

## **Response to APC Report on Humanities**

8 November 2000

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to some of the conclusions reached by the APC committee in its recent review of the Humanities program.

2a. The report states that **'the impression remains that there is considerable variation from section to section in what material is covered'**. We do employ a common core syllabus in each of the courses, and weekly faculty meetings are designed in part to review the upcoming texts. Each instructor is required to submit a copy of her/his syllabus to the course coordinator and to the director of the program, and I believe that variation is minimal. Of course instructors in Humanities come from a number of disciplines, and it is to be expected that different approaches to the material emerge over the course of the semester. But all instructors are expected to cover the same core syllabus and readings.

2b. The report states that **'the relationship between 414 and the rest of the program is tenuous'**. The capstone course now begins with a lecture where materials from the first three courses are explicitly re-introduced and linked with the main themes of 414. Global power relations, human rights (including here women's rights), environmental issues, and broader cultural developments in the contemporary world are taught within the context of earlier patterns. It is true that many 414 faculty have not taught in the earlier courses, but the relationship between 414 and the first three courses is quite clear; virtually all of the main lectures refer back to earlier developments and trends, and weekly staff meetings always draw upon issues raised and addressed in 124,214,324. Faculty who teach in one of the other courses always draw attention to connections made in previous semesters.

4. The report states that there is a **'heavy reliance on part-time and temporary non-tenure track faculty'**. The number of part-time faculty teaching in the program has been significantly reduced over the past two years with the employment of three full-time, non-tenure track instructors. At present (fall 2000) we employ six part-time instructors, and one of these instructors is a full-time faculty member at AB-Tech. Although the employment of non-tenure track faculty is not ideal, it is certainly an improvement on an earlier situation. These faculty members receive very high marks on their student evaluations, and their contributions to faculty development initiatives in the program have been exceptional.

5. The report states that **'uncritical support of the courses risks stagnation'**. I am not aware of any uncritical support for the program. Indeed most of the faculty who teach in the program are constantly criticizing, re-evaluating and refining each of the four courses. The recent efforts to edit and publish custom readers for the program is just one of many examples of the sort of constant self-evaluation central to the health of the program.

The report also states that the program **'has not been sufficiently bold in its exploration of alternatives to keep pace with important trends in liberal education'**. I am not sure what unidentified 'important trends' are being referenced here. During the current academic year (and thanks

to NEH funding), we are hosting faculty development workshops on China, India, and the environment . The first two workshops feature nationally-recognized scholars and are designed to incorporate more non-western material into the program. The environmental workshops are responding to student-led calls for greater emphasis on issues relating to the natural world. NEH funding is being used to host all of these workshops and to pay for visiting scholars. In addition, program members are active participants at the annual meeting of the Association of Core Texts and Courses, and at the annual meeting of the Association of General and Liberal Studies. At a fall 1999 meeting of COPLAC institutions, members of the Humanities faculty sought suggestions and discussed the program with faculty from peer institutions. At least two faculty members from Humanities participate in the annual Asheville Institute on General Education. Important trends in liberal studies are a feature of these meetings, and we attempt to incorporate new ideas whenever appropriate. Just this past September a team of UNCA faculty, together with the Vice Chancellor, attended a meeting on the future of the Humanities hosted by UNC-Chapel Hill. Again and again we were told that our program is both exciting and unique in its efforts to bring together faculty from across the campus for the purpose of teaching core texts and unified themes. In November 2000 a group will travel to Wabash College in Indiana in order to observe the Humanities program on that campus and to discuss possible improvements in our offerings. And in early December 2000 the Humanities program hopes to begin working with faculty at Christ School in Arden, where faculty and administration are eager to begin their own interdisciplinary Humanities program. These sorts of undertakings are ongoing and central to the quality of the Humanities Program at UNCA.

During the 1999-2000 academic year, a FIPSE grant on "Assessing Trends in the Liberal Arts Core: A Vision for the 21st Century" included UNCA among general ed. programs assessed at sixty-six colleges nation-wide. The evaluator for UNCA, Dr. Scott Lee, reported that "Since the Humanities Sequence had its origins in the mid-1960s, not only is the continuity of development and structure for UNCA's General Education program institutionally deep and firm, but it is both disciplinary and interdisciplinary."

I respectfully disagree with the report's assertion that the chronological paradigm has '**little justification for its use other than tradition**'. There are very strong and legitimate reasons for the employment of this organizing principle, not the least of which is the fact that we do not have a general education requirement in history on this campus. I would be happy to discuss the pedagogical value of the current model at the committee's convenience.

Sincerely,

Bill Spellman