

CEPP Meeting October 23, 2001

Present: Sandy Baum(Chair), John Berman, Pat Fehling, Frank Gonzalez, John Brueggemann, Doug Humphrey, Mike Meguerdichian, Pat Oles, Linda Simon, Janet Sorensen

Visitors: Ann Henderson, Jon Ramsey

Minutes of October 2, October 9 (revised version), and October 16 were approved. All minutes to date are now approved. Sandy related that copies of minutes should be sent as e-mail text (not attachments) to cepp-list-web, with a title which includes the date of the meeting that the minutes document.

Ann Henderson and Jon Ramsey are sharing the perspective of CAS and the Registrar's Office with regard to granting credit for on-line distance learning experiences as well as procedures for the granting of transfer credit.

Ann related that there was significant pressure on CAS from students who wish to receive credit for on-line distance learning courses that they have taken at other institutions during the summer. Since Skidmore has no policy concerning evaluation of on-line distance learning courses for credit, CAS has set a boundary that no credit can be given for these experiences. Students are very frustrated, and interest in on-line distance learning courses is rising.

Ann believes that we can evaluate these courses using a process related to the one we currently use for evaluating transfer credit (guidelines listed on registrar's website), with special attention to the following guidelines (text provided by Ann):

At the course level:

- 1) The specificity of course outcomes and how they are assessed, including where applicable, the type and amount of student writing that is expected
- 2) The degree to which students are engaged in analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of content
- 3) Currency and depth of texts, assigned readings, and other course materials
- 4) The type of interaction with the faculty member that is outlined in course materials and what is included in evaluation for the final grade
- 5) The regularity of instructor feedback and the expectations for student participation
- 6) The degree to which students are expected to engage in active learning practices
- 7) The expectations for student interaction with each other through electronic means
- 8) The level and amount of instruction in the assessment of the validity of on-line resources

At the institutional level:

- 9) Student access to technical assistance throughout the course
- 10) Availability and sufficiency of library resources for class participants
- 11) Adequacy of student services offered to students studying on-line

Sandy: Can we evaluate on-line courses the same way as other courses?

Ann: We need to be more specific about what you can't assume from the course description: what kind of interaction will students have? There is a lot broader variation in the student experience on-line. Is the course content appropriate and adequate? What contact time is there with faculty?

Jon Ramsey reminded us that review of most courses for transfer credit is quite routine and carried out by the registrar's office. He showed us a huge guide of on-line course offerings from all types of institutions across the country. He said that these institutions are often offering their courses at a lower fee schedule than we use.

John Brueggemann: What is the worst type of institution listed in the guide?

Jon: Most are large state universities.

Ann: Worst are proprietary institutions that are essentially vocationally oriented.

Jon suggested that Skidmore has not yet figured out its own particular relationship to distance learning. Though we are very well versed now on cyber enhanced courses, we still have no institutional policy concerning on-line distance learning. The written policy about transfer credit of traditional courses is a document from 1978. Sixty credits can be transferred to Skidmore.

Frank: Even if we have a policy in place, it will be a much bigger process to evaluate on-line courses.

Ann: Yes, but a lot of the responsibility for documentation will be on the head of the students. We will have to build up a reserve of experience with courses and institutions that we have dealt with.

Sandy: If we make a policy that requires a certain amount of contact, will that cause other types of problems for existing courses that are being approved now? Should we try not to restrict more?

Ann: Yes, we need to trust accredited colleges and institutions.

Jon: We look for the liberal arts environment for where the courses are coming from – the institutional profile – more than just one course listed in humanities, for example.

Middle States are beginning process of review of on-line experiences in institutions, and the Commission on Higher Education is the umbrella body.

Pat Oles: How can we differentiate an on-line course from other distance learning/independent study courses that we give credit for?

Ann: Independent studies are the most scrutinized, as there is not any course description. The evaluation would primarily be a chair's decision. In fact, we may have accepted a distance learning course without even knowing it – they are not differentiated on a transcript.

Mike revealed that one of the courses for which he had received transfer credit was a distance learning course with a substantial on-line component, confirming the fact that such courses may already be receiving credit.

We discussed the need for CEPP to create a policy, then discussed possible ways to begin.

Sandy gave the committee an assignment to come to the next meeting with ideas about drafting the policy. We can share thought questions over e-mail before the next meeting – Sandy will draft a set of questions and circulate.

A flurry of comments came in the last few minutes of the meeting, centering around whether or not the responsibility for forming the policy could be given to chairs of departments. The committee agreed that the responsibility to create the policy should be at the institutional level and not at the departmental level. Ann reminded us that most on-line courses are at the introductory level, and that many would potentially be taken to fulfill all college requirements or as electives rather than major requirements. We discussed the possibility of creating guidelines at different levels for different types of courses.

The meeting adjourned and lively conversation continued.

Minutes respectfully submitted – Janet Sorensen