Minutes, Rhetoric and Communication Study Group meeting, 11/13/02

Present: Dan Bitran, Pat Bizzell, Loren Cass, Mark Hallahan, Laurie King, Ed O’Donnell, Phil Rule

Absent: Susan Berman, Brian Linnane, Mary Morton, Catherine Roberts

Meeting Monday 11/18, noon, Fenwick 208, with Neel Smith, Classics, to hear his ideas on rhetoric and electronic media;

Meeting Wednesday 12/11, 9 a.m., Fenwick 208, our final meeting of the semester, to plan ahead.

We discussed the need for password protection of the website where we are posting people’s interview notes or explicit permission from those interviewed to post their materials. We felt strongly that it was not right to post the materials without either password or permission, since we had explicitly told our interviewees that their responses would be confidential. We agreed to give Catherine the responsibility of solving this problem by the method of her choice, either getting the password set up asap or contacting each interviewee who’s been done so far and getting his/her permission. NOTE: those of us with interviews still to do should get that permission from our interviewees.

We discussed what we are finding from our interviews. Some patterns: faculty in the humanities seem more negative about student written and oral communication skills than faculty in the sciences, and more willing to get faculty development help. Most favor teaching writing within discipline-specific courses, although several also/instead recommended an intensive writing experience in the first year, not necessarily in one’s major.

Several noted the value of resources already available, e.g. the workshops offered by Jasna Shannon; assistance with on-line research provided by reference librarians; etc. It was noted that many faculty do not seem to be aware of existing resources to improve teaching of communication skills.

We looked at a number of textbooks for teaching communication skills, some of them discipline-specific. A number of these have been placed on a shelf to the right of the door of the English Common Room [Fenwick 207] if anyone would like to look at them again. Ed O’Donnell shared information he had found about a speaking-across-the-curriculum program at DePauw and Pat Bizzell shared info about a Teaching and Learning Center at Carleton and a Center for Public Speaking and Civic Engagement at Penn State.

Loren Cass informed us that Pat and Ed were going to be asked to give a report on our progress at the 12/3 AAC meeting, responding to a set of questions not yet given to us.
We discussed the need to determine the future direction of our work, and decided to wait on that discussion until after the 12/3 AAC meeting. Two possible models were proposed:

1. We could continue to gather information—certainly we intend anyway to finish up any remaining interviews—and disseminate what we have learned to the faculty, e.g. through reporting on the results of our survey/interviews; reporting on what Ed and Brian found in re. programs at other schools especially Jesuit schools/small liberal arts colleges; arranging for a “best practices” panel at which 3-4 colleagues identified through the interview process would present on their pedagogy; putting our influence behind publicizing the faculty development workshop with a visiting expert that Jasna Shannon will offer at the end of the spring semester.

2. We could push harder toward coming up with a recommendation by the end of the school year. How? We could divide ourselves into teams of 2-3 people and each prepare a proposal for one of the options we have discovered, as it might be realized at Holy Cross, e.g. a teaching and learning center for Holy Cross; a speaking-across-the-curriculum program; a writing-intensive experience for all first-year students; etc. We’d have to decide on the list of options to explore. Each team would present to the committee and when/if we had a favorite, we could begin to share it, e.g. with the other curriculum study groups.

It would, of course, be possible to do both 1 and 2 above, at least to the degree of setting up the small teams to collect info on options and put it in some order applicable to the College, even if we didn’t feel ready to report out on these by the end of the school year. To be discussed at our 12/11 meeting.

NOT CLEAR: what timetable the administration expects us to be operating on.