ROGER WILLIAMS UNIVERSITY
FACULTY SENATE
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF SEPTEMBER 7, 2011

Attendance: Peter Alfieri, Sue Bosco, Jim Brunnhoeffer, Ben Carr, Patrick Charles, Kelly Donnell, Michael Emmer, Roseann Evans, John Fobert, Kamille Gentles-Peart, Diane Harvey, Tony Hollingsworth, France Hunter, Hasan Khan, Rebecca Leuchak, Chris Menton, Dave Moskowitz, Cliff Murphy, Nancy Nester, Roxanne O’Connell, Lou Procaccini, Joseph Roberts, Lauren Rossi, Tony Ruocco, Mark Sawoski, Ferd Schroth, Tom Sorger, June Speakman, Becky Spritz, Jennifer Stevens, Anne Tait, Minoo Tehrani, Cliff Timpson, Mel Topf, Laura Turner, Sean Varano, Kerri Warren, Romelyn Woodruff

Announcement: Pres. Topf indicated that agenda items with be placed on the agenda in the order in which they are received.

Motion (Topf, Woodruff): To thank last year’s Senate and officers Senators Bosco, Alfieri and Moskowitz for their service. Passed without objection, two abstentions.

Minutes: Pres. Topf acknowledged the receipt of minutes from Senate meetings in May.

Email Policy: Pres. Topf announced that Pres. Farish seeks three faculty members to serve on an email policy committee that would assist in clarifying university policy re. the conditions under which faculty and staff emails would be accessed by administration. Senators Schroth, O’Connell and Carr will serve.

Diversity Committee chair: The person who was elected chair last spring has stepped down. Pres. Topf asked for nominations for a new chair. Motion (Woodruff, Khan): To nominate Rebecca Leuchak for the position of Diversity Committee Chair. Motion (Stevens, Evans): To elect Rebecca Leuchak as chair. Passed without objection.

General Education: Pres. Topf explained that he had placed this topic on the Senate agenda to provide the opportunity for the Senate to take a clear position on the General Education proposal.

Motion (Menton, Varano): That the Faculty Senate Approves the August 2011 proposal of the General Education Committee.

Extended discussion of the proposal ensued focusing on several issues:

Minors: should a minor be required of all RWU graduates. They create proficiency in a field different from the major.
Core Curriculum: does the new proposal address the weaknesses of the current Core? Do we know what those weaknesses are? Did the committee consider revitalizing the current core after an assessment of its strengths and weaknesses? Sen. Tait has a course release to investigate this.

Resources: one of the problems with the current Core is a lack of resources. Will that change under the proposed Gen Ed program?

Outcomes: aren’t the outcomes in the proposal already addressed in our Core? Shouldn’t the outcomes in the proposal be in all RWU courses? The outcomes were in fact developed through long and wide conversations with faculty that focused on what an educated person should be.

Information: are faculty fully informed of the proposal? Is there faculty buy-in? Has the case for change been made? There have been, over the past several years, multiple opportunities for faculty members to participate in town halls to learn more about, and help develop the gen.ed. curriculum.

Logistics: do we know how many sections are needed? How many faculty will participate? What class size will be in gen ed courses? What kind of faculty development will take place? What about adjuncts? Prerequisites? The committee did not want to move forward with these matters until it had secured Senate approval of the general outlines of the proposal.

Creativity house: the language describing this house is so broad that any course could qualify.

Course Content: it is unclear from the proposal what the content of the courses will be.

Current Core: far from perfect; too many adjuncts, no oversight of curriculum, no assessment, not a four-year program which the gen ed proposal is. Advantages are that all students take the same five courses, and interact with students from other majors there and in their core concentration classes. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current program and how does the proposal capitalize on those strengths and address the limitations? The assertion was made that this kind of analysis has not been done. In response, it was pointed out that several waves of assessment were done some years ago, including in the 2020 strategic planning process. The enthusiasm for the Core expressed at the recent professional development day indicates that the Core is not yet dead.

Quantitative reasoning: the Math faculty will not support any gen ed program that does not include at least one Math course.

Marketability: is the proposed curriculum something that will distinguish RWU and attract students? Have we done a peer/aspirant analysis and test marketing to see if prospective students and their families will “get it.”

Implementation: The proposal does not include an implementation plan. Any plan should include implementation in addition to statements on impact on other programs, including availability of a minor, which is a distinct competency in some programs, on double majors, on study abroad and other programs, and on liberal arts and science programs that students choose as core concentrations.
Motion failed: For - 6
Against – 23
Abstain - 7

Motion (Sorger, Carr) The Senate requests that the Gen Ed Committee publish a document that lays out the strengths and limitations of the current core program and explains how the Gen Ed proposal builds on those strengths and addresses those weaknesses.

Motion failed 10-13-7

The motion was offered in answer to the question: what next? after the Senate’s rejection of the Gen Ed proposal. Discussion focused on the charge of the Gen Ed committee which was created not to examine the core, but to develop something new. Five years of work were put into this effort with broad consultation. Should assessment of the core been part of this process? While the conversations about Gen Ed were valuable, the process was flawed from the start.

Should the Gen Ed committee now take the comments offered by the Senate and address those points in a revised proposal? What is the appropriate role of the Core committee at this point?

Motion (Carr, Woodruff) The Senate requests that the President put together a committee to provide strengths and weaknesses of the current Core and how any reform proposal incorporates the strengths and addresses the weaknesses.

Motion failed 5-19-5

Discussion, which was short, focused on the suggestion that curriculum is the work of the faculty, and that the President’s plate is already relatively full.

Motion (Speakman, O’Connell) The Senate charges the Core Committee and the General Education Committee to hold a joint meeting at which they will develop a plan for next steps and report to the Faculty Senate on this plan at its October meeting.

Motion carried 21-5-5

Senate review of graduate courses:

Motion (Speakman, Fobert) The Faculty Senate recommends that no graduate course or program be offered without moving through the mandated curriculum review process.

Motion passed without objection, one abstention.
Commencement:

Motion (Tehrani, Carr) The Faculty Senate invites comments and suggestions from the faculty on Commencement, and further recommends that one honorary degree recipient at Commencement be selected by the Faculty.

Motion carried 21-1-1

Email purge:

Motion (O’Connell, Menton) requesting the President Farish review the 90-day email purge policy. The President addressed the Senate, noting that he would look into the matter. No vote taken.

Respectfully submitted,

Vice President June Speakman