Minutes of the University Core Development Committee, Thursday, May 20, 2010.

The committee met in McMahon Conference Room (Gasson 105) at 3:00 p.m.

Members attending were Patrick Byrne, Michael Clarke, Clare Dunsford, Catherine Read, and Arthur Madigan. Also present were Darren Kisgen (CSOM) and Patrick McQuillan (LSOE), who join the committee as of July 1.

The main business of the meeting was to discuss our understanding of the Cultural Diversity core requirement, i.e., of the characteristics that a course needs to have to fulfill the Cultural Diversity requirement, and in particular how this applies to summer courses proposed by the Office of International Programs for Cultural Diversity credit.

There seemed to be widespread agreement in the group that OIP's three-week summer courses need to incorporate a component of preparation for the overseas experience and a component of follow-up to that experience (as many such courses already do). There also seemed to be agreement that there is a distinction between an experience and a course, i.e., that even the valuable experience of visiting a foreign country is not necessarily a careful study of that country's culture. Still, members pointed out that many OIP courses are more than visits to a foreign country; they give students an experience of immersion in the culture.

Discussion turned to the part of the 1991 Task Force Report that indicates that the typical Cultural Diversity course should be non-United States and non-Western European. As one member pointed out, interpretation of this point has been controversial from the start. This member said he could well envision how studying in certain parts of Europe might give students a new perspective on suburban life in America and so accomplish the purpose of the Cultural Diversity requirement. Further, he saw some importance in the arguments that certain facets of European culture were significantly different from our students' culture and that studying in a European university milieu might well give students an experience very different from his or her own. Another colleague, however, reminded the committee that this requirement was made in response to an American history of discrimination by ethnicity and race. Yet another colleague pointed out that some students are currently advocating for a required course on diversity over and above the current Cultural Diversity requirement. From their point of view, allowing courses on European cultures to count for Cultural Diversity would be a step backward.

Discussion then moved to the role of a historical dimension in Cultural Diversity courses. One colleague cited the 1991 Report's formulation: "A critical component of a liberal education is the capacity to see human experience from the point of view of others who encounter and interpret the world in significantly different ways." To understand the point of view of others involves knowing why those others see the world the way they do, and that generally requires understanding their history. Another colleague agreed in general, but pointed out that the Report mentioned historical understanding as one of several ways in which a course could fulfill the requirement. This colleague preferred a