

English Meeting
25 October 2012
HHall 301

Present: Robert K, ShaunAnne T, Nicole T-A, Harold N, Margaret S, Ron F, Eric F, Frank M, Duane H. Absent: Treven E, Patti K, Sarah A.

Preamble, Barnard College's Interactive Classroom Series: Confucius

- Students take roles and re-enact the history of the moment by using their understanding from research.

Approval of Minutes: Harold **moves** to approve minutes. Frank calls the second. **Minutes approved.**

Harold's formal concerns about our BSE and BA Curriculum be added to the minutes. Harold **moves** to include his formal concerns with the English Department curriculum to 25 October minutes. Robert calls the second. **Motion approved.** 1 Abstention.

Vote on Patti for Online Master Teacher: Ron moves that Patti be named the Online Master Teacher for our online classes. Robert calls the second. **Motion passes.**

Patti be paid \$1,500 per course or commensurate going rate for building online classes. Duane **moves** that Patti be paid \$1,500 or the commensurate going rate per class that she builds. Margaret calls the second. **Motion carries**: 4 yea, 2 nay, 1 abstention

BSE Licensure: The State form for assessing was presented.

Assessment Reports: Completed.

Adding World Lit and World Drama. Eric suggested that he could drop two of his Topics in order to add the World Lit and World Drama. ShaunAnne will call a meeting of all those interested to determine

More Online Course Offerings: Courses like ENGL 315 need to be offered online to meet the needs of students in Bismarck.

Recruitment ideas. Robert **moves** to spend \$200 to have more English Department Flyers printed. Eric calls the second. **Motion fails.**

English Club: SIEDL grants may go away; need funding sources.

Next meeting 29 Nov; all @ 12:30-1:30

Appendix: Harold Nelson's Curriculum Concerns

The BSE advising sheet includes only one of the topics classes in the program, and shunts the other 35 to elective status. We spent four years in designing many of these classes, and originally planned to offer many of the classes in a two-year rotation. But, with shrinking budgets and enrollment, it's naïve to expect that 80 + students will take English electives each term.

Two solutions: (1) forget our vision, erase most of the "Required Topics Courses in Literature" and use the sheet, or (2) follow the vision we developed over four years, revise the sheet, keep the courses, and make the BSE a stronger and better program than this fall's. I outline the latter solution in the second section of this memo. We need to choose. We can't continue to list the classes and tell the campus community that we'll regularly offer them when we won't. First, though, the sheet presents other problems. Here are the top ten.

I. Problems

A. Philosophic/Rhetorical

10. Denies Freedom of Choice This sheet eliminates freedom of choice for advisors and students. It's rigidly prescriptive, and offers no rationale for its requirements. The approach reminds me of that used in the fundamentalist church in which I was confirmed when I was a kid. Students are able to choose one literature class and one writing class. The other choices are limited, on the order of "chocolate or vanilla?" Based on the titles, for instance, what are the significant differences between 365 (Media English) and 367 (Media Literacy)?

9. Exceeds State Requirements The state presents its requirements in *North Dakota Education Standards and Practices Board "Program Approval Standards," July 1, 2012*. Philosophically and rhetorically, these requirements differ significantly from the advising sheet's. *Standards* is general, and the sheet is specific; *Standards* encourages diverse approaches, and the sheet uses a "one size fits all" approach; *Standards* is flexible, and the sheet is inflexible. Practically, *Standards* encourages traditional literature classes "emphasizing works and writers in American, English, and world literature . . ." that the sheet does not. *Standards* requires six semester hours in composition. The sheet, in contrast, requires ten hours in composition and in teaching writing. Why does the sheet overweight required writing courses for those students who'd rather read, watch movies, or study linguistics? Who knows better what individual students should take after they've met state requirements, the students themselves in consultation with their advisers, or an anonymous writer or subcommittee?

8. Lacks Clarity According to the sheet, students are required to take one from a list of 35 literature classes. But two of these courses are already listed as requirements—Native American Literature under diversity and African Lit/Chinese and Japanese Lit under foundational. May students double dip, and satisfy both requirements by taking 269, 339, or 349?

7. Sets a Terrible Example for Future Teachers Perry Nodelman, in *The Pleasures of Children's Literature*, writes "if education works and children do learn from the behavior of their teachers, then much of what they learn is what their teachers have conveyed unintentionally, simply because the teachers haven't thought about the implications of their methods" (34).

Consider the sheet's implications. The sheet's requirements significantly exceed North Dakota's, are significantly different from those at comparable institutions, and illustrate that it's okay for teachers to exercise their power for inscrutable reasons. A good teacher, the sheet implies, makes all students jump through the same hoops, regardless of these students' individual interests. The sheet does a wonderful job of preparing the Mr. Gradgrinds and Ms. Grundys who will ruin English for the future generations.

