Student Learning Enhancement Team

February 6, 2009

3:30 p.m., Peabody Boardroom, Administration Building


Those absent:  Meg Amstutz, Paige Carmichael, Paul chambers, Cheryl Dozier, Art Dunning, Loch Johnson, Pam Kleiber, David Lee, Jean Martin-Williams, Connor McCarthy, Jere Morehead, Shannon Scott, Adam Wyatt

Rodney called the meeting to order at 3:35 p.m.  The minutes of the January 26 meeting were approved.

Rodney began the discussion by stating that we need to decide what is important, what the team’s priorities are.  He wanted to know, for example, how we should consider the different themes.  Rodney then asked everyone for their thoughts.

Luke Naeher:  Likes first-year, study abroad, and research ideas that were submitted.

Fran Teague:  Writing will be a part of whatever we choose.  She likes the experiential learning theme.  If we adopt a first-year emphasis theme, we should include transfer students and students new to professional degree programs.

Barb White:  Likes experiential, real-world learning, thinking outside of what we normally do.  Also likes global theme.  Barb believes students want to get outside the traditional educational experience.

Bill Potter:  Likes learning skills.  These can be used for a life time.  Students need to know how to write and do research.

Judy Shaw:  Likes all global proposals.  Pointed out that these programs provide experiential learning.

Marisa Pagnattaro:  Students need more contact with faculty, as expressed in the student survey results.  This can be accomplished via research and/or global themes.

Joe Broder.  Agreed with Marisa.  Students should get to know faculty.  Another grouping that would address this would be advising.

Denise Gardner.  Likes engaged scholar/engaged citizens—engaged in research, service, global.  Could be tied in with skill development.

Allan Aycock.  Is positive about engagement that focuses on engaging students at a deeper level.  Would like there to be a common UGA learning experience that “marks” UGA students.  Everyone does research, service learning, e-portfolio, etc.

Katy Bowers: Having a connection with faculty members makes or breaks an experience.  Students need to be involved in “going and doing something.”  If we choose a first-year experience, we need to change
it to “first semester” and include transfer students. Would like to see small groups of students interacting with faculty.

Leslie Atchley: Whatever theme we choose, it needs to have faculty/student interaction at its core. Engagement and transferable skills are central to a good education.

Irwin Bernstein: We should be creating opportunities, not requirements. It is important that students learn more than “factoids.” An increase in small groups in labs, community service, study abroad, etc. all involve more faculty contact. If students join faculty in those pursuits, they won’t compete for faculty time.

Robin Tricoli: Agrees with Irwin. She likes experiential learning and critical thinking, with a writing component.

Jere Morehead. Some pre-proposals are too narrow. His favorite is the language and culture pre-proposal.

Shannon Wilder. Likes critical thinking and increased faculty involvement in the context of service learning. Following the forum she spoke with David Berle who has offered to meet with several other authors. How will we facilitate collaboration?

Rodney answered that we will select some pre-proposal authors and ask them to talk to us.

David Knauft: There is power in submitting to the leadership team proposals that build on our strengths. Service learning is a UGA legacy (David referred to Hoke Smith) not traditionally tied to teaching. We are a land-grant institution.

Bob Boehmer: Bob remarked that we do not want to have a disjointed proposal. Having listened to everyone’s ideas, he noted that the following themes had been supported: faculty/student interaction, engagement, writing, research, global experience, a unique mark of a UGA education. He asked if we could arrange those elements to fit a common topic and offered the example of environmentalism. How do we make sure that a context has all the critical elements.

Fran commented that we don’t have to mandate writing. If we choose service learning or study abroad, students will have to make some kind of presentation, either written or oral.

David agreed with Bob. We shouldn’t combine too many elements. We need cohesion.

Robin stated that the impact of experiential learning on students is greater than traditional learning.

Katy quoted the UGA motto: “To teach, to serve, to inquire into the nature of things.” She asked if we could somehow have a theme of service, building on our strengths.

Denise: We need to construct thematic opportunities: global, real-world/research, civic engagement/service learning.

Irwin: We must be sure we don’t give students “trivial pursuits.” Students should seek into the origins of facts, not simply learn them.
Rodney replied that students think research is done only in relation to lab sciences.

Joe reminded the group about the work that has been done in the area of creating a new learning environment at UGA. Also, if we can tie a student learning initiative to our mission and that learning environment, it would be a good fit.

Robin asked what the leadership team wants from this team?

Rodney: Three to four proposals with pros and cons of each. He added that improving advising at UGA is important.

Irwin agreed that advising could be an area that the team could be interested in.

Rodney, Fran, and Katy brought up the idea of beginning with a first semester project and ending in the senior year with a capstone project. Katy remarked that the first semester is important because most students don’t know how to engage in learning.

Leslie: If we have a common theme, could we develop a plan in phases to reach different groups of students?

Luke agreed with Leslie and asked if we could structure a plan that would begin with a UGA101 experience and then in the last three years offer opportunities in study abroad, service learning, research, etc.

Rodney interjected that whatever we do we have to remember to be practical.

Bill remarked that while experiential learning is effective, knowledge-based education is also important.

Barb: We must be aware of the larger picture. Engaged students will understand the world they’re living in.

Judy: We need to keep in mind that there must be rigor in teaching and learning.

Rodney: We can’t create a “monster.” Budgetary and other practical matters are crucial to our success.

Irwin: It will be difficult to estimate costs. He reminded the group that some ideas could be implemented for not much money.

Leslie: If we emphasize faculty/student interaction, we could give students several choices of projects, etc.

Katy: Students do need a push sometimes.

Irwin: A stronger advising system would help give students that push. That could be expensive.

Denise: Remember the idea of scalability. We must get realistic budgets.

David: Faculty will become involved in the student learning initiative if the administration says “this is important.”
Rodney stated that he would like to present three proposals to the Leadership Team, all having the same budgets, so that the decision of which to choose would not be made on the basis of money alone.

Rodney asked for an idea of “boiling down” all the ideas we have and got several answers.

He then called for a “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” vote on each of the 30 pre-proposals. The purpose of the vote was to select the authors we would like to invite to make presentations to the team.

The following eight pre-proposals received a “thumbs up:”

“Central Advising Resource Center.” Noelke

“Active Scholarship Initiative.” Wharton, Steger, Barratt, and Balthazor

“Taking Academic Advising at UGA to the Next Level: Advising Ombuds, Faculty Mentoring, and Reduced Student-Advisor Ratios.” Crowther

“Undergraduate Research.” Hall

“Integrating Research and the Undergraduate Experience.” Pacifici

“Engaged Scholars, Engaged Citizens.” Berle, Gonzalez, Hous, Matthews, Thompson, and Service Learning Interest Group

“Integrated Program for First-Year Experience.” Fechheimer

“Re-envisioning the Undergraduate Curriculum in a Global Context.” Fallows, Lauth, Galen, Williams, Porter, Gittleman, Horne, deMarrais

Rodney said that he, Bob, and Jan will discuss how the invitation to the authors will be worded.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jan Wheeler