**NOTES from the Second**

**CSB/SJU JOINT FACULTY FORUM on the COMMON CURRICULUM
Tuesday, November 12th, 2013
SJU Q264**

The forum was called to order by chair Pam Bacon at 4:33 p.m., who introduced the other members of the ad hoc committee: Bret Benesh, Emily Esch, David Arnott and Terry Check. Pam encouraged anyone who might have additional comments, suggestions for soliciting feedback, etc. to see one of the committee members. She also reviewed the charge to the committee, i.e. to determine suggestions for changes, suggestions which will be handled by next year’s chair, Terry. Bret Benesh will be timing comments, and those who have not spoken will be called on before those who have; she especially encouraged new faculty to participate.

As in the first Forum on Nov. 6th, the committee had prepared a set of questions in a PowerPoint, *Faculty Forum on the CC.pptx* [a print copy of which is attached to the archival copy of these minutes].

Slide 1:

* What is the purpose of the Common Curriculum?
* How does the Common Curriculum fit the liberal arts mission?
* What should all of our students learn by the time they graduate?

**Discussion**:

1. Jennifer Galovich: You may or may not want to respond to this, but would it be appropriate to ask about the Wabash document that was sent to us? That was prepared two years ago, correct? I don’t recall seeing it before. Who compiled it, what did they do, and who did they talk to?
2. Pam: Can anyone in the room address the origin of the report and when we saw it?
3. Ken Jones: That is our consultant’s report, and came at the beginning rather than the end. We didn’t know how to go forward. We got help from the center that specializes in liberal arts education, and they met with both presidents, all the academic administrators, and about a dozen committee chairs. They met with students. Some here may have met with them. They gave us that report, and we took pieces to guide us.
4. Jennifer: Did they meet with faculty? Ken: Yes, with the committee chairs and with the chairs of those departments affected by the Common Curriculum.
5. John Olson: My memory is that, at the end of the report, there is detail about the report and who they met with.
6. Fr. Rene McGraw: I want to speak not about Philosophy, but to say that I think the purpose of the liberal arts is not well served by our current shrunken Common Curriculum, and we need to use the Common Curriculum to ensure that students do not load up on taking two majors and minors, and not too much in their own major. And to get a broader look. A study of the Common Curriculum includes the number of double majors, minors, and how many are staying within their own department. Expand this to be a real liberal arts college.
7. Greg Schroeder: I believe the purpose is also to ensure the health of the departments that deliver it. We should be mindful of the enrollment impact of the Common Curriculum. I don’t think it’s inappropriate to say that the health of some departments is at risk if we don’t funnel students into them. At a liberal arts college it’s important to take math, literature, and languages. The Common Curriculum should be the more idealistic of our components, and it should be coercive if necessary.
8. Sunil Chetty: I might be idealistic, but I tried to think about how the Common Curriculum fits the institutional academic goals. It seems that the Common Curriculum should be shaped around general academic goals that provide breadth. Students can get really skilled at critical thinking within their discipline, but we should identify what the different disciplines can contribute, to shape it within goals we already have. They have their interests, and those can be guided by society, but it is our duty to show that other disciplines have value that may not be apparent. All can be accomplished if we fit things into goals we already have, and determine how much of a discipline is needed for a broad education. Reading the goals for each department, they seem haphazard.
9. Jean Keller: I’m not sure if this is the purpose of the current Common Curriculum, or what it should be, but when we had those discussions, the purpose was to make it smaller. There was not a vision for what we wanted it to be. That encapsulates what so many people’s frustrations are. How should our Common Curriculum be? We talked about what students should learn, but the predominate question, to shrink it down, perverted the process. What should students learn? I keep getting hamstrung because even juniors and seniors in my senior seminar need remedial help to write a good paper. Sometimes it seems like I am teaching FYS in the Ethics courses
10. Gordon Brown: In some sense I echo what people have said; we should decide what we want our students to learn by the time they graduate, and the Common Curriculum gets them from where they start to where we want them to be. The challenge is that not much in the Common Curriculum is really common: just the Senior Seminar. We also have to think about what makes us unique: what can we give them that other places can’t? The purpose is not just to deliver what we think they should have when they graduate, but also to brand us (I hate to use that marketing term). What makes our schools unique? Why come here? What makes us distinctive? Our Common Curriculum is too big for what it delivers. If a senior can’t write, the Common Curriculum is too big. Make it smaller, or increase the value.
11. Susan Riley: As an FYS instructor, I would like to apologize for students I have sent on. I have been struggling with it for 12 years, and have never felt I have succeeded. I have tried every strategy I can find. I always make notes about what I will change the following fall, and am getting discouraged; this is beyond what I can do. FYS is failing in part because there are too many goals. We need to focus on the goals we really want, such as writing.
12. Ben Faber: I think we need to use the Common Curriculum to remind students that human beings are uniquely built to enjoy learning new things, to be challenged by knowledge and to find success in finding new knowledge.
13. Christi Siver: I know before this Common Curriculum there was a Core Curriculum based on writing flags and skills; why was that moved away from? It seems like we would all agree on skills like writing.
14. Jennifer: I don’t think I would agree that it was *based on* those skills, though there were those flags. Exploring the Human Condition, the original Core Curriculum, looked much like the current one, only bigger. The flags were what was bigger. And when we tried to adjust those flags, there were a couple where we declared victory as a faculty and moved on.
15. Greg: Two places on which we declared victory were the quantitative flag and the discussion flag; also writing. We had gutted the old core by…one of the values of the previous Core Curriculum was the document on the human condition. What we don’t have now is a document stating what is important. When I was teaching the First Year Symposium before it became the First Year Seminar, I used *Exploring the Human Condition* to help me figure out what we had and why. We lost the overarching articulation of values manifested in that nice little booklet we all had on our shelves. I know Ken was working after the fact to try to come up with one. But the lack of that guiding philosophy is important.
16. Katie Johnson: I’m wondering, with the shifts that happen in society, if we should be asking our Institutional Research and Admission people what our students are looking like. If they are arriving with fewer writing skills, we need something to address that. I don’t know how we do that.

