Minutes of the Arts & Science Faculty Council

February 6, 2006

The meeting was called to order in Buttrick 222 at 4:14 p.m. by the Chair, Professor William Damon. Present at the meeting were Dean Richard McCarty, Professors Karen Campbell, Kathy Gaca, Malcolm Getz, John Lachs, John Sloop, Gerald Stubbs, Joel Tellinghuisen, Arleen Tuchman, and David Wood. Professors William Caferro and Virginia Scott were unable to attend. Associate Deans Kate Daniels and Russell McIntire attended as guests of the Faculty Council, as did Jonathan Bremer, from the A&S Dean’s Office staff.

1. Approval of the Minutes of the Faculty Council meeting of November 29, 2005.

Professor Campbell inquired about the follow-up to Professor Damon’s question at the preceding Council meeting regarding the wording of the sentence, “Dean Rapisarda replied that the estimates were based on enrollments in similar types of programs at other Vanderbilt schools,” in the Minutes of the November 1, 2005 Faculty Council meeting. Mr. Bremer replied that Dean Rapisarda stated, in response to this point of clarification, that his estimates were based on enrollments at other Vanderbilt schools and at peer institutions. Mr. Bremer then stated that he had revised the Minutes by adding the words “and at peer institutions” at the appropriate place. There were no other questions or discussion and the Minutes were approved. (Dean McCarty joined the meeting.)

2. Proposal to create an A&S Course Evaluation web site.

Dean McCarty explained that the proposed A&S course evaluation web site would have several distinct advantages over the current Student Government Association (SGA) web site (the course evaluation web site proposal is attached to these Minutes). The College of Arts and Science would more promptly, reliably, and accurately post course evaluation data to the web site, and A&S could better manage the site. Access to the web site would be restricted to those persons who have VUnet IDs. The course evaluation information would be represented as histograms rather than as means and standard deviations. Presenting the data in the form of histograms will make “data mining” difficult and will present the data in an easy-to-read format. Furthermore, information will be presented for only one course at a time, and printing will be restricted. Course evaluation information for three years will be available, and then the oldest data will be deleted. Some information and some courses will not be presented on the web site: Written comments will not be included. Summer courses, courses with fewer than five students, and courses with less than a fifty per cent response rate will not be included. Faculty members may also petition the Dean, through his or her department chair, to withhold course evaluation information for compelling reasons. Many of our peer institutions, Dean McCarty continued, have a course evaluation web site, including the University of Chicago, Washington University in St. Louis, Columbia University, and Yale University. Other peer institutions transfer course evaluation data to their respective undergraduate student associations, who, in turn, create a web site. This is the case at many Ivy League
universities, such as Princeton, Harvard, and Brown universities. Dean McCarty then presented a test version of the web site. He stated that the proposal contains sufficient checks and balances such that the web site will present useful course information to students, restrict access to members of the Vanderbilt community, and prevent abuses of the data. (Professor Tellinghuisen left the meeting.)

Professor Damon asked whether the web site would include the number of students who completed the course evaluation form for each course. Dean McCarty responded that, yes, the number of students enrolled and the number of students participating in course evaluations will be presented for each course. Professor Campbell asked if a note would be posted on the web site for those courses in which data has been withheld, for whatever reason. Dean McCarty replied that, yes, a note would state that there is insufficient data for this course. Professor Wood asked which course evaluation information would be posted on the site. Would this semester’s courses be included? Dean McCarty responded that the web site would include course evaluation information that will be collected after this proposal has been approved by the A&S faculty. If the proposal is approved this semester, then next semester’s courses will be the first to be included on the web site. Professor Campbell asked, if this proposal were to be approved, would the SGA no longer have access to the course evaluation data. Dean McCarty replied that, no, we would no longer grant them access to this information. Professor Campbell then suggested that Dean McCarty discuss this with the SGA president, to which Dean McCarty replied that he plans to meet with her. Professor Lachs inquired about the reason for the concern about data mining. Dean McCarty responded that many faculty members have expressed concern about the inappropriate use of course evaluation data. This proposal incorporates safeguards against such abuses. Professor Wood asked whether the standard for granting requests from junior faculty to withhold course evaluation data would be different from the standard for other faculty members. Dean McCarty stated that the standard would be slightly different. The concern is that students might avoid courses taught by junior faculty whose scores are low. This would be counterproductive; junior faculty members need teaching experience to improve their effectiveness. Senior faculty members usually teach upper-level courses that are required for the major, and, consequently, students have to enroll in those courses, regardless of the scores of the instructor. Following up this point, Professor Stubbs asked whether Dean McCarty considered an exclusion for all first-year instructors; otherwise students might assume that an instructor is ineffective if his or her course is missing from the web site. Dean McCarty replied that many first-year instructors receive high scores, and there is no reason to exclude them. Further, there might be many reasons for why a course is not included on the web site—it might not have had the necessary response rate, or it might have had a small enrollment, for example—and students would not know why the course is missing. Professor Campbell asked about the instructors who have opted out of the online course evaluation system. Dean McCarty responded that their courses would be included on the web site. Professor Getz asked whether a course requires a minimum number of responses to be included. Dean McCarty replied that, yes, a course needs at least five responses. Professor Getz then asked whether graduate courses would be included. Dean McCarty replied that the main focus would be on undergraduate courses, but he stated, after a query from Professor Tuchman, that graduate courses with
at least five student responses will be included. Council then approved the motion that recommended that the course evaluation web site proposal be brought before the A&S faculty for consideration.

