

Faculty Senate
Monday March 31, 2008
4 p.m. Olin 122

Faculty Senate tabled a motion brought by Curriculum Coordinating Committee to approve a proposal for the Capstone course requirement. The next Senate meeting, on Monday, April 7, will begin by resuming discussion on this motion.

Most of the discussion on the motion concerned the four proposed characteristics of the Capstone course and its implementation.

Before discussion began, Dean Mark Krejci noted that the motion was brought to Senate by the Curriculum Coordinating Committee, not the Curriculum Committee, as was erroneously stated on the motion.

Mark Jensen (Chemistry), chair of the Curriculum Coordinating Committee, explained that developing the proposal for the Capstone course was the committee's major charge for the year. He said the committee reviewed Senate legislation regarding the course, as well as previous and unsuccessful motions for the Capstone course and feedback from the Dena's office, in developing this motion. He said the committee wanted to incorporate into the proposal what has been successful in the Inquiry Seminars, and to make the specifications minimal—to make them descriptive rather than prescriptive. He said the guidelines are intentionally broad so that faculty members proposing Capstone courses could teach to their passions, interests and imaginations.

Bryan Luther (chair, Physics) asked for more discussion about the second of the motion's four course characteristics: "Capstone courses will include a significant experiential component." He asked for a description of "experiential," adding that more detail would be helpful.

Krejci said that the motion had originally come to Senate Coordinating Committee with bulleted explanations and examples for each of the four guidelines, but that SCC recommended removing the list lest it be seen as prescription rather than illustrative. Originally, he said, the bullet points offered as examples of "experiential" such things as immersion experiences, co-ops, and study-abroad.

Jonathan Clark (Chair, German) asked what would ensure that the quality of the Capstone courses would be the same for every student.

Jensen replied that maintaining quality and consistency would require the concerted efforts of the Curriculum, Core and Assessment Committees.

Clark said he feared the course will not deserve the name "Capstone" in the end if faculty members have different notions about what "experiential" means, and that we need to come to consensus about it.

Krejci reiterated that SCC feared that a motion with lists of examples would be regarded as restrictive. Previously, he said, Senate has become bogged down in trying to solve logistical issues with the Capstone. So this motion attempts to articulate the goals and characteristics of the Capstone as the first step toward figuring out how to deliver the courses in a quality manner.

Ellen Aho (Biology) said she appreciated that the proposed Capstone would be a Core requirement, and asked if the Capstone could also serve as the Capstone for the major.

Jensen replied that the course could serve both major and Core needs—“that departments could do whatever they wanted with it.”

Krejci said the only way the Capstone is affordable is if some departments offer the Capstone in the context of their majors. Many departments are already offering such courses, Krejci said; some departments would need the Capstone to be within their majors because the majors are prescriptive in the senior year.

Susan O’Shaughnessy (Philosophy) asked if departmental majors would need to be open to students outside the major. No, Krejci said.

Cynthia Carver (CSTA; Division Chair, Professional Programs and Communication Studies) asked if more legislation concerning Capstone would come to Senate should Senate pass this motion today, “or is this it?”

“It was our hope that this was it,” Jensen replied.

In that case, Carver said, we need additional details, material that would assure and guide faculty members coming up with course proposals and make it clear that the course components “could play out in a variety of ways.”

Gregg Muilenburg (Philosophy/Division Chair, Core and Academic Development) said that whatever procedure we follow for course approval and implementation the specifications will need to be fleshed out, whether in the Curriculum Committee application form for new courses or in an open forum on the Capstone experience. The streamlining strategy that resulted in this motion, he said, was based on this question: Can we agree on these four characteristics? If so, then we can figure them out in greater detail later; if not, he said, another motion would come back to Senate. He said he worried that if the motion gave a lot of details Senate would get bogged down in logistical issues.

Susan Larson (Chair, Psychology) said she agreed with Carver about the need for more detail. For example, she said, the motion’s first course characteristic—that the courses “will address an issue of global significance”—raises the question of whether the courses should address only one issue or several.

Muilenburg said “an issue of global significance” could be read to mean many as well as one.

Jensen articulated the committee’s general vision for Capstone courses: The courses would pose a problem; student research would come up with some kind of a solution or suggestion about solving the problem, bringing in their disciplinary expertise and applying it into the solution. This opens the possibility of linked Capstone courses, he said, wherein students would have the opportunity to examine the same issue from different disciplinary perspectives. This work would culminate in some kind of public presentation or peer-reviewed publication of the work.

Clark said he was anxious about the fourth characteristic: “To emphasize the capstone nature of this course, students will be expected to take the Capstone in their senior year.” He said he wondered if exceptions might need to be made to accommodate students studying abroad or doing internships.

Jensen said there would need to be some kind of mechanism to allow for exceptions.

Mike Bath (chair, Political Science) asked if students will have to have completed all other Core classes before taking the Capstone.

In reply to Clark's and Bath's questions, Muilenburg said that although we should be flexible enough to allow for exceptions for good cause, ideally students would take the Capstone in the spring semester of their senior year, "with the full experience of their education."

"That is the expectation. Whether or not we can make it happen is another thing," he said. "If we got the vast majority of students to take the Capstone in their senior year, after having taken all their other Core classes, it would be a victory."