Slide 2:

* Do you feel a shared ownership of the Common Curriculum?
* Is it important for faculty members to feel shared ownership of the Common Curriculum?
* To what extend do you see the Common Curriculum as an important part of a CSB/SJU education?

**Discussion**:

1. Wendy Sterba: I’m confused, having just read hundreds of pages and the outside agency’s report. They comment on there being no common curriculum. I see nothing common, nothing we’ve agreed upon, and we need to start over and talk about the Core and its nature. If feel no connection whatsoever to the new Common Curriculum, and feel frustrated. I have to thank Ken for his marvelous job on analyzing all that data, but it doesn’t represent my experience. The numbers say students are taking as many Humanities as they did in the past, but courses are getting shut down in Humanities disciplines. The two years that we chose to compare – are they flukes? I think we need to look at a succession of years. I’m frustrated.
2. Gordy Brown: My answer to the first question is no, and to the second, an emphatic yes. We all need to believe in our Common Curriculum. To question 3, I see it as the most important thing we can do. A student can major in Biology anywhere, but I don’t think they can get an idealistic version of a liberal arts education anywhere. That would distinguish us if we did it well.
3. Rene: I obviously feel that we need to be very careful with the Philosophy department to get students involved, but at the foundation, we are dealing with turf battles—that people want something for their own department, and to hell with the rest. Going through the arguments about changes to this Common Curriculum – so much was double majors, minors, etc. – unless the whole faculty is committed to saying no, stop, don’t try to get a double major, triple major, etc. But we are so engaged in turf battles that we don’t look at the whole institution.
4. Wendy: I have been reading the Teagle Report on double majors, saying that students that tend to do them don’t take proportionately longer to graduate; different institutions of various sizes suggest that students are better able to go out into the world, connect different disciplines, etc. As an example, in the foreign languages students almost always have a double major. It’s a complicated report, but I don’t think double majors are necessarily the problem here. Turf battles aside, there are things we do agree are important to our students, and they have to be able to express themselves in papers and in the work they do in math.
5. Mark Thamert: I am concerned that, since the loss of the flags and the Judeo-Christian Heritage taught by faculty across the curriculum, we are also taking away professional development opportunities among our colleagues. The faculty member had to have strong professional development to create courses in Gender, etc. We concentrated the Judeo-Christian component into the Theology department and Ethics mostly into the Philosophy department, and I think we lost ownership in that process.
6. Ben: At some level we need to have shared ownership, but I don’t think it’s possible at the specific level. We won’t ever all agree on lots and lots of parts. If we think it at least marginally accomplishes it, that’s a reasonable goal.
7. Tom Sibley: I remember when we talked of everyone teaching one book in common. We couldn’t agree on that; we are way too independent. The commonness isn’t because of content, it’s because of attitude, how we teach each of our courses. I teach math as a liberal art. Lots of places can teach computer science as a technical course, but we work really hard to teach them as a liberal art. We have things in common, but we are way too independent to have a common curriculum.
8. Greg: Scott Johnson asked how many of us were here when we voted in the Common Curriculum. Most of the people now executing the curriculum weren’t the ones who created it. As we listen, obviously some of us are still fighting lost battles. But we have new colleagues, and although some of us are still smarting from the last round, we do want to move forward. But we don’t want to forget what we did the last time around. Mark talked about moving from Judeo-Christian to upper division theology, and the flags. Let us remember that when we changed the Gender flag to a Gender designation, the lower divisions in the Humanities no longer had a Gender component; and we ratcheted up the requirements for the Gender designation, which meant that it was something that not everyone could own. Not all of us are specialists in feminist theory, which was cited specifically in the discussion about the Gender designation. So that was one consequence. We changed the Senior Sem to the Ethics component, and ratcheted it up; you had to have training in Ethics. The old Senior Sem we essentially saddled onto the Study Abroad directors, who, regardless of their qualifications, were teaching 50% of those classes. It’s entirely reasonable to ask ourselves if it was reasonable to do that for people not trained in feminist ethics, etc. They either train up, or they don’t. You have to deliver the Core regardless of whether you are qualified to provide it.
9. Mark: A first year student at Yale has to read the *Rule of Benedict*. If Yale can teach that tiny common book, I think we can.

