

Science Division Meeting Minutes
November 10, 2008
(corrections to coahranm@grinnell.edu)

Miscellaneous Announcements (Clark Lindgren)

1. Greg Ruthig was recently invited by the Alumni Office to give a talk at an alumni event in the Tacoma Park Zoo in Minneapolis. He found the audience very receptive and enjoyed the event. Thus, he would like to encourage all of us to consider doing alumni events.

2. Folk have been asking about the origins of the frog exhibit in the northeastern corner of Noyce 2nd floor. Leslie Wright raised the idea and held focus group meetings for department chairs, last year. The concept was approved, and later Biology and Chemistry approved the use of that particular space. So there was a process, but perhaps it should have been discussed more widely.

Related discussion:

Note that the exhibit is not permanent. It has been publicized that it will be there until May, but Leslie has said we can re-evaluate at the end of the semester and have it removed if we like.

We should get input from students as well. They use the space the most.

One advantage of that space (when there are not frogs in the window) is that people driving by can see our students working.

Does this imply we should ask everyone every time we put things in common space? (Probably not, but blocking a whole window seems dramatic.)

What about the lake-bottom artwork near the Math department? Didn't we vote that out too? (We'll follow up with Leslie.)

Planning Assessment Activities for Interdisciplinary Work (David Lopatto)

Since the upcoming proposals for bridging projects (to be submitted to Leslie Greg-Jolly) need to include a brief description of plans for assessment, David wanted us to know that he is working with a group of researchers from several schools to design classroom assessment instruments for interdisciplinary courses. The group includes Profs. Trish Ferrett of Carleton, Sheldon Wettack of Hope, Mary Walczak of St. Olaf, and Jim Russo of Whitman. They plan to meet in February, perhaps in Grinnell, to develop both quantitative and qualitative rubrics to provide evidence of interdisciplinary learning. They intend to have prototype instruments available that can be used in bridging projects by next year.

Mark Levandoski urged us all not to be afraid of assessment, but to approach it experimentally (i.e., try something, evaluate how well it worked, modify it for next time, etc). Note that our ability to get grants is likely to depend on how well we discuss our efforts at assessment, so it is an important skill.

HHMI Workshops (Mark Levandoski)

Mark passed around a call for proposals for summer workshops intended to foster the development of interdisciplinary curricula. The workshops should lead to concrete ideas for interdisciplinary courses we would like to teach. These could include modifications to current courses, or completely new bridging projects. The handout also includes a reminder of six topic areas that were discussed at the recent HHMI retreat, but other workshop topics would also welcome.

The proposals should be submitted to the Instructional Support Committee by February 2. The HHMI grant has money to fund two of these workshops. If ISC approves more than two, the additional funding will come from the Dean's Office.

Feel free to talk about your ideas with members of the HHMI committee. In particular, the two workshops funded by HHMI will be funded on a first-come first-served basis, so please do keep us informed as you make your plans. (Note that ISC won't coordinate this timing, so it is important that Mark and the HHMI committee are kept informed.) We hope both workshops can happen this summer or perhaps next summer, and we would be happy if more than two occurred.

GSP Interest Inventory (Karen Shuman)

Karen handed out a survey, asking for feedback about who might be interested in participating in various GSP activities over the next few years. She collected the surveys at the end of the meeting, but she would be happy to accept late surveys from folk who were not present.

GSP activities include an opening dinner with students and their families, a faculty panel called "Working the System" where faculty provide information about courses and prerequisites in their departments, and various lab activities that usually involve about 6-8 students.

From time to time, GSP also needs new co-directors. Co-directors oversee the program, which includes several meetings during the spring term for planning, a very busy week before GSP, all day every day during GSP (which is held the week before new student orientation at the end of summer), and multiple reunions during the following year to keep in touch with GSP students. In addition, co-directors may mentor individual students throughout the year. GSP currently has four co-directors, including Joyce Stern.

Curriculum Committee (John Stone)

John relayed several items of business from the Curriculum Committee as follows. In addition, the committee recently endorsed the policy studies concentration: feel free to ask John for more information on this.

New fall registration process:

The committee thought that placement of students via the new registration process went fairly well, and they have only 6 minor improvements to suggest for next year. Note that

more add/drop requests were processed during add/drop period this year than in the past, but it was approximately equal to the number of changes that occurred in previous years at or after registration in Harris. The number of add/drop requests in the science division also increased this year, especially in math and chemistry.

