Student Learning Enhancement Team

Friday, February 27, 2009

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


Those absent: Allan Aycock, Bob Boehmer, Paige Carmichael, Paul Chambers, Cheryl Dozier, Art Dunning, Loch Johnson, Pam Kleiber, David Knauf, Connor McCarthy, Jere Morehead, Marisa Pagnattaro, Fran Teague

Pre-proposal authors: Ron Balthazor, Caroline Barratt, Paul Quick, Sara Steger, Robin Whorton

Invited guests: Christopher Hayes, Nelson Hilton, Hugh Ruppersburg, Julie Segrest

Rodney Mauricio called the meeting to order at 3:35 p.m. and introduced the pre-proposal presenters, Ron Balthazor, Caroline Barratt, Paul Quick, Sara Steger, and Robin Wharton. Rodney then introduced invited guests Christopher Hayes, Nelson Hilton, Hugh Ruppersburg, and Julie Segrest.

Ron Balthazor gave a slide presentation of their pre-proposal, “Active Scholarship Initiative.” Ron pointed out that since submitting their pre-proposal the group has made several changes in their idea for a Student Learning Initiative.

Their initiative would emphasize critical thinking, research, and writing and would integrate the best pedagogy on campus. The program moves student learning from term-based to project-based time lines and involves virtual research and a writing laboratory. Ron and his group have included an electronic assessment component which would fulfill both UGA and SACS assessment requirements.

Ron distributed two handouts, one that addresses the criteria developed by the team and the other that describes a sample project scenario. Copies of the handouts are attached to the minutes.

Hugh Ruppersburg asked which students would be involved with the initiative. Ron said that he envisions sophomores primarily—even those in large lecture classes. Their initiative is flexible enough to include other undergraduates.

Jean Martin-Williams asked if the group had considered how ASI teams would be scheduled—would they be available during the busiest times of the semester? Ron replied that scheduling would have to be considered. He thinks that with efficient use of graduate students and peer tutors plus careful attention to scheduling at or before the beginning of a semester there should be no major scheduling challenges.

Judy Shaw asked how ASI differs from Writing across the Curriculum. Ron answered that ASI is more targeted and more project-based. It involves a team of support instead of individual T.A.s. Ron replied that IT would be a critical part of ASI, including using IT in peer rating/assessment.
Katy Bowers asked if ASI in its implementation phase would be as frustrating as she found EMMA a few years ago. Paul Quick responded that EMMA was a “toddler” compared with its current state.

Hugh Ruppersburg asked to what extent is the program flexible enough to serve a diverse campus. Paul explained that teams are formed from groups all over campus. Hugh then asked for an estimate of how many people would be needed to staff the initiative. Paul did not respond with a specific number. Instead, he referred to the special training that would be offered to TAs.

Nelson pointed out that Berkley has a similar program. Robin Tricoli added that the Berkley program began with a grant from the Mellon Foundation which provided a faculty stipend for professors to work on these kinds of projects. Also, Robin stated that Berkley’s program is still small and might not be the best model for UGA.

Irwin Bernstein asked if the initiative would constitute the centerpiece of a class. Ron answered that it is one way to add a lab experience to a class—a different way of delivering content. Irwin then asked if UGA would add an hour of credit to a class that used ASI. Katy said she didn’t think that would be necessary. Non-science classes she is familiar with often have “extra projects.”

Judy then asked what faculty members get out of this. Paul responded that they get extra “hands” to help them deliver the course. Ron added that faculty like it because it is good pedagogy. The administration would have to support the idea for it to be successful.

Rodney asked if the initiative would be sustainable after five years. Ron said that Rodney’s question was tricky, but that he believes the faculty would be “transformed” after five years. Even if the funds went away, the system would still be used.

Irwin asked how long it would take to train a faculty member to use the technology associated with the initiative. Ron answered that it would depend on the faculty member, but that it wouldn’t take very long—a matter of a few hours.

Leslie Atchley reminded everyone that one of the most important outcomes of the student survey was the importance of the faculty/student relationship. Paul stated that ASI does not take away from that experience. Members of the group added that it could bring students and faculty closer together. Ron stated that there is no magic available to improve faculty/student ratios. We need to be encouraging students to see learning in a different way.

Barb White stated that we should focus on rigor and pedagogy—the passion of learning that can exist between faculty and students—rather than on technology. Ron added that the point is for students to engage with their own learning. Technology should support that. Barb said that we should utilize the technology we already have.

Shannon Wilder asked if the possibility for an e-portfolio application existed. Ron answered that it could be one aspect of the initiative.
Rodney asked what would happen if the team decided that this idea would work well in capstone courses (in terms of scalability). Ron said that it could begin there and evolve to support other initiatives. Paul said it could be an honors class option.

Rodney then asked what the initiative would cost. Ron stated that it is in a pilot stage now and will be used in five courses in the fall at a cost of almost nothing. The initiative would need a year of development plus a director, an IT person, a personnel coordinator, IT hardware, approximately 50 units of graduate students per semester, six instructor librarians per semester, plus paid peer tutors, in order to support 500 projects each semester. He estimates that the total cost would be around $500,000.

Rodney thanked the presenters and the invited guests for attending.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jan Wheeler