Slide 3:

In the review of our Common Curriculum, the Wabash group pointed out that faculty were reluctant to arrange for common experiences across courses (e.g., common readings, assignments, linked sections). The Wabash report noted “we do not typically hear that degree of reluctance to agree to common actions at other campuses with which we have worked. It was especially notable in light of the many comments about the strength of community at CSB/SJU.”

* Do you think the Wabash group’s comments are accurate?
* How might the reluctance to develop common experiences influence our students’ Common Curriculum experience?

**Discussion**:

1. Jennifer: Yes, I think the comments are accurate. However, it is not clear. I think that faculty may be reluctant to arrange for those common experiences because there is no common framework. I’m not sure why I would be doing that. I arrange for my FYS to do something with the Theater department, but as a sort of general “we ought to be doing this kind of thing.” It’s not clear what the goal is that we would achieve. Faculty are reluctant when we haven’t articulated what are really the commonalities, not a common content but a common sense of why are we doing this?
2. Bob Bell: I taught FYS two years ago, and two weeks into the semester they published the “End of Men” article. I asked if the FYS instructors would consider sharing it with all the sections, and I think I got one response from the 52 sections. Maybe it was too late into the semester—two weeks—but I was disappointed that so few were willing to discuss it.
3. Gordy: Regarding the last point, to develop common experiences, I think in our various settings, if we think the liberal arts are important, we have the burden on our shoulders to emulate that for our students. If I never talk about anything other than science in class, they may wonder why this guy with a PhD doesn’t demonstrate in any way an interest in the liberal arts. We need to showcase a way that we are all interested in the liberal arts to show them why it’s important that they do it.
4. Rachel Marston: I am new in the English department. I’ve been struggling my way through FYS and looking at other schools’ FY/seminar experiences, and there is something to be said about common content. What about semantics, or a book that worked across not just the Humanities, but also the sciences? Sections in FYS aren’t covering just writing, but also literary works, and current events. We have a lot of experts on our campus, and maybe this is too lofty or prescriptive, but I wonder about having some more common content that could have built-in change.
5. Jean: Historians are telling us not to look at the history, but to move forward. A common experience we used to have is that we needed FYS to have a two-year theme with more encouragement to do collaboration; I would find those kinds of conversations rich and good for the students.
6. Susan: Coming from the Social Sciences, each of the disciplines is another way of looking at the world. Students could see how we do that, and it would be the liberal arts in a living way.
7. Ken: As an old person in the room, I loved the suggestions about common pieces; I have offered money to FYS to come together to create clustered courses to share a reading, etc. And have averaged maybe 1 ½ courses per year for the last several years. I’m not sure that fits with our human nature. When we had interdisciplinary courses we had structure for courses to do that. An interdisciplinary Humanities course required two people to come together to teach a course. We didn’t like that. We had Social Sciences come together to teach a particular problem; people said it was too much work. We have had experiences with this before, and if we want to do it, we have to understand that it is more work. Tom is right, we are independent, and work avoidance is human nature.
8. Patty Klug: I teach an FYS course, “Disconnected or Connected?” I’m not an expert in technology or computer science, but I have felt responsible to bring those into the discussion. We don’t have to be experts to bring them in. I am brand new. It is a responsibility to show we are from a liberal arts background and have curiosity about all these disciplines. Even though I am an expert in literature, I don’t just do literature, but I bring things in from across disciplines. I don’t have all the answers about neuroscience research, but we can talk about it. Liberal arts create curiosity for a lifetime. I can show a passion and commitment that I am still learning myself. That commitment comes from believing in that education and not getting wrapped up in a particular expertise.
9. Susan: Ken’s point is a good one, so I wonder if there would be a way to do it without the extra work? Thinking about Rachel’s idea, if, for example, if we could decide on a theme that could last two years, we wouldn’t have to coordinate it, we can pack it with our disciplines: this is the way a biologist or an historian would tell us about this.
10. Rachel: I engage students with literature, but also give them the opportunity to talk about moral issues, and engage them that way. If we also make it easier to coordinate with others, to have someone from Biology give an evening lecture, that will get all FYS students talking about it—a way, as Susan was saying, where we could do this and feel more connected, but not feeling really burdened or disagreeing about common texts.
11. Greg: Jennifer talked about the lack of a framework to give us an incentive to do something in common; we would of necessity follow our own expertise. We need to build the common.
12. Ken: That’s essentially a resource question, and last time we didn’t talk about how we would pay for the Core. The idea of having something in common, we have to say it’s common, and expect it from each other, or there is no reason for anyone to do it. If reallocation of resources in needed, that has to be part of the discussion.
13. Christi: I’ve been thinking about the resource question. I haven’t taught FYS, but I teach an ethics course. And we need the resources to get everybody and the departments on board. We have seen turf wars, and we want to have students in our department because that is part of how we are evaluated. We need to address the turf concerns, and there have to be resources to help faculty understand and buy into it. I feel behind the curve because I never had the common training for teaching Ethics.
14. Wendy: I was between Ken and Greg in arriving on campus. There were a lot of people invested in the First Year Symposium, with meetings and discussions, and there were funds granted to it. If we can have a framework to which we are committed, and funding, we can reduce the requirements of what we expect of a lot of FYS people. I still have to figure out how to get 8 million things into my course. Maybe we need to pare down our expectations. I would love to have a common theme, and to work with other colleagues. Jennifer and I went to Reed College, where everyone had to take Ancient Greek; maybe we could work on some in-between possibilities, but we need to get everybody on board.
15. Todd Johnson: We are talking about students that are here, but if things look too out of the ordinary, are we going to attract different—and more, or less, students? Do we need to consider that, and what it will do to long-term goals?