Chris French noted that the time period for incoming students to make their scheduling decisions was shortened this year, and perhaps as a result fewer students asked math professors for placement advice before registration. This may have led to the increased number of add/drops later.

Independent study and course capping policies:

The curriculum committee has also had very preliminary discussions, really just setting as an agenda item, the observation that the number of independent study courses is increasing and may be getting out of hand. Further, the committee would like to persuade departments to think about ways to make the “cap and kick-out” process more transparent to students.

Course designator for interdisciplinary courses:

The committee is also considering what designator to use for college-wide interdisciplinary courses. John would like to see all bridging courses listed under the same acronym (COL) to avoid the impression that some of these courses are superior to others. Other members of the committee would like to use COL only for courses that cross divisions. Students would like these courses to earn divisional credit, for purposes of phi beta kappa and early graduation. John estimated that at most 12 bridging courses would be offered per year.

Clark mentioned that he would like to see all interdisciplinary courses use the descriptor COL, precisely so students won't use these courses to “cheat” on divisional credits. Chuck S. thought COL would be a major improvement over the current system, in which SCI/SST/HUM is used for interdisciplinary courses.

Printed course schedules:

The Registrar is proposing to print and distribute fewer course schedules, given that it cost \$11K to print them (for both terms) this year.

Many people raised concerns about the suggested change. These included the fact that the printed schedule is where students learn about new courses, and that students are likely to print the schedule themselves anyway if it is only available on-line. Elaine noted that the on-line database is often too slow to use during an advising meeting at present and would tend to get slower if it was used more heavily. Bob noted the possibility of the computer going down and causing disruptions if paper schedules were not also available. Chuck S. likes to keep old schedules, but we don't know whether there are plans to keep an archive of old schedules on-line. Further, at present, the on-line database does not show room numbers where courses will be held – this information is only in the printed version.

However, there were others who supported the idea of saving paper, and who noted that students may be more in favor of this change than we are.

Laura suggested that we could try the proposal on a provisional basis, and that a spring semester might be a good time to try it given that demand is 25% lower in spring than in fall.

Others suggested finding ways to reduce the cost of printing the schedules. Ideas for this included reducing the amount of whitespace in the formatting, printing only the fall schedule (rather than the schedule for both terms) in the fall edition, and sending print copies to students only (not faculty). However, Lee finds it useful to have two copies available during an advising meeting, so he and his student can study it concurrently – note that this could not happen if the schedule were only available on-line.

A question was raised about students' use of the on-line course scheduler. Sam and Elaine both observed that their students seemed to use it less this year than last. Janet suggested that the scheduler might be more useful if students could bookmark courses they were still considering (much like they currently dog-ear the pages in the printed schedule), rather than only being able to record a final schedule. She also suggested that we wait at least a semester and try to promote the use of the on-line planner before dropping the printed schedule.

At the close of the discussion, we took two separate votes. First, a show of hands of people strongly in favor of printing fewer schedules (5), versus folks strongly opposed (17). Separately, a show of hands for people in favor of waiting a few semesters to promote on-line planning before removing the printed schedule (20).

Other Business (Clark Lindgren)

Lindgren: We are on the home stretch for EKI proposals, and there has not yet been an EKI proposal coming from the science division as a whole. If you are interested in being on a committee to brainstorm ideas on this, let Clark know. Ideally, such a committee would include people from each department. Note that other divisions have done this and have had EKI positions come from it.

Levandoski: Recall the resounding “NO” from the faculty at our recent faculty meeting, when asked whether we should “pause for reflection in the EKI hiring process.” I suggest that instead of pausing, we should lobby the administration for additional hires, given our expanded number of students and our desire to continue having small courses. We must lobby for this if we want it. It isn't often that the administration gives us a gift of new faculty.

K. Jacobson: It is important for departments to continue letting council know how registration is going for each dept. Concerns regarding class sizes and registration difficulties boiled over last year, but has quieted down now. If there are still concerns, it is important to let council know.

Question: Do you know whether term hires will get funded this year?

K. Jacobson: We are working on that now. We want to be a bit more deliberative than in the past. The number of requests has gone up, but there has been talk about keeping the number of term appointments the same as last year.

Sullivan: We now get ½ teaching credit for teaching lab, but some colleges give full credit for lab time. As we teach more workshop style courses, the line between lab and other time is

blurring, so it might be time to consider giving full credit for lab time.

Lindgren: Reviewing teaching loads isn't on Council's agenda now, but perhaps it should be.

Meeting Adjourned.