

Liberal Arts Council Minutes  
April 17, 2019  
Flowers Hall 230, 2:00 p.m.

**Presiding:** Dean Mary Brennan

**Present:** Council members: Audwin Anderson, Manda Anderson, Susan Day (recording), Beth Erhart, Ken Grasso, Craig Hanks, Lucy Harney, Paul Hart, Bill Kelemen, Yongmei Lu, John Mckiernan-Gonzalez, Angela Murphy, Aimee Roundtree, Chad Smith

**Guests:** none

**Absent:** none

Dean Brennan noted that the College delivered “treats” to each building with Liberal Arts Departments. She also noted that Psychology, the Advising Center, and the College office had 100% participation in the recent Family campaign.

The minutes from 4.17.19 minutes were unanimously approved on a motion by Dr. Erhart and a second by Dr. Lochman.

Awards Day comments included that the need for a larger space, i.e. the Ball Room or Evans, next year. We can start 5 minutes late, and we do not need to order the students alphabetically or numerically. We will use the cards next year, and we may give two cards to students with awards in two areas, allowing them be noted in different departments.

Dean Brennan noted that she had had a meeting with Provost Bourgeois and Associate Provost Thorne about planning goals and summer enrollment. As far as she knows, summer enrollment and summer budgets are accepted and funded, and 2019 summer administrative assignments will remain the same for this summer. One issue will be stipends vs. salary remuneration. As a result, we will have a “retreat” this summer to develop College policies (maternity leave, summer schedules, workload, travel and other issues.) Chairs were encouraged to talk to their graduate advisors about necessary summer hours.

Susan Day provided a handout\* re Student Learning Outcomes and SACS-COC dates. Chairs asked the following questions, to which she intends to request answers.

1. Will the TRACS site repository for policy be continued?
2. What policies by must be posted each department? Should minutes for department meetings be posted? Which meetings?
3. Can we have a model to be copied for organizational charts? What are the principles that will inform the charts? Are Centers included in the charts? Faculty?
4. In the charts, should titles or names or both be used?

#### CAD Update

DEAN BRENNAN reminded chairs in Anthropology, History, Geography, Psychology, and Sociology, as well as the Advising Center, of the May 23, meeting with Blinn College representatives from 11-2 in Flowers 230. The agenda will be to discuss pathways for transferring from Blinn to Texas State.

Dean Brennan reminded representatives from Anthropology, Geography, History, Southwestern Studies, and the Center for Diversity and Gender Studies to notify Stella LoPachin about faculty authored books from their departments. If there are none, she would like to be told that as well.

Dean Brennan noted that several departments need to discuss endowment expenditures with her after the meeting.

Dean Brennan asked chairs and directors to tell her whether their Internship Coordinators currently have alumni or interns in D.C.

Dean Brennan discovered, in her meetings with new tenure-track faculty, that they felt welcomed, but logistically felt somewhat adrift. Other than that, they had no complaints.

Dean Brennan noted that the Research Expo was a huge success. Dr. Kelemen noted that requests for information from faculty mentors somewhat annoyed his faculty because of their manner and frequency.

Around the table

Dr. Mckiernan-Gonzalez described a note from author Sandra Cisneros describing how much she enjoyed her recent visit to our campus.

Dr. Anderson noted that the new African-American minor is approved, it is in the catalog, and a supervisor has been hired to administer it.

Ms. Anderson noted some errors in the new undergraduate catalog. She asked about "Field of Study" rules.

Our 2019-2020 College meeting will be on August 20, 2019, at 2:00 p.m. in Flowers 341.

Dean Brennan noted that Scott Bowman is creating a hiring guide, with specific techniques, to increase the diversity of our staff. She distributed a handout showing the number of new minority PhDs in various areas. She reported that Dr. Bourgeois wants faculty to encourage minority students to go to graduate school. Dean Brennan will bring speakers to campus to discuss faculty responses to student questions.

Dean Brennan asked chairs and directors to please remind students that they do not have to pay their tuition until classes start. Financial holds of less than \$200 will not keep students from enrolling.

