Minutes of the March 12, 2019 faculty meeting

The meeting was called to order at 3:05 p.m. in Harris Hall by Dean Adrian Randolph.

I. The minutes of the Faculty Meeting of October 30, 2018 were approved with a correction to point IV, adding “academic year 2019-2020.”

II. Assistant Dean for Curriculum and Assessment Laura Panko gave the second reading of the Proposal for an Art Theory and Practice Minor. The department determined to develop a proposal for a minor to provide an academic structure for students wishing to pursue a course of study in Art Theory and Practice, but who cannot commit to a major. The dean noted that a webform had been created to collate comments after the first reading.

Dean Randolph moved for a vote and majority approved.

III. Assistant Dean for Curriculum and Assessment Laura Panko gave the first reading of the Proposal for a Data Science Minor in the Department of Statistics. This is a proposal for a six-course Minor in Data Science, offered by the Department of Statistics. The Minor would be available to statistics majors and minors, as well as to those majoring in other WCAS departments and programs.

Assistant Professor of Instruction Arend Kuyper noted that the expected number of enrolled students would be 40 to 55. Professor Susan Manning from the Department of English wondered what would be the difference between data science and statistics. Professor Kuyper replied that there would be overlap, but that data science would focus on the computational aspects of data science.

Professor Jackie Stevens of the Department of Political Science noted her concern for incentivizing “certificates,” and observed that this might focus more students on obtaining a certificate rather than on taking courses to develop intellectual capital unrelated to their major/minor. Dean Randolph noted that there are not yet certificates offered by the College. Associate Professor of Instruction Beth Andrews replied that a minor would enable students to bring data science back into their own field of study, and that the specific sequence of courses would develop expertise.

Assistant Professor of Instruction Michael Maltenfort voiced concern that the series of courses for a minor in statistics was limited. Professor Sandy Zabell responded that the minor would be more flexible for students. Assistant Dean Laura Panko noted that a minor in data science would be helpful as a signal to students, helping them understand that there is flexibility and broad knowledge beyond the humanities.

Professor Kuyper noted that electives would depend on the student’s home department, and that the course list would be expanding.
Assistant Professor of Instruction Michael Maltenfort wondered how courses would be counted for students when their statistic majors overlapped with their data science minors. Professor Zabell noted that while courses couldn’t be double-counted, they would be reviewed based on each student’s particular case.

IV. Associate Dean for Academic Initiatives Ann Bradlow gave the first reading of the Proposal for modifications to the Weinberg College degree requirements. She outlined the modifications as follows: the creation and introduction of the college-wide learning goals: Observe, Critique, Reflect, Express. Second, the introduction of two overlay requirements that fall under the category of When-Cultures-Meet learning goals — one that focuses on cultural interactions in the USA, and anther with a global orientation. The third modification was a restructured writing requirement: one First-Year Writing Seminar and one course in Year Two or later in Advanced Expression. The fourth modified goals for the Fall Quarter First-Year Seminar and separated the writing portion to a writing seminar (see third modification), and moved to the goal of ensuring that the first-year seminar focuses more wholly on transitioning and supporting student during their first year at the College. The fifth and final modification was an update to the names, descriptions, and learning goals for the Foundational Disciplines. Dean Bradlow shared that the webform for comments was still open, and encouraged faculty to share their thoughts there.

Dean Bradlow outlined a brief history of the Committee on Degree requirements activities, beginning with the appointment of the committee members in February 2016, the submission of the final report to the Dean in 2017, and the Foundational Disciplines Convention held in the spring of 2018.

Professor Maltenfort expressed that he had concerns with the overlays, and didn’t believe that the overlays accurately address the specifics of diversity and inclusion. He recommended stronger language, similar to that used in the Hewlett curricular fellowship. Professor Susan Manning noted that the language was used so that departments across the College could think more broadly about diversity and inclusion.

Professor Ezra Getzler of the Department of Mathematics voiced concern that the document was too specific and would dictate too specifically what faculty who create the courses would be required to do. Associate Dean Ann Bradlow noted that three faculty members from each area were present in the creation of the document. She explained that the document was still a living document, and that comments and concerns were appreciated and noted. Professor Getzler remarked that he believed that the learning goal was too prescriptive, and that the committee might rethink the names of the overlays. Professor Laura Beth Nielsen of the Department of Sociology responded that the overlays were written with the purpose of being implemented across a wide variety of departments, and that if the committee were more specific, it would not be compatible with some departments.

Professor Christie Traina of the Department of Religious Studies remarked that she would like to hear from the committee on why they did not support lowering the number of courses required for graduation from 45 to 42. Associate Dean Ann Bradlow replied that the committee did discuss this option, but felt it was a separate discussion, and built in ways to reduce courses in the new structure if this were to move forward.

Professor Jackie Stevens remarked that she appreciated the creativity of the committee, and felt it was important to note that prescribing too much could take away from the student experience. She also remarked that the College might rethink the framing of diversity in faculty hiring.
Professor Jules Law of the Department of English noted his reservations with regard to the reworking of the first-year seminar and said that he believed it would take the emphasis off of writing and move it toward student life as a hybrid course. He felt it might be too specific for a large group of faculty to feel skilled to teach. Dean Randolph responded that he believed it would not directly focus on student life, but shine a light on the academic life of the student, and encourage the exploration of ways to better prepare our students to write further into their academic life at Northwestern. Associate Dean Ann Bradlow also remarked that this would be an incremental change, with a system that would help develop more support for faculty who would like to teach first-year seminars.

Associate Professor of Instruction Sheila Donohue remarked that she would like the first-year seminar to help students transition to university life, and noted that she would like a robust rethinking of the first-year seminar to focus more wholly on helping these students transition successfully.

Associate Professor Harris Feinsod noted his skepticism toward the learning goals as well as a request to reimagine the title of the overlay for “where cultures meet.” Dean Randolph requested that faculty submit their comments and ideas to the dean’s office and that this office is open to further discussion.

Professor Gregory Ward of the Program in Gender and Sexuality Studies asked to hear about the process the committee was using to move from the previous overlay of “social inequality” to the current overlay of “when cultures meet.” Associate Dean Ann Bradlow stated that the committee was responding to a call from Northwestern students and faculty for a requirement in the area of social inequalities and diversities. She noted that further information on the process could be found in the CDR final report.

Associate Professor of Instruction Justin Brown of the Department of Neuroscience wondered if the committee could discuss the rationale for the change in the writing requirement. Associate Dean Ann Bradlow remarked that the committee wanted to address writing and expression beyond the first year, and noted that expression can be displayed differently depending on the course or department the student is in, and that the committee didn’t want the overlay to be limited by focusing only and directly on the written word.

The dean requested a motion to extend the meeting beyond the official end time. The motion was moved and approved.

Associate Dean Ann Bradlow noted that in regards to the language requirement, the committee wanted to move away from the term “proficiency” and instead focus on the courses students should take, and would leave the verification of proficiency using AP credits up to the individual language department.

Christine McCary, Weinberg College Adviser and Lecturer in Biology, noted that there would be resources for faculty to support students in a holistic manner through the first-year seminar and noted that a discussion needs to happen regarding the inequality of the student experience.

Assistant Professor of Instruction Michael Maltenfort requested that the items proposal be split into individual pieces for discussion and vote.
V. The Dean thanked the faculty in attendance. The meeting was adjourned at 4:46 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Courtney Essenpreis, assistant to the dean.