Minutes of the FYE committee, 3/30/09

Present: Erik Craft, Joanna Drell, Joe Essid, Al Goethals, Libby Gruner (chair), April Hill, Dan Palazzolo, Carol Wittig, Joan Neff (ex oficio), Uliana Gabara (guest)

We began with a presentation by Uliana Gabara on the ways the FYE can contribute to internationalizing our student body. She made 5 points:

1. Cast the year as cultivating an international/multicultural worldview. Both coursework and extracurricular activities could move students toward study abroad as early as their 4th semester.
2. Encourage projects that link immigrants in the Richmond community with UR’s international students.
3. If we are thinking of adopting a FY mentor program, think about linking FY students to international students and/or students returned from study abroad—make use of their expertise and integrate/re-integrate them better into the UR community.
4. Consider developing LAC sections for a FYE. Students might do some readings in the original language or in other translations besides English. (The example Uliana gave here was English vs. Chinese translations of an Arabic text.)
5. Consider developing a short-term study abroad unit within an FY course—for example, a spring break trip to Canada or Mexico. Focus on our near neighbors for this first international experience.

Discussion centered around institutional impediments to these initiatives. On the student side, these include money, time (it must be done during a break), parental concerns, other commitments (e.g., athletics). On the faculty side, lack of recognition or reward for participating faculty would be the biggest impediments.

We then had a discussion of the major themes that arose out of the first set of open forums. These were:

- What does “academic” mean (as in “provide an innovative shared first-year academic experience”)
- Who does or should teach in the FY program?
- How can we keep the experience common and/or shared?
- What is the scope of our charge? (This speaks to the definition of “academic”)
- Can we distinguish between means (methods, implementation issues, etc.) and ends (goals, outcomes)?

Our next discussion centered on revising our list of four goals. Our new list, after considerable thoughtful discussion, is as follows:

In their first year at UR, students should:

1. enhance their ability to think, write and read critically
2. enhance their ability to communicate effectively
3. develop the fundamentals of information literacy and library research skills
4. have the opportunity to work closely with a faculty mentor
5. have an academic experience that expands their understanding of the world

Next steps:
We are now ready to begin developing models for the FYE. We are starting with a consideration of three models:
   1. A two-semester common experience (Drell)
   2. A two-semester experience with one common syllabus and one seminar or elective experience (Drell, Palazzolo, Craft)
   3. A two-semester experience with seminars during both semesters (Hill, Essid, Goethals)

A further sub-committee (Gruner, Essid, Wittig) will meet to consider support/implementation issues that would be common to any model. I’ve asked sub-committees to report back within two weeks, though we will probably start considering at least one model next week.

A reminder of upcoming forums and meetings:
A&S Academic Council
Tuesday 3/31 11:15 – 12:30 (THC 305)
attending: Gruner, Drell, Palazzolo, Neff, Hill (and possibly others?)

RCGSA
Wednesday 4/1 7:00 – 7:30 p.m. RCGA (Whitehurst Living Room)
attending: Gruner, Palazzolo, Drell, Wittig, Goethals

Topic #2: Design of FYE #1
Tuesday 4/7 3:00-4:00 p.m. (Hill, Essid, Craft, Goethals)
Thursday 4/9 12:30-1:30 p.m. (Gruner, Drell, Craft, Hill, Wittig)
Friday 4/10 9:10 – 10:10 a.m. (Gruner, Essid, Goethals, Neff)