Minutes, Rhetoric and Communication Study Group meeting, 12-3-02

Present: Bizzell, Cass, O’Donnell, Roberts, Rule
Absent: Berman, Bitran, Hallahan, King, Linnane

Our next meeting will be February 19, same location, noon.

Report on AAC meeting, 12-2-02

Ed O’Donnell reported on the AAC meeting of 12-2, at which all four study groups presented updates. He said the other groups seemed to be struggling much more than we are to define their agendas; our issue, in contrast, seems to be how to achieve goals everyone pretty much agrees on in re. student communication abilities. Ed reviewed for them the key questions we’ve addressed, some options we’ve turned up, our faculty survey process and information-gathering from other schools, and the Smith and Martin presentation.

The big question that emerged at the AAC was: how are all four study groups related? The Integration and Acquisition of Knowledge groups have ceded rhetoric and communication issues to us; the Acquisition of Knowledge and Engagement with Values groups are very concerned about overlap between them; but others felt that overlap was not a bad thing as it would help common ground to emerge. In the area of critical thinking, we overlap with the Integration, Acquisition groups; in the area of promoting dialogue, we overlap with the Values group. The possibility of reshuffling, redefining groups’ mandates later was mentioned. There was some desire expressed to get the groups together more often, or at least the co-chairs. Ed was unclear about whether Dean Ainlay actually requested a summary “mission statement” from each group right now; he will clarify.

By the end of the year, each group should expect to present a report on its basic objectives. Ours will surely include our survey results, an account of the “best practices” we’ve discovered here and elsewhere, and a narrative focussed on “what our students should know/be able to do” in re. communication skills: what does it mean to be a good writer/speaker/reader? We discussed trying to frame these goals as part of a “teaching mission statement” for the College.

Our next steps

We spent some time discussing what we should do next to prepare for our report and move things forward in the spring. Everyone in the group was given a task for over the winter break [including those who were not present, and who should feel free to request a change of their assignment if they wish!]:

1. Everyone should finish their faculty interviews asap and get the notes to Catherine with explicit permission from the interviewee to post them on our website. Catherine
wants people to know, however, that this section of the website will be password-protected.

2. Loren and Mark will collate information from the surveys, using the numbers when possible and noting what themes come up frequently, as well as the occasional “nuggets” of wisdom.

3. Ed and Brian will continue to collect information from programs at other schools, and begin to categorize this info in terms of types of programs: writing- and/or – speaking-across-the-curriculum, teaching and learning institutes, etc.

4. Laurie and Dan will attempt to come up with part of a “goals” statement on what communication skills students should have, that part that deals with technological skills.

5. Phil and Sue will attempt to come up with part of a “goals” statement that deals with writing, reading, speaking abilities.

6. Pat will investigate connections between our work and that of other study groups dealing with potential modifications to the FYP.

**Spring faculty workshop**

Pat reported Jasna Shannon’s request for input from the committee as to the best date for the proposed faculty development workshop on speaking-across-the-curriculum, which Jasna will be sponsoring with College writing program money. We agreed that the best time might be early in the week immediately preceding graduation.