3. Changes in Freshman Orientation and the implications for A&S.

Dean McCarty stated that he and Mark Bandas are co-chairs of the new Orientation to Vanderbilt Norms and Values Committee. This committee is one of four committees that Chancellor Gee created in response to the recommendations of the Safety Task Force. The mandates of the four committees all concern campus culture: Events, Activities, and Campus Culture; Conduct, Honor, and Integrity; Orientation to Vanderbilt Norms and Values; and Student Wellness and Health. Dean McCarty explained that the current orientation program has several weaknesses. New students are presented with too much information in a short period of time and with little opportunity for reflection and/or retention. Orientation activities occur in the two or three days immediately preceding the first day of classes and do not continue throughout the term. Further, last semester there were many incidents of alcohol intoxication and sexual assault by first-year students. The Orientation to Vanderbilt Norms and Values Committee is charged with changing the orientation program at Vanderbilt. Dean McCarty stated that he proposes that orientation activities be conducted primarily in small groups, co-facilitated by faculty members, VUceptors, and Student Life professionals. 80 faculty members (60 from the College of Arts and Science) would be required to help facilitate the small groups. Dean McCarty stated that he was convinced that 60 A&S faculty members will volunteer to lead discussions in the learning communities. These small groups, based on the model developed by the Vanderbilt Visions Committee, would meet on move-in day and continue to meet approximately once a week throughout the year. All of the small groups would follow the same framework of topics and be provided with the same resources, but each group would accomplish the goals in their own way. Students would earn one credit, on a pass/fail basis, for participating in these discussions and activities. Dean McCarty remarked that the Provost is strongly supporting these proposed changes to freshmen orientation and has committed financial resources for faculty members who volunteer as facilitators of the small learning groups.

Professor Tuchman asked whether the faculty members who would be facilitators for the small learning groups will also be pre-major advisors. Dean McCarty replied that he would prefer to couple these two functions in this way, but the current group of pre-major advisors might not want to be facilitators. Further, some students in a small learning group will not be enrolled in the same college as the facilitator, since the small groups will be a mixture of students from all four undergraduate colleges. Professor Tuchman then asked how Vanderbilt has avoided these kinds of problems (alcohol abuse and sexual assault) in the past. Dean McCarty stated that the recent escalation of inappropriate behavior was not predictable and was exacerbated by the fact that RAs are now the first responders to incidents. RAs are not trained to handle those kinds of situations and do not have authoritative powers to respond effectively to the problems. Professor Wood queried whether the way in which Vanderbilt presents itself to prospective students might have an impact on the kind of students we are attracting.
Vanderbilt prides itself on the increasing SAT scores of our matriculating students, but are we being as careful to attract the best students in other respects? Dean McCarty appreciated his point, but noted that the results of student surveys regarding alcohol consumption have been relatively stable for some time. The increase in the amount of inappropriate behavior is probably the result of a combination of variables. Professor Sloop suggested that weak penalties are one important factor for the increase in inappropriate behavior. Dean McCarty agreed, although Vanderbilt’s amnesty policy has been effective in preventing serious injuries and deaths. The amnesty policy allows students to go to the hospital emergency room for treatment without the risk of incurring penalties.

Professor Damon stated that he has been a pre-major advisor and enjoys talking with students about their academic and career plans, but he cannot imagine talking to students about their social concerns. Dean McCarty replied that he is not asking faculty members to teach students about alcohol and sex. He is asking them to facilitate discussions about these issues with a student VUceptor and a Student Life professional. Faculty members, as facilitators of these small learning groups, will develop a high level of familiarity and trust with the students in his or her group, and discussion of these sensitive topics will arise naturally. Common readings could also form the basis of discussion about these topics. Faculty members will not be told how to discuss these issues with his or her students; facilitators can lead the discussions in their own way. (Dean McIntire left the meeting.)

Professor Gaca asked whether it might be better for the small learning groups to be college-specific. Dean McCarty responded that that is a valid alternative, but the plan is to work toward the goals of the College Halls system in which students from all four Vanderbilt undergraduate colleges will participate. Professor Gaca then stated that, in her experience as a pre-major advisor, parents upset about their children’s academic problems can be challenging enough; parents upset about their children’s social problems would be far more difficult. For another matter, there are liability issues involved. The liability is greater, Dean McCarty replied, if Vanderbilt does nothing in response to the increase in inappropriate behavior. Students, he suggested, could be asked to take an online alcohol awareness program. The particular program that he has in mind appears to be effective in reducing the amount of alcohol abuse at other campuses. Professor Campbell asked about the response rate for this type of online program. Dean McCarty replied that the response rates are very high, because completing the program is made a prerequisite to registering for courses. Professor Sloop asked if completing the online program is anonymous. Dean McCarty replied that it is anonymous, although we could track who has taken it.

