

**Academic Foundations Committee  
Retreat Minutes**

August 27, 2009

**Present:** Melinda Tilton  
Mike Havens  
Sandie Rietz  
Lorrie Steerey  
St. John Robinson (for Tom Regele)  
Tasneem Khaleel – ex-officio

Neil Suits  
Neil Jussila  
Michael Scarlett  
Tyree Jenks (for Brent Roberts)

**Absent:** George Czyz  
Bernie Quetchenbach – *excused*  
Tom Regele – *excused*  
Richard Pierce – *excused*

Kurt Toenjes  
Matt Redinger – *excused*  
Mark Fenderson – *excused*  
Brent Roberts – *excused*

**Guest:** Regina Cain

**Presiding:** Lorrie Steerey, Chairperson

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The meeting was called to order at 12:31 p.m. in the Missouri room of the SUB.

I. HOUSEKEEPING

**A. Meeting Time/Place**

It was agreed that the AFC will meet for Fall semester at 3:00 p.m. on Wednesdays in the Missouri room if it is available.

**B. Chair/Co-Chair**

Since Dr. Steerey (Chair) and Dr. Redinger (Co-Chair) were elected half way through the Spring semester, it was agreed that their terms will continue through the 2009-2010 year.

**C. Curricular Forms Entirely Online**

The Academic Senate is working toward entirely online forms with electronic signatures and no paper at all. Hopefully, this process will be complete in time for the Fall 2010 semester.

**D. Curriculum Deadlines**

The Academic Senate will once again be setting deadlines for curriculum, though not many changes pass through the AFC. The Senate will again be sticking to those deadlines as well.

## **E. Senate Attendance**

The question was raised as to whether someone, other than Dr. Steerey, should attend Senate meetings. It was agreed that Dr. Steerey is enough. If necessary for curriculum changes, Dr. Redinger could attend.

## **II. ACADEMIC FOUNDATIONS CONSULTANT RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **A. Academic Foundations Objectives**

The consultant (who was visiting the COT but also reviewed the Academic Foundations program) agreed that we had good objectives, but we have too many of them. We are trying to measure too many things too many times. She suggested that each category be reduced to just three objectives. She also suggested that not all categories be evaluated every semester, but rather a few categories at a time on a rotating basis. It was noted that if we evaluate on a rotating basis and not cover every category every semester, we will likely come up short on data when we make annual reports, which are becoming the norm.

It was agreed that fewer objectives per category makes good sense. We have two good semesters of data, plus the first semester which is not complete, and we can use that data to modify the category objectives. It was cited that the matrix—the full list of outcomes—is what was used to evaluate courses submitted for Academic Foundations. If we remove half the objectives, we are invalidating all those submissions.

It was stated that the objectives need to be changed because they do not make sense and often are not applicable to the course in the category. It was suggested that all the faculty from each category get together and discuss which three objectives they would like to use for their category.

It was noted that in June, there was a meeting regarding VSA (Voluntary System of Accountability), of which MSUB is now a member. The VSA evaluation instruments, which are very similar to the GRE, are much better than anything we have written. They even include discipline-specific questions. As members of VSA, we are required to purchase one of these very expensive instruments. Rather than spending time re-working the objectives we have, why not simply use a VSA-endorsed instrument. Most other units in the University System are either thinking about or are using one of these tests. It was agreed that Provost D'Ann Campbell and Dean Tasneem Khaleel will be asked to an AFC meeting to discuss these instruments. Dr. Khaleel noted that the VSA tests are usually done at the freshman and senior levels. It was noted that each student will have a unique identifier, so they can be tracked. A student who leaves the University before graduating will not necessarily skew the data.

It was noted that we could simply use the GRE as our assessment instrument, since it is cheap and even free in some cases. It was cited that we have to stick with the current system of assessment through Fall 2009. We can change to something else in Spring 2010, if it's ready. The question was raised as to why we should put any amount of work into this system if we can abandon it after Fall 2009.

It was stated that the matrix and the list of outcomes are pre-instructional goals. What we need is an over-arching view of what Academic Foundations should accomplish.

