

Science Division Meeting Minutes
April 13, 2009
(send corrections to coahranm{at}grinnell.edu)

Student Internships

The following guests from Student Affairs gave a presentation about the services they offer.

- Kathleen Powell, Director of Career Development
- Mike Caldwell, Assistant Director of Career Development for Internships
- Karen Edwards, Director of International Student Affairs

Career Development Office:

A brochure is posted on the CDO website that lists our services:

<http://www.grinnell.edu/offices/cdo/students/includes/CDOBrochure.pdf>

Services include:

- Over 70 workshops are offered per semester on topics such as graduate school, and writing cover letters and resumes.
- “Quick stops”: These are 15-minute walk-in appointments for students on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays.
- “Resume drop”: Students can drop off their resume for feedback with quick turnaround times.

The CDO will be working on a project this summer, reaching out to all REU programs across the country and asking them to post their opportunities on our website (for free). The CDO staff would also appreciate it if faculty could forward all the internship announcements we receive to them as well. The same goes for all on-campus opportunities, including on-campus jobs. The goal is to create as complete a listing of summer opportunities for students each year as possible.

When you advise students, please feel free to call our office or send students to us, to find out about internship and research opportunities that are available out there.

Be aware of the Grinnell Link internship option, which is available to international as well as domestic students. This program provides opportunities for students to do internships with Grinnell Alumni, and get paid through the college. For this reason, international students are also eligible.

Suggestion: It might be helpful if the CDO could list summer research opportunities at Grinnell on their website, as well as opportunities at other campuses. The intent would be to gather the information together to streamline the process for students, and also to allow students to see our research opportunities in the context of others.

International Student Affairs:

Be aware that if international students want to stay in the U.S. after they graduate, they must get a job in their major area. They can only get employment authorization (HB sponsorship) for such a job. As part of their application, they need to show that the job description fits both their major area and their education level.

Students are allowed 12 months of Optional Practical Training (ie, work experience) in the U.S., which can be used either during or after their schooling. Karen Edwards recommends that students save these hours for after graduation, because landing a job after graduation may be more difficult if they are not able to work for 12 full months. Yet, if a student is doing research off-campus, they may have no choice but to spend some of their OPT hours.

However, students in STEM fields, which include most sciences, can apply for an additional 17 months (beyond the standard 12) if their employer uses the “e-verify” system. For students in these fields, using some of their OPT hours during college is less risky.

Students doing research in Grinnell do not face these issues. No work authorization is needed to work or do research at the student's own institution, so no time is deducted from their OPT hours.

Another good solution for some students is to get internal funding from the CDO office to do an internship-like project elsewhere. That makes the project a funded educational experience, so no work authorization is required. However, this approach is not an option for off-campus research projects.

Clearly, these issues are complicated. Feel free to contact Karen Edwards when they come up!

Gender, Women's and Sexuality Studies Major (Asani Seawell and Kathleen Skerrett)

A motion was made and seconded, proposing the creation of a new inter-departmental major in Gender, Women's and Sexuality Studies (GWSS) that will replace the current Gender and Women's Studies Concentration.

In 2008, the college created two new tenure-track positions to teach gender and women's studies, and hired Lakesia Johnson and Astrid Henry into these positions. We now propose to create a new 32-credit major. We do not propose a new department to house it, but rather, an intrinsically interdisciplinary major. The course requirements would be taken from courses that currently exist on campus. (Handouts detailing these were provided.) Current concentrators would be allowed to complete either the current concentration or the new major.

Note that there are no science courses listed among the current GWSS offerings. Consider this an invitation to submit syllabi to the committee for appropriate science courses!

Several reasons for the making the proposal at this time include the following.

- Most of our peer institutions already have majors and/or minors in this area.
- We want to support the work of our new interdisciplinary faculty in GWSS.
- GWSS is now a mature field of study, complete with graduate programs.
- Students who apply to these graduate programs are likely to be considered more seriously with a GWSS major than with a concentration.
- We see the major as fully-funded, in the sense that we already have two faculty fully devoted to GWSS, and a large number of additional GWSS courses are currently being taught by faculty housed in various departments across campus.

- We believe we would not have difficulty filling either of our new GWSS positions if the individuals holding these positions should choose to leave.

