**NOTES from the**

**CSB/SJU JOINT FACULTY FORUM on the Common Curriculum  
Wednesday, November 6th, 2013  
CSB HCC Alumnae Hall**

The forum was called to order by chair Pam Bacon at 4:33 p.m., who would be conducting the forum along with Bret Benesh and Emily Esch, two other members of the Common Curriculum Program Review (CCPR) ad hoc committee. Another member, David Arnott, was also present; the fifth member, Terry Check, could not be. Pam encouraged anyone who might have additional comments, suggestions for soliciting feedback, etc. to see one of the committee members.

To provide some structure to the discussion, 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]. Bret will be timing responses, as needed.

**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. Kaarin Johnston: Are you asking about the common curriculum we have now, or what we seek in one? Pam: Either one.
2. Derek Larson: The fact that we have to ask these questions shows that our current one is hopelessly lost.
3. Pam: Part of our goal is to make recommendations to the Senate for the next steps with the Common Curriculum. Answers to these questions will help guide us in the potential next steps, c revision, etc.
4. Don Fisher: I’m glad we have the opportunity to talk about this; in the last go round we jumped into what it was going to be before talking about its purpose. What does it mean to be a liberal arts institution and what do we want our students got be like, think like, and value when they leave? What are the pieces we need to put in place to create our new common curriculum?
5. Chuck Wright: I want to observe – not mine, this was in the document - we really don’t have a common curriculum. As to the question on the purpose, one of them is to provide a common set of learning experiences for students; what we have is a general education curriculum, with a menu of options students can follow as they choose. We have to decide what that experience is and what they should learn. As in general ed, they are forced to take courses outside their major; as a Gen Ed program, it seems to be functional.
6. Richard Wielkiewicz: When we did this I requested that we have an essay or document that describes it, which has never shown up. We have no thesis, and are afraid to take a risk and say what we stand for. I am embarrassed to the core when I teach a course on environmental ethics and few take it; if we don’t get the environment worked in, don’t expect to see me at any more meetings.
7. Patricia Bolanos: Rather than talking about the purpose, we need to talk about what a general grad requirement should be. I second what was said: what do we want our students to be like, to value? We haven’t said what we want students to know and speak knowledgeably about.
8. Leigh Dillard: I find they aren’t capable of connecting the dots and have no way of coming out with a cohesive way of looking at the world. They check things off the list and don’t put the pieces together.
9. Maureen McCarter: I second what Richard said regarding the students getting through college without addressing issue important to their futures. What pertinent issues are they going to be facing that we are not preparing them to face down the line? We need to discuss this and equip them to deal with those.

**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. Dave Arnott asked, how many present teach a course in the Common Curriculum, either an FYS or a disciplinary course that meets a Common Curriculum requirement? Just about everyone raised their hand.
2. Kaarin: It isn’t a common curriculum, it’s a “cafeteria curriculum.”
3. Janna LaFountaine: Are there some models we have looked at that are something we would like, or could at least compare to what we would like, across the country, a model to go forward instead of just throwing arrows?
4. Patricia: I was part of a task force for the Common Curriculum, and we looked at different models, sent out information, and got feedback. We got feedback from most of you about what you wanted, such as to have fewer Humanities requirements and more Theology. But it is difficult to talk about ownership, and if we were part of building this. All of us gave feedback in some shape or form. There are good models, in my viewpoint, but that may not be shared. St. Mary’s in Notre Dame is an example; it requires a lot more courses than we have now.
5. Don: Again, we are jumping forward without addressing what we want to do, which should drive which model we want to use. What is a liberal arts education from CSB/SJU? Set goals, and then figure out how to implement it. Do I feel shared ownership? I do, in the parts that I can share. Our department doesn’t fit nicely into the structure—no Humanities or Natural Science designation—so we have to look for parts we can fit in: Gender, Experiential Learning, Cultural—the idea rather than the box to check off. Most disciplines can probably look at something related to those (Gender, etc.). Look at the goal and understand it – for example, the Social Sciences. We don’t really fit in there very well.
6. Kaarin: I’m old, so I remember *Exploring the Human Condition*, with its beautiful philosophy; and I’ve stayed so long because of those values, such as human dignity, which we still hopefully believe in. But we don’t talk about those much anymore; how will that get students a job? They have to be creative thinkers, look at the world and see what’s needed. To have check list of what they need to have—there are multiple ways to serve it other than a checklist. We had a start there.