## **B. Capstone Course**

The Academic Foundations consultant noted that we are measuring courses, and we need to be measuring categories and the entire program. A capstone course which all students take could accomplish a whole-program assessment. However, this approach assumes that there is one goal for Academic Foundations and all students must reach it, no matter which courses they took to get there. The question was raised as to what test could possibly cover all the areas in Academic Foundations.

It was noted that adding a capstone course is really changing the curriculum based on data that we need, not a learning goal.

It was cited that another institution uses a senior thesis which is focused in the student's major, but the student brings to bear all the knowledge gained in general education courses. Another suggestion is a portfolio students would keep throughout their career with the University. That would be finished with a snap-shot test and a qualitative survey.

It was stated that *we* don't really know the goal of the Academic Foundations program, so consequently our students don't either. We need to write the big, main goal of Academic Foundations and connect it to assessment.

It was noted that the bottom line is we have to satisfy NWCCU. We have to find a self-evaluation tool that is useful. We also have to show them we are working on the current objectives to make them more useful.

- Motion by Neil Jussila, seconded by Melinda Tilton that **Academic Foundations not include a capstone course.**

- Motion carried with one abstention.

## **C. Service Learning Component of Academic Foundations**

It was suggested that a service learning course could be used as an Academic Foundations capstone. The question was raised as to how a service learning project could show us how the student used all of his or her Academic Foundations background. It was cited that many programs, especially in the College of Arts & Sciences, already have a large service learning component.

It was suggested that each major/discipline decide what their students should get out of Academic Foundations and create an assessment to measure those areas. The responsibility would be moved to the departments, who could test once at the sophomore level and again at the senior level.

It was noted that if the AFC is to consider service learning, a subcommittee should be formed to fully discuss the idea.

- Motion by Neil Jussila, seconded by Sandie Rietz that **service learning not be included as a component of Academic Foundations.**

It was noted that students don't have the time and we don't have the resources to require this kind of course. Service learning is already effectively included in the majors.

- Motion carried with one abstention.

#### **D. Faculty Group Review of Academic Foundations Objectives**

The AFC members will convene a meeting of the faculty in their respective categories to discuss changes to the Academic Foundations category objectives. The groups will also review the MUS general education outcomes to make sure they are covered in Academic Foundations.

### III. DATABASE

#### **A. Review of the current database reports**

It was noted that some objectives have very low numbers because the faculty teaching the course felt the objective was inappropriate and thus did not fill in results.

There are a handful of courses which have never had any data entered since the beginning of this process. How should they be contacted? It was agreed that those faculty only need to enter Spring 2009 data, and a face-to-face meeting would help.

It was noted that our goal is to get 80% of the Academic Foundations courses reported. It was responded that many surveys only get 25% or 50% participation, and we still use that data. Eighty percent seems very high.

It was agreed that Dr. Steerey, Dr. Suits, and Dr. Havens will meet with Ms. Cain to review the reports and decide what to do to "close the loop," i.e., to make changes as a result of the outcomes data. Dr. Steerey will then write a report of their efforts for NWCCU.

#### **B. Changes to the Database**

It was cited that mostly people are using the "actions" box to fill in remarks. Originally, the actions box was meant to give faculty a place to indicate what they planned to change in a course as a result of their students' performance on the Academic Foundations objectives. Dr. Steerey would like to make the actions box a menu of choices so they can be categorized in a report. These choices included (but not limited to): add reserved readings, develop alternative method of presentation, and make attendance part of one's grade.

#### IV. REMEDIAL COURSES

It was noted that we have a large and increasing number of new students who must take remedial math and English courses—and those credits do not count towards Academic Foundations or any degree. The reasons usually presented are that the high schools are not doing their jobs and the best students go to Bozeman or Missoula. However, we have no evidence of that. What if the real issue is the reliability of the COMPASS test? If the test is not reliable, think of the huge cost to students for all those remedial courses, and a large percentage of those students are Native American. How many students get discouraged by their remedial courses and leave MSU Billings?

It was noted that Bozeman and Missoula use ACT test results (anything under 22 requires remedial courses) and they skip the COMPASS test entirely.

- Motion by Neil Jussila, seconded by Neil Suits that **the AFC look into the COMPASS test** (with the assistance of Student Affairs) **and act on the Committee's findings.**

- Motion carried with one abstention.

The meeting adjourned at 3:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Rita J. Rabe Meduna.