Discussion:

Have any students done independent majors in GWSS? (Response: Yes, students have been asking for this major.)

What does the addition of two courses add for students beyond what the concentration offers? (Response: Graduate programs in GWSS expect a major in GWSS. Having a major will also allow us to provide a more rigorous curriculum than we currently do. At present, there are several courses listed as available for concentration credit that have not been taught for years; in contrast, the courses we've listed as "fully funded" are ones that we know will continue. This allows us to ensure a common background for all majors, rather than a hodgepodge of different offerings each semester. We have also hired two new faculty. These are all steps toward adding rigor to the program.)

I am concerned about the argument that the program is already "fully funded." Yes, the program looks great without requiring an increased financial commitment from the institution at this time, but it depends on the individual people who offer these particular courses. Suppose someone central to the program, but from another department, leaves. Will we be able to hire a replacement with expertise in their specific area? Without institutional commitment, will we risk losing the major? I would also like to see institutional commitment with respect to the courses offered. For example, I would like to see courses from the sciences and from at least half of the social sciences. Will our students be disadvantaged for lack of these when they get to graduate school?

Response: We would like to see more courses too and would welcome involvement from the sciences. We also see the new positions that Astrid and Lakesia hold as the institutional commitment for the program. In the current financial downturn, it is unlikely that a greater commitment will be forthcoming soon; however, it may be that making GWSS a full major will help bring about a level of institutional commitment in the event of faculty leaving.

A vote was held on the motion, and it passed unanimously

Grinnell Prison Education Program (John Stone and Kathleen Skerrett)

The Grinnell Prison Education Program is a program in which professors and students offer lectures and some full courses at the Newton Correctional Facility.

The Curriculum Committee is considering a proposal to regularize these courses, which would enable the incarcerated students to get Grinnell college credit for them. We also propose to give a certificate of achievement for students who receive 40 credits in the program. These credits will be transferable to other colleges, and we expect the certificate will help students who wish to attend college after being released.

The Committee is seeking input from each of the divisions on this proposal. It is not yet putting forth a motion to vote on.

Disussion:

To earn credit, the courses should be offered as they currently are at Grinnell. This means there is no way to offer some courses, for example lab chemistry courses. (Response: The restrictions of prison life are real and won't give. The issue is not only with lab sciences. Prisoners have no Internet access, and there is a rule against teaching a foreign language in the prison. So this will require lateral thinking: think about how we would offer our courses for a student who was impaired in some other way that did not allow them to participate in all aspects of the course.)

Perhaps we could use computer simulations, in lieu of lab experiments.

In order to count does a course need to be on the Grinnell College books and taught on campus as well as in the prison? (Response: The course must meet Grinnell standards. The appropriate parallels are the Grinnell-in-London, and Grinnell-in-Washington, programs. These are not taught here, but they get Grinnell credit.)

How often have full courses been taught? If a faculty person does this, is it a volunteer mission, even though credit is offered? (Response: There were two 4-credit courses in history that were taught concurrently in the prison and on campus. Shawn Womack also taught yoga at the Mitchellville prison. Mostly these are taught by senior faculty and SFS faculty.)

Can we honestly say we offering a Grinnell experience to these students? Is a certificate for a Grinnell program, or for an unorganized smattering of courses? Are we offering the students what we claim to be? (Response: This seems to me to be the most troubling question.)

What if we can't staff six courses per year? This is more than one faculty FTE per year. I don't want to see pressure on SFS and senior faculty to teach these. I don't want to see faculty get caught between short-staffed departments, the prison program, and the Dean's office. (Response: There will probably be gaps in the program, so it potentially could take an indefinitely long time to finish the certificate. However, students are tolerant of this. One thing they do have is time.)

If we do this, it must be a serious commitment. It would be cruel if we fail to follow through. (Response: We would like to begin with a 5 years' commitment, and make it clear that is what we are doing. Ultimately, we would like the program to be funded another way, and offering a certificate program may improve our chances of getting external funding.)

Please send additional comments if you have them to John Stone.

Announcement (Mark Levandoski)

The 3D printer, purchased on the HHMI grant, has arrived. There will be a training session Monday April 20, starting at 1:00 pm and running for at least two hours. Let Mark know if you want to attend. Don't worry if you can not attend; there will be plenty of people who attend, and they train others.