Dean McCarty stated that a specific proposal for the small learning groups is not ready yet, and any proposal would require the agreement of all four undergraduate schools. He suggested that the small learning groups be a one-credit, pass/fail course, facilitated by faculty members, VUceptors, and Student Life professionals. Professor Campbell stated that, if students from all four Vanderbilt undergraduate colleges will participate in the small learning groups, then the faculty of all four colleges should discuss the proposal.
This would be difficult to arrange, she acknowledged, but an e-mail discussion or a web site could be used. Dean Daniels remarked that Dean McCarty is correct that Vanderbilt has to address the behavioral problems witnessed last semester, but we as a faculty have a choice about how to do it and we need to decide quickly. The Vanderbilt Visions Committee proposed a program that includes small student groups and would require at least 40 faculty members to lead these groups. These small student groups are similar in concept to Dean McCarty’s proposed small learning groups, which would require 60 A&S faculty members. It is unlikely that 100 A&S faculty members would be willing to participate in these programs, and, consequently, the Dean’s Office has been discussing merging the two programs with the Vanderbilt Visions Committee and the AXLE Implementation Committee. Professor Sloop asked whether all faculty members would be welcome to facilitate a small learning group. Dean McCarty replied that, yes, all full-time faculty members would be invited, including Lecturers and Senior Lecturers.

Professor Lachs posited that this proposed scheme places too much emphasis on the use of words to affect behavior. Dean McCarty responded that the small learning groups would have an academic focus and structure; the groups could discuss common readings, for example, and/or be inspired by great lecturers or presenters. Some of the discussions in the small groups might require or be helped by the use of VUceptors and Student Life facilitators. Professor Lachs responded that these suggestions still place too much emphasis on words. What is needed are positive habits and action. Deans McCarty and Daniels explained that the small learning groups would encourage and develop positive habits and action. The groups, as one of their first actions, would develop a written agreement amongst themselves governing their conduct, and they would cooperatively work together to accomplish common goals, most of which will be outside of the traditional classroom setting. The goals and activities of the small learning groups would impress upon the students that they need to be responsible members of the Vanderbilt community.

Professor Campbell asked whether the student VUceptors will be compensated for their work. Dean McCarty replied that, yes, they will receive bookstore credit. Professor Campbell then asked whether the plan for the small learning communities would be implemented for August, 2006, to which Dean McCarty said yes.

Dean McCarty stated that he hopes to bring a proposal to Council next month, depending on the decisions and input of other committees. Professor Damon responded that Council would appreciate an update on this issue next month, regardless of the actions of other committees. (Dean Daniels and Professor Wood left the meeting.)

4. **Business from the Curriculum Committee.**
   - Course renumbering proposal.

Professor Damon stated that the Council should not discuss this issue as a whole, but that Dean McCarty should appoint an ad-hoc committee, with at least one Council member and perhaps one Associate Dean and/or the A&S Registrar as *ex officio* members. Professor Campbell asked whether the new course renumbering system should be a four
digit scheme, as the proposal suggests, or a four place scheme. She suggested that a five or six place scheme might be even better. Professor Getz responded that the course renumbering system could include letters, but recommended that Council should let the ad-hoc committee discuss and propose the nature of the new scheme. Council members agreed with this point. Council then approved a motion to recommend that Dean McCarty appoint an ad-hoc faculty committee to consider and propose a new course renumbering system.

5. Business from the Committee on Educational Programs (CEP).

- Division of the Department of Art and Art History.
  Professor Lachs asked whether the proposed division would require any additional resources. Dean McCarty responded that it would not. The proposed division is almost cost neutral. Council then approved the proposal without dissent. (Professor Lachs left the meeting.)

- Addition of and revisions to East Asian Studies minors.
  Professor Getz remarked that the same courses appear to satisfy both the proposed Minor in Chinese Language and Culture and the Minor in East Asian Studies. The two minors should be more clearly differentiated. Professor Campbell suggested that Sociology 278 should be listed as one of the elective courses for the EAS minors. Council then voted to defer these recommendations, pending clarification of Professor Getz’s recommendation.

- Elimination of Information Systems track in Managerial Studies minor.
  Professor Campbell asked whether the phrase “‘pipeline’ issues” in the proposal referred to students presently enrolled in the program who would be grandfathered if this proposal were to be adopted. Professor Damon replied yes. Council then approved the elimination of this track.

- Addition of a Chinese Area Studies track in Beijing, CET Study Abroad.
  There were no questions or discussion, and Council approved the proposed track.


- Recommendations from the Second Language Acquisition Committee.

Professor Getz asked how these proposed rules, if approved, would be advertised and whether they would be published in the Catalog. Professor Damon replied that yes, presumably, they would be placed in the Catalog. Council then approved these recommendations, with the understanding that Catalog language would be written for these rules.

7. New business and concerns.

No issues were raised.
8. **Good of the Council.**

No issues were raised.

9. **Adjournment.**

Council voted to adjourn at 5:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Malcolm Getz  
Secretary of the Faculty Council