Dr. Brennan noted that information about additional temporary lines will be forthcoming from Dr. Thorne soon.

The meeting ended at approximately 3:30 p.m.

\*Day handout:

SACS-COC DATES AND COMMENTS:

- We must develop our own "ORG CHARTS." They are used to demonstrate that we have sufficient staff to do the work we are required to do.

- All policies must be updated and posted for uploading by January, 2020; policies and websites need to be static from January 2020 to the end of the onsite review (March 30-April 1, 2021).
  - Please don't move materials around, especially those linked to policies or the report;
  - Please don't change templates.
- Spring 2020—Report has to be completed with all links, vetting, etc. accurate and complete.
- September 8, 2020—Final report to SACS-COC due. It will be submitted electronically with links to thousands of documents; it will also be submitted as a paper document.
- Emphasis on data from the last three years of documents, including assessment documents:
  - 2019-20 (next year)
  - 2018-19 (this year)
  - 2017-18 (last year)
- October 2020—SACS-COC will review the report (No reviewers will be from Texas)
- December 2020—We will receive the response to our report
- February 2021—We will respond to the December report
- March 31-April 2, 2021—SACS-COC on-site visit

**ASSESSMENT (STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES)**—General approach should be one of good-faith efforts to improve student learning. We are not trying to prove that our students are smart or that we are wonderful teachers. We are trying to demonstrate that we care about improving students' ability to learn, and, as a result, we are taking actual steps to help them learn.

- More words are not better. In the "Evidence of Improvement" section, write about 1-3 (preferably 2) outcomes that demonstrate some increase in student learning.
- In the "Action Plan," focus on outcomes that have been static or have fallen. You should be curious and concerned about failure or a lack of progress;
  - Must include "concrete" steps that you plan to take to improve the outcome;
  - You must not say you will meet (any time in the future to plan);
  - Your plan cannot be "to plan."
- Below is a model report, submitted last spring by Dr. Teya Rosenberg, cited by Beth Wuest as ideal:

### Evidence of Improvement

This year, improvement was apparent in two areas. The first was for Outcome 1, Method 1 measurement, which assesses the writing of students near the end of their degree, when they write the General Exam. 90% of students met the expectations of faculty readers, surpassing the 76% of last year. The second area was Outcome 2, Method 1, which uses the General Exam to assess students' ability to analyze, at a graduate level, a variety of literary texts. 91% of students met or exceeded the expectations of faculty assessors, a small increase from last year's 90%. We believe these improvements are the result of steps taken in accordance with last year's action plan to provide more guidance to student and faculty for the General Exam. In the spring semester, the new graduate director sent out more explicit directions about how to study and to approach the General Exam to students and also to faculty readers, which seems to have contributed to this improvement.

### Action Plan

Although there were improvements in Outcome 1, Method 1 and Outcome 2, Method 1, there is room for further improvement. Because we believe our strategy last year seems to have worked, we will continue and expand the guidance for Method 1 across the three Outcomes this coming year. The directions for the General Exam given this past year to students and faculty were somewhat informal, sent as an email. In 2018-19, the MA Literature program booklet for the General Exam with instructions and examples will undergo extensive revision, making clear the expectations and requirements and also making explicit its connection with the rest of the program to better prepare students for taking the Exam. The booklet for faculty will undergo similar revision, and a meeting of MA Literature faculty will be held in the fall semester to create a rubric for the General Exam with the intention of calibrating faculty readers' expectations.

The results for Method 2 measurements, which look at the theses and area examinations of students completing their degree, also need attention. In all three outcomes, the average scores fell from those of previous years and are below the goals set. To some extent, this seems connected with an outgoing Director disengaging from the process and an incoming Director not yet familiar with how to guide students and faculty through these final steps. The new Director, with a year of experience, will improve guidance in 2018-19. The booklets giving advice to students and faculty are out of date and will be revised to provide stronger guidelines and timelines for both the thesis-track and the non-thesis track (area examination) programs. Also planned are meetings in fall and spring semesters with students in their final semesters to counsel them on requirements and expectations, as well as providing that information more clearly to faculty advisors.