Slide 4: Any other comments about the Common Curriculum?

**Discussion**:

1. Mark: One aspect of downsizing the Core was that our costs would be much lower. Having Senior Sem meant we would pull underutilized people from many departments to teach courses across the curriculum. I wonder if there is an analysis of the finances.
2. Mike Reagan: It concerns me how many students come in with high school credits that allow them to avoid our Common Curriculum elements. On a practical level, I know retention fell last year; did that have anything to do with students graduating early? That concerns me.
3. Bob Bell: I’m on APSAC, and we are looking at that now.
4. Greg: If the ad hoc committee does not yet have Chuck Wright’s assessment reports for the Intercultural and the Gender components, there were a lot of good points there. Pam: Yes, we do.
5. Jessy O’Reilly: If there are to be changes, they should be in upper division writing, either in their major or a general class. I see students coming out of FYS knowing how to structure a paper pretty well, but once they get a few years of coursework and have to work with their disciplinary material, I’d like to see writing hit at the upper division level as well as first thing.
6. Ben: Two thoughts on specific things we could institute: One, to make the courses the most fun, within every department, have courses that are really purely for the Common Curriculum, and that allow partnering faculty to teach what they want to teach the most, which may not fit within the regular content of the major. Second, across majors—and apparently this was something that existed before—with pairs of faculty developing courses. It’s harder to do because it’s new, but it’s easier when you only have to do half a course, a course where we act as students across disciplines, demonstrating those things.
7. Richard Ice: First, about the AP credits, department chairs are looking at that, and we must also take into consideration our peer and national colleges; we don’t want to have good students going somewhere else. It’s complex, but we are looking at it. For the retention issue, there is a committee. As we get more national students, retention gets difficult; it is harder to keep students the farther they go from home. But I’ve asked them to look not only at why some leave, but why others stay, to make programming more consistent. We are not seeing them graduating early, as some thought.
8. Emily Esch: That’s not entirely true. The St. Ben’s students are leaving early, more than three times as many as at St. John’s, an important thing to consider.
9. Richard: Retention is a factor of three as well, however, and retention is different from early graduation.
10. Wendy: We should all thank Ken for the amazing work he did on preparing the analysis.
11. Ken received a round of applause.

**ADJOURNMENT:** The Forum ended at 5:33 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted by Peggy Roske*