B. Logical/Legal

6. Contains Illogical Requirements Why does the sheet favor some courses over equivalent classes? For instance, why are African Literature or Chinese/Japanese Literature listed as “foundational courses,” while Magical Realism, based mainly on South American literature, is not? Why is Adolescent Literature listed as a required core course, but *Coming of Age Novels* (scheduled fall 2012, but canceled because it didn't fill) and *Major Writers: J. K. Rowling* (spring, 2013), both classes in adolescent lit, listed only as electives? More generally, what makes a class “foundational” or “core”? A good argument can be made for Senior Seminar; capstone courses are common in English programs. The other foundational and core courses? No.

These inconsistencies illustrate the sheet's lack of breadth and depth of vision. Some courses are apparently required for no good reason beyond someone's personal preference, and others because someone thinks they'll “broaden students' horizons,” or assumes they “teach students necessary knowledge”—though all people who teach the core and foundational classes cover different material, and we all know that the “dead white guys” canon from the sixties is now passé in the profession.

5. Ignores the Democratic Process Who wrote the sheet? An individual or a committee? I received a nearly finished copy of the sheet last spring, but I knew nothing about its preparation until this time. If there were meetings, why weren't they announced? Why has the department never debated and voted on the sheet? By whose authority has the sheet been passed out to students without departmental vote and approval? Since the sheet has not been approved, why isn't the word “tentative” in the title? How does this secretiveness promote departmental harmony and cooperation? The entire department will probably never sing “Kumbaya” around a campfire, but this lack of professionalism, this lacking of simple courtesy and respect in daily interactions, shrivels souls into prunes.

4. Illustrates Eccentricities Why are African Lit or Chinese/Japanese Lit and Media English or Media Literacy required for future English teachers at MSU when they are not required in the BSE requirements at other universities in the area or, indeed, based on a random Google search, the nation?

C. Practical

3. Complicates Marketing Students in the BSE programs at more expensive and prestigious schools in the area, including UND and Concordia, have many more choices than the sheet offers to MSU students. If given the choice, how many bright and independent students will choose a regimented program over a more flexible and student-centered one?

2. Contains Problematic Requirements Individuals get sick, die, retire. Life happens. Individuals designed the topics classes, and own them. To list 339 (African Literature) or 349 (Chinese Literature) as foundational courses assumes that the designers will teach the classes forever.

1. Is Based on Unrealistic Expectations

We originally planned to offer many of the special topics classes every two years. By relegating the classes to elective status, the sheet eliminates most of the customers for these classes. MSU's budget has tightened, guidelines for cancelling classes have strengthened, and enrollment is down about 9% from a couple of years ago. What evidence is there that the administration is in a *Field of Dreams* ("build it and they will come") mood this year, and will continue to allow us to offer so many electives?

II. Notes Toward a Solution

A. General Principles

1. Offer students a general rationale to give an internal logic and consistency to the program. Here are notes toward a draft.

Goals

In *The Educated Imagination*, Northrop Frye argues that seeing repeated patterns in sets of texts and other connections between these texts is the goal for literary study. He writes "whatever value there is in studying literature, cultural or practical, comes from the total body of our reading, the castle of words we've built and keep adding new wings to all the time" (95). Following Frye, this BSE program is designed to help you to see aesthetic, cultural, historical, linguistic, structural, and thematic similarities and differences between a variety of texts and the world in which they exist. The texts include those that you and other students create.

More specifically, the program gives you an opportunity to learn to

- closely and analytically read or view a variety of texts from different countries and periods,
- write in a variety of genres appropriate to your coursework,
- communicate effectively and well,
- integrate research into your own thinking and communication,
- study languages that are written, spoken, and visual,
- understand technology's role in literacy,
- develop a nimbleness of mind and an ability to handle ambiguity, complexity, and subtlety,
- learn approaches for sharing literature with others.

Objectives

Each objective is based on the July 1, 2012 *North Dakota Education Standards and Practices Board "Program Approval Standards."* Satisfying these requirements will qualify you to teach English in North

Dakota. You might need to satisfy additional requirements to teach English in a different state. The program requires more courses than the minimum for some objectives.

- Grammar and Usage
- Developmental Reading
- Reading
- Composition
- Speech
- Media
- Methods
- Instructional Technology

2. Include no classes with only one instructor as stand-alone requirements.

3. The BSE Advising Sheet requires either Introduction to Linguistics or American Dialects in Literature and Media for the grammar and usage state requirement. This requirement is specific. "The teacher candidate has studied English language content including a) language development, b) history of language, c) grammar, d) dialects and levels of usage, and e) the purpose of language. Both of the classes will satisfy the requirement if the course descriptions and syllabi are written correctly.

Logical consistency and common sense agree that this principle should be used with the other state requirements as well. Media and instructional technology in particular do not require courses. It makes no sense to squander six credits by requiring courses for these objectives.

B. The Program (We can easily fill in the blanks.)

1. Grammar and Usage (3 +)
2. Developmental Reading (3)
3. Literature (9 +)
4. Composition (6 +)
5. Speech (3)
6. Media (One from a list of classes that include media)
7. Methods (3)
8. Instructional Technology (One from a list of classes that include instructional technology)

Peace.

Harold