:10 a.m.
- **Wednesday 4/22** 11:15-12:15 p.m. **THC #305**
- **Thursday 4/23** 3:00-4:00 p.m.

All meetings (except 4/22, as noted) will be held in the Gottwald Auditorium. Dan will moderate the meetings on 3/24 and 3/26; Joe will moderate the meeting on 4/7; otherwise I will do so. For the first set of meetings next week, we will present our preliminary goals to the audience and solicit feedback on them; for the next two, we will solicit feedback on the design of an FYE (probably proposing several models). SpiderBytes notices about these meetings will start going out soon; please feel free to announce to your classes and your colleagues as well.

We will also check back with the provost’s office about making our minutes accessible and providing a web page or some other format for input from the campus community. We discussed several models for this, and prefer, if possible, a simple web-based “form” which stakeholders can fill out and submit for posting. At a later date, we will also contact the deans of the three undergraduate schools for their input.

We then began discussing the models put forward so far for our consideration, putting them in the context of the Core Course Faculty Survey conducted this fall. Of note in that survey are the findings regarding faculty participation and models for an FY course. 58% of faculty who responded to the survey said they would not teach Core in the future if they had a choice; indeed, only 60% of faculty currently teaching Core said they would like to teach it in the future.
Second, there were seemingly discrepant results regarding a common syllabus vs. multiple courses from different disciplines. On a 1-5 scale, with 5 being most important, the average response on the importance of a common syllabus was 3.08, while the average response on the importance of offering multiple courses from different disciplines was 3.64. While this seems close, the responses on a common syllabus were evenly spread out between 1 (not important) and 5 (very important), while the responses on multiple courses clustered near the top, with 34.5% rating it 5 (vs. 23.3% for a common syllabus. This may give some context to our discussions of the various models, which at the moment range from keeping the Core Course as is, at one pole, to shifting to requiring two writing-intensive seminars, at the other.

Issues that came up in our discussion included grading disparity, close reading vs. critical reading, modes of innovating with a first-year experience, capitalizing on our strengths in interdisciplinary and cross-school connections, and emphasizing pedagogy. We also discussed some of Joe’s findings from Cornell, including their requirement that students read no more than 75 pages/week for their first-year seminar course. Some highlights:

1. Might we propose a two-semester sequence of thematically linked or clustered courses, requiring (or suggesting) that they be in different disciplines?
2. Might we propose a team-taught seminar or seminars?
3. Could we innovate by linking the courses with advising or residence-based learning?
4. Is close reading the same as critical reading?
5. How much training will faculty need to teach writing-intensive seminars, and what kind of support will that entail throughout the year?
6. Would complaints about grade disparity diminish if students had more choice of topic?
7. Could we still provide opportunities for mentorship without a two-semester sequence with the same faculty member?

This was a wide-ranging discussion and while many issues were aired, none were settled. We will continue the discussion next week. We will not finalize our goals list yet, as we still have the three forums on goals for next week, but I would like us to start developing more models (or revisions of the current ones) for us to discuss.