**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. Kaarin: On the nose!
2. Ben Faber: When I read this, the way they wrote it, it’s almost like there aren’t components that actually mention experiences that much. I wasn’t here when it became the Common Curriculum. What are we organizing around? There are at least two or three different principles. Content? Distribution requirements? Experiences? Skills? Issues? My sense is that we never decided on those organizing principles, or others. So we don’t agree on common experiences or what the requirements are intended to do. It’s the first question: do we agree on which organizing principles we will use?
3. Parker: It wasn’t just about common experiences; it was a willingness to fulfill common requirements. There is an oversight issue. If someone is not willing to have their students do those four papers—that seems inappropriate. On the common readings and assignments, I understand that if you are in the Humanities, you might be more comfortable with readings and discussion. But to impose that on a math or economics professor for whom that isn’t where our strength lies, and if you impose, on top of that, a set of common readings that don’t resonate with us, as a teacher, it’s hard. A common canon for an English professor in the past is one thing, but an economics professor now is a different thing.
4. Chuck: From my own department we have some 100-level intro Common Curriculum courses. Take, say, 101, Social Philosophy: depending on who teaches it, it can be completely different course. There is no felt imperative to have a common course addressing common principles. If they take Philosophy 125, you can expect they have learned something, but not what that is. Our choices are highly individualistic. I don’t know if our courses are indicative. The resistance to coordinating pedagogical content across courses—I see that in my department.
5. Ken: The reason why the committee asked this question was that I asked them to. The intent was to get at the interdisciplinary issue. We talk about our students coming out able to see broad boundaries. What are the barriers here? Are we in departmental silos? Our schedules? Lots of factors. I wasn’t asking if Philosophy 125 sections all have to be taught the same way, or if people need to use the same books. It’s about working across disciplines.
6. Patricia: We could, if possible, all decide on what it is we value and then determine how our departments will interpret that, and weave them together. If we can’t agree, we will have things imposed upon us.
7. Richard: It’s telling that we had to hire someone to tell us these things. We didn’t need an outside consultant. Can’t we make up our own mind on what our curriculum could be?

**Slide 4:** Any other comments about the Common Curriculum?

**Discussion**:

1. Vincent: I’ve had talks with Chuck about the Gender learning goals. On the handout sent to us, page 5, learning goal number 3 strikes me as ridiculously restrictive. It doesn’t include religion, or science; and I’m sure others would add other things. We need to revisit the Gender learning goals.
2. Maureen: I have issues with the Gender learning goals; they do not mention LGBT people, an enormous gap.
3. Jean Lavigne: I would like us to talk about what has happened since we implemented the Common Curriculum. I read the report, and have questions, but I thought, at a meeting we had at the beginning of the year, that we would have access to the data from the report. Can we see the raw data and make that available? I think there are more questions to be asked and more uses for the data. People would look at their own departments and their own divisions, and it isn’t fair to ask one or two people to do all that. There are other things I can’t understand given the data that’s here. In 2007, 355 students met their NS requirement with Nutrition courses; that then dropped to 99. I don’t know that I can interpret it, either. I would like to see the data.
4. Ken: The report was constructed from piles and piles of student transcript records. There is no spreadsheet that gives you all that. I would be very happy to share all the transcripts with you. I’m sorry the data doesn’t make sense in parts; I was hoping the committee could help me try to explain those parts. Banner doesn’t pull the information that we all want in an individual way. We go line by line through what students did and count it all.
5. Pam: The committee has been struggling with it. As we have read everything on the SharePoint site, we wondered about getting back to the big picture. Are all the numbers going to help, or do we want to think of it from the bigger picture of our goals? That’s how we approached it.
6. Cindy Malone: Regarding trying to figure out what our students should know, my editing and publishing course involves writing, editing, critical thinking, and basic arithmetic. I am deeply disturbed by the level of ability I see in basic writing and arithmetic. I would like students to be able to write clearly and accurately and understand basic math.
7. Vincent: I had a conversation with Richard Ice about international students and the level of language capabilities with which they come. I have had a wonderful student but with very poor English skills whose comprehension was not nearly adequate. We aren’t doing them justice. It’s an Admissions problem, to some degree; and we, the faculty, have to have a discussion about the level of competence we expect from the students for whom English is a first language and those for whom it isn’t, some described standards. I do make compromises for those students who come without English. I’m not sure we should be accepting all these students. It isn’t just international students, either, as I’m sure I don’t have to tell you.
8. Richard: I endorse what Cindy said. And yes, I felt ownership when I taught FYS, but it is damn hard work, and there is no follow-up, or it’s random. We aren’t going to get there if we don’t follow through. There needs to be follow through.
9. Chuck: On the shared ownership issue, my own experience is a bit divided. In teaching and being involved in shaping the assessment goals, I try hard to integrate them, and have a robust sense that a course is part of a larger shared endeavor. My colleagues share it as well. The assessment work I’ve been doing makes me hope that will come out of it. The other courses to meet the Humanities requirement – it isn’t as robust, nor a clear set of shared goals – it’s a divided experience. As Richard said, there is no thesis required, and lacking that, it is hard to have a sense of contributing to something we are all engaged in.
10. Don: We need to think about what our students are going to be like when they graduate and how to get them there. If we can identify those goals, then I can look at my courses and see how I can support the Common Curriculum. We may have to come back to the flag thing and make sure students can write, etc. We need shared ownership. As a department, it defines what our institutional priorities are. How can our department support the Common Curriculum, so when you write a departmental report, you can say how you are preparing students for life after they leave here? And the reports should mesh.
11. Jeff Diamond: As a newer faculty member, not knowing what thought went into it, maybe it would help if people could see how it evolved and to know why it was done. What presumptions did people make? Even now there are presumptions about what to do. It would help to know what the thinking was earlier.
12. Ben: Another question that maybe should have been up there: getting to the macro level. How much should we be thinking about changing, and using the micro data we have?
13. Kaarin: If you believe students should come out as certain types of people, until we have some idea of what we want, it’s not going to happen.
14. Parker: In Econ we have learning goals for the Social Sciences on all our syllabi; and when I look at the learning goals, I don’t agree with all the Common Curriculum requirements, but that’s beside the point. But the learning goals seem to be good. We had long debates over what we’d come up with, but with Gender, Critical Thinking, etc., they are all there; the question is whether they are being implemented. I think they are clearly described; the question is whether those are what we want. They are clear and delineated. Do we want them?
15. Emily: A lot of the Common Curriculum goals are not being assessed by departments. In general, they focus on departmental goals, not the Common Curriculum
16. Derek: As I recall, the goals were created after we decided on the requirements. We wanted to not be disruptive, so departments didn’t lose students. It explicitly ignores Don’s and our departments. We are challenged when we try to get designations. It isn’t all that different to push people toward the places we want them to go, spread them out, get people in the right places, the enrollment where it should be.
17. Ben: How disruptive, if at all, is the curriculum? We have FYS solely for the purpose of the Common Curriculum. Is there anything else that exists solely for the Common Curriculum, or just label courses within existing departments?
18. Mike Tangredi: Plenty have introduced courses for non-majors, for example the Math department; we have courses that don’t serve any purpose other than to provide a Common Curriculum experience for people majoring in things that are not mathematical. In the science division there are plenty of such courses.
19. Leigh: I was hired simply to provide courses for the Fine Arts designation, and nothing at all for the Common Curriculum.
20. Don: The way we are structured, it would be hard for faculty from different departments to come together and teach a course other than Gender, Experiential, and Cultural. We should have more interdisciplinary interaction to achieve the Common Curriculum goals.

