

## Educational Policy Committee Minutes, September 25, 2014

Members present: John Gilmour and Jack Martin (co-chairs), Susan Bosworth (Associate Provost for Institutional Accreditation & Effectiveness), Ryan Corcoran, Josh Elrich, Dean Lu Ann Homza, Bill Hutton, Hiroshi Kitamura, Heather MacDonald, Weizhen Mao, April Pisano, Dean Monica Potkay, Denise Ridley-Johnston (Assistant Director, Institutional Effectiveness & Assessment), Cory Springer, Bill Stewart, Kim Wheatley.

Scribe: Hiroshi Kitamura

The chairs called the meeting at 10:07AM

1. Approval of the minutes from September 18, minutes approved unanimously
2. Discussion of the “COLL 400 Criteria,” drafted by the COLL 400 Working Group
  - (a) Add “capstone strategy class (in the School of Business)” to the bullet points under “i. Capstone Experience” to extend reach to the Business School
  - (b) Discussion on the class size of COLL 400. EPC believes that the language for this should be made adaptable to the “capstone” needs of different programs and departments
  - (c) Question on requiring COLL 400 to appeal to “at least two disparate audiences” (Item 8 under “PROPOSED QUESTIONS”)
  - (d) Eliminate the word “output” from the entire document. Other minor revisions were proposed. See updated text below.
  - (e) Question on how to staff COLL 400 in departments and programs that lack the resources. The Dean’s Office is in support of the idea of providing staffing to departments. Programs, however, will also need staffing as well.
  - (f) Question about the length of the document. EPC believes that the information in the current draft is necessary except for the “Addendum,” which will be cut
  - (g) Discussion on adding a specific question for the School of Business under “PROPOSED QUESTIONS”
  - (h) Discussion on the “assessment” or “evaluation” of the final product
  - (i) Discussion on internships as a capstone experience. The committee believes that it should be included as one of the options
- (3) Agenda for the next meeting

(a) Discuss the 8 proposals that could not be covered at the present meeting

(b) Discuss how to set up a mechanism to review the submissions for COLL courses

(4) Immediate action item: the final draft of the COLL 400 proposal will be circulated to members for a vote on Monday. If approved by the committee, the document will be sent for discussion at the FAS meeting on Tuesday

The meeting was adjourned 10:55AM. Below are the COLL 400 guidelines as approved by EPC.

### **COLL 400 language approved by the Faculty in December 2013:**

The COLL 400 capstone experience will require students to take initiative in synthesis and critical analysis, to solve problems in an applied and/or academic setting, to create original material or original scholarship, and to communicate effectively with a diversity of audiences. Students can fulfill this requirement through upper-level seminars, independent study and research projects, and Honors projects, as deemed appropriate by departments, programs, or schools. COLL 400 may but need not have an interdisciplinary focus as students can synthesize material within as well as across disciplines. COLL 400 capstone experiences must be at least 3 credits, and normally be taken in the senior year.

### **COLL 400 Guidelines Proposed by EPC:**

**Concise Summary Statement:** COLL 400 is (i) a capstone experience of at least 3 credits that requires students (ii) to produce original material or original scholarship and (iii) to improve their ability to communicate with diverse audiences.

#### i. Capstone Experience

Through a capstone experience, students must apply, or implement, what they have learned in their course work. This may involve the application of content, skills, and/or methodologies. Capstones are ordinarily taken in one's major or minor, but they also can allow students from several majors to direct their expertise to a single topic. Departments and programs must ensure that students have some relevant prior experience, e.g., by requiring prerequisites or instructor approval. It is generally expected that students will take their capstone experience in their senior year.

*Opportunities to fulfill COLL 400 include:*

- Upper-level seminars.

- Honors projects.
- Senior research.
- Independent studies.
- Student teaching (in the School of Education).
- Capstone strategy courses (in the School of Business).

## ii. Original Material or Scholarship

COLL 400 experiences require students to produce a body of work that counts as original material or scholarship. To be original, the body of work must involve initiative, creativity, and analysis that goes beyond the summary of existing ideas. For some disciplines, the originality of the work may consist in the articulation and defense of new ideas, the discovery of new connections between existing ideas, or novel presentations of existing ideas. For others, the originality may consist in the application of existing methodology to new data or in the creation of art. Research papers, artistic work, and performances of various kinds may count as original.

*Application to specific cases:*

- Research papers. Substantial research papers generally satisfy the originality requirement.
- Lab or field work. A research paper or thesis that analyzes the results of the lab (field) work would ordinarily count as original, but lab (field) work is generally not itself original.
- Client-based work or internships. In some disciplines, students apply the analytic tools learned in their field of study to address questions or tasks issued by actual clients or employers. Written analyses or oral presentations based on such work would ordinarily count as original, provided that (i) students receive academic mentorship for the duration of the work, and (ii) the designated assignments receive academic evaluation. Such work, whether performed individually or in teams, does generally not itself qualify as original.
- Student teaching. In the School of Education, student teaching can count as original work.