Clark said he feared that if we start making exceptions to when students take the Capstone, "we are calling into question our hopes for the Core altogether." Our challenge, he said, is "to create a mechanism of delivery" that ensures the Capstone "means something in the lives of these students."

Aho said she hoped Senate would encourage each department to offer a capstone within the major. She said she was uncomfortable with the motion's language about implementation: "Implementation will take place after the Division Chair for Core and the Academic Dean have worked with departments/programs to develop a sufficient number of capstone experiences for seniors at Concordia College." She said that language should be strengthened; as it is, she said, "it's too wide open."

O'Shaughnessy said she fears that adding yet another expectation to departments would stretch faculty too far. She said that adding Capstones without additional FTEs would result in additional pressure on departments that are already stretched too thin.

Krejci replied that he and Muilenburg agreed that the Capstone requirement will require additional resources. The requirement would demand 12-15 new sections, he said, with new FTEs. Some departments already offer Capstones that would work for the requirement, he said; it is a matter of dialogue to determine how many more courses are needed. He said he agreed that we cannot expect faculty and departments and programs to keep adding more; we need new resources. That need is reflected in the proposed strategic budget, he said.

Student member Jennifer VanBenthuisen asked if the Capstone courses would be department-specific. She said she fears it would be difficult for students to take a course without background in a specific discipline. For example, she said, if the business department does not offer a Capstone course, she as an accounting student might have trouble in a Capstone from the Sociology department.

Doug Anderson (chair, Mathematics and Computer Science) asked for example of a course that would meet the proposed Capstone characteristics.

Peter Schultz (chair, Art) offered as an example a course Ross Hilgers has created called "Sustainable Ceramics," open to art majors as well as all other students. The course would include travel around Minnesota during weekends to look at natural clay bodies, forming and firing ceramics from that clay and placing them back into the environment. Such a course would include elements of biology, environmental science and art. The global issue involved is sustainability, he said. "The great strength [of the motion] is that Ross was able to come up with this and make it work for the requirement," Schultz said. "The [motion] allows each of us to bring our talents and passions to the course."

Joy Lintelman (History) asked if the committee discussed the Capstone in context of change to the academic calendar, as "it feels like we are squeezing one more thing into an already-full curriculum."

Jensen replied that the committee had indeed discussed possibilities for creative Capstone courses that would be possible with a change in calendar, but that they could not let possible calendar change drive this motion given the need to get these courses on track as soon as possible.

Luther asked if “experiential” could include an intensive laboratory or studio experience. “Do I have to go off-campus to stare at something I could stare at in my lab?” he asked. “Or could I do this on-campus and still have it be experiential?”

Yes, Jensen said, “experiential” could mean an on-campus experience, which is why the committee removed its original “off-campus experiential component” from the motion. The goal, he said, is to encourage active responses to “Becoming Responsibly Engaged in the World.”

VanBenthuisen asked if the “experiential” component might be met by students’ previous experiences such as studying abroad or an internship. She suggested the course might be offered as an independent study, offering students the ability to bring in their own specific interests and tie in any previous experiential components they may have had.

Bill Tomhave (Mathematics and Computer Science) said he feared that without more explanation, the motion’s phrases such as “an issue of global significance” or “significant experiential component” will cause confusion and misinterpretation. He asked if another possibility for this requirement might be having students complete not a Capstone course but rather a Capstone experience over their four years here.

Michelle Lelwica (Religion) said she was comfortable with the motion’s lack of specificity about the four characteristics because it offers room for creativity. But she said she agreed with Tomhave’s observation in that the motion’s language about implementation places a heavy burden on that process. She said perhaps Senate should have more details about implementation before voting on the motion.

Krejci asked for a motion to table the motion, which was moved and seconded.

Krejci announced that Concordia junior Alex Ritter has been awarded the Goldwater Scholarship, a prestigious scholarship to support students going into math and science research. Concordia junior Kelsey Blom earned an honorable mention in the competition.

Krejci also announced that Kristi Loberg (Sociology and Social Work) had recently completed a terminal degree.

Other Senate business included approval of minutes of March 3, approval of the agenda, and the approval of the following motions on the consent agenda

- Elimination of the semester abroad requirement for the Major in German with a minor in International Business
- Modification of the list of “additional required supporting courses “ for the Elementary Education Major
- Modification of the General Science Education Licensure for Grades 5-8
- Modification of the Biology Education Major with Teaching License, Grades 9-12
- Modification of the Physics Education Major with a Teaching License, Grades 9-12

Another motion, Modification of the Elementary Education Major with a Science Specialty, originally on the consent agenda, was moved to the regular agenda in order to correct an error. The error was corrected in an amendment which passed by unanimous voice vote. The motion passed on unanimous voice vote and was adopted as follows, with the phrasing in error struck and new language in bold:

“Motion: The Curriculum Committee recommends that the Elementary Education Major with a Science Specialty be modified so that students take Biology 121. ~~rather than having the option of taking Biology 101.~~ **Biology 101 may be substituted for Biology 121 if a student earned a B or higher in 101.**”

Senate adjourned at 5 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine McMullen
Faculty Secretary