**Slide 5**:

What was your reaction to the process used to develop the Common Curriculum?

Do you have suggestions for how to improve the process?

**Discussion**:

1. Derek: There was an ad hoc committee which spent a year and a half looking at models, all disappeared into the ether.
2. Karin: The third committee.
3. Derek: We kept starting over again, and once we started the process, it had to be smaller, simpler, disciplinary; we took the old one and lopped a few branches off. Then we got tired of it. The mass meeting with the clickers—click your vote and we were done. And then: oh, we need learning goals.
4. Mike: Two curricula ago, we did have a lot of discussions. We were a smaller, simpler place without so many interdisciplinary courses. The motivation to switch seems to be that the old program was too large. How do we perform surgery on it? We had a can-do attitude. How many think there ought to be a Humanities course? A Math course? It was an illusion of consensus driven by someone who decided on the questions beforehand with little discussion.
5. Madhu Mitra: The last time, we voted on separate elements of it, never on the whole package.
6. Kaarin: One problem is, you can see how many people are here. Those of a certain age remember the clickers; I don’t know if the younger faculty are too nervous? Those who went through it might be tired. You younger ones don’t know the complex history. When we think something is incredible, we don’t necessarily know how it rolls itself out with Academic Advising. We just go “oh well…!”
7. Peggy Retka: That’s why I am here; my programs are built around the Common Curriculum, and whatever you decide, I will build the programs in Study Abroad around them, so we can continue that tradition. We are all chasing the box, and students are too. They don’t make good use of their electives. Students have choice, but don’t know how to deal with it. We are all trying to check the boxes to show that we are relevant and adequate. It is coming full circle and we are chasing our tails to make sure we can see students in our area.
8. Jean: Not only use of their electives, but also the number of students who graduate early: the number who are deciding that, with the reduced Common Curriculum, “I can take something in the summer.” I have a student now who is leaving a year early, with a few courses taken elsewhere. The change is pretty striking in the data; we go from 23 to 60 in 2011 graduating early, just for CSB. That seems to be their choice: they prefer not to take electives.
9. Ken: You can see there are also students spending more than 8 semesters here. Women outperform the men, and are more likely to graduate early because they come in with more credits. I don’t see a disaster there; what does the data tell us, not anecdotal information.
10. Jean: When we have 10% of the senior class graduating early…
11. Ken: We don’t have the trend line, and are looking at really small numbers of students. If four students change their minds in a division, that is huge.
12. Don: We need to look at how many students are coming here with a large number of college credits. How many are they coming in with? Those are all questions that impact the Common Curriculum.

Ken added an apology for the formatting of a document and the availability of the correct version and its tables in landscape.

**ADJOURNMENT:** The Forum ended at 5:32 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted by Peggy Roske*