## iii. Diverse Audiences

In COLL 400 experiences, students *express* themselves in ways appropriate for at least two disparate audiences. There are at least two main ways of satisfying the diverse audiences requirement. One involves requiring at least two discrete assignments that are tailored to different audiences. In this scenario, the original piece(s) of work (described in ii., above) may be prepared for one audience, while additional assignment(s) would require students to translate their research, the subject matter of the course, and/or the methodology of the discipline to a disparate audience. These additional assignments need not be significant enough to satisfy the originality requirement, and the additional assignments can, but need not be, based on the same research. Another way of satisfying this requirement allows a single piece of work to address more than one audience. Class discussion and

participation—even in an interdisciplinary course—cannot satisfy the diverse audiences requirement, whereas papers, presentations, and performances can satisfy it.

*Application to Specific Cases:*

- Multiple assignments. A course might require students to give an in-class presentation and write a final paper. The audience for the presentation would thus consist of a student's peers. The implied audience for the paper (unlike the student's peers) would already be familiar with that research topic. To be sure, the diverse audience requirement does not require different modalities (e.g., one written paper and one oral presentation/blog post/editorial/digital presentation), except where this is required to communicate effectively to the target audiences. Consider an interdisciplinary course on the environmental and economic implications of climate change. Such a course might require two essays, one on the environmental implications and one on the economic implications. These two essays would jointly satisfy the diverse audiences requirement, provided that the essays were written to disparate audiences.
- As mentioned above, a single piece of work can satisfy the diverse audiences requirement. For example, a single interdisciplinary research paper on immigration that addresses issues relevant to sociology and economics and *is written for experts in both areas* might satisfy the diverse audience requirement. This example also illustrates why it is possible for a single piece of work to satisfy both the originality requirement and the diverse audiences requirement: a single piece of interdisciplinary work might effectively express ideas to experts in two disparate disciplines.
- Intradisciplinary but still significantly diverse. Various sub-disciplines might be sufficiently diverse that a single work concerning both sub-disciplines might satisfy the diverse audience requirements. Experts of the psychology of language acquisition and experts on the psychology of memory may count as disparate audiences. Experts on genetics and experts on molecular development may count as disparate audiences.
- Honors thesis and defense within a single sub-discipline. An honors thesis in a single sub-discipline generally will be written to experts in that sub-discipline. Since the oral defense of the honors thesis includes at least one committee member from a disparate discipline, the oral defense would ordinarily be aimed at a much more general audience than the thesis. The honors thesis and defense, then, jointly satisfy the diverse audience requirement.
- Independent studies within a single sub-discipline. Independent studies (including projects that begin as honors theses and later become independent studies) often result in a substantial essay written to specialists in the relevant sub-discipline. For such an independent study to satisfy the diverse audience requirement, it would need to include some further assignment(s). Examples include: a short written discussion that elucidates the sub-discipline's methodology and importance to a non-academic audience; a poster presentation aimed at academics with no training in the relevant discipline; an oral presentation based on the essay made to wider or more diverse audience than the thesis is itself directed.

- Work for client or employer. When one's original piece of work is developed for a client or an employer, it will ordinarily count as satisfying the diverse audiences requirement.
- Public artistic performances. Some performances are aimed at both experts and lay audiences, so a single performance may satisfy the diverse audience requirement. For example, a public piano concert that receives academic evaluation may satisfy the diverse audience requirement.
- Student teaching. In the School of Education, student teaching can count as communicating with diverse audiences.
- Business Strategy: In the Mason School of Business, the capstone strategy course requires the preparation and presentation of analyses to diverse audiences.

### **Questions for courses seeking a COLL 400 designation:**

1. Describe the nature of the COLL 400 experience (see above for examples of the types of experiences that qualify).
2. If the COLL 400 consists of a single course, how many credits will that course offer (must be at least 3).
3. If the COLL 400 comprises a sequence or combination of courses, describe each of the components of the experience and indicate how many credits each component will bear (must add up to at least 3).
4. How will it be determined that students have the necessary background for the COLL 400 (prerequisites, instructor approval, etc.)?
5. How will the COLL 400 experience require students to apply the skills and knowledge they have gained during their course work?
6. How will the COLL 400 experience require students to do one or more of the following: take initiative in synthesis and critical analysis; solve problems in an applied and/or academic setting; create original material or original scholarship?
7. What type of work will be produced and how will that work demonstrate having achieved the goals described in the previous two questions?
8. How will students satisfy the requirement that they express themselves in ways appropriate to at least two disparate audiences? Identify two or more target audiences, describe how students will communicate with these disparate audiences, and explain how the COLL 400 experience will prepare students to engage in that communication effectively.

