

**UNCA**  
***Academic Policies Committee***

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***Report on Humanities***

On February 17, 2000, The Academic Policies Committee met with Humanities faculty to discuss the four Humanities courses.

Senate Document 3684 states: "An interdisciplinary course sequence from the humanistic disciplines following the historical development of civilization has traditionally been at the center of liberal education at UNCA. The faculty approves of the Humanistic sequences in its current form as the foundation for general education at UNCA."

Other than reaffirming the traditional historical emphasis, the document gives little guidance as to the program's content. It states only that the course sequence must cover "the ancient world, the rise of European civilization, the modern world, and the future and the individual." The document does add: "It is assumed that the courses will continue to evolve in response to faculty and student concerns and needs." The challenge facing the Humanities program is defining "concerns and needs" and integrating them in the traditional sequence.

From the report and the discussion, APC draws five conclusions about the Humanities program.

1. *A clearer statement of the program's goals is essential. These goals must be recognized and supported by UNCA's faculty.*

The Humanities program has tried to satisfy the Senate Document's dictate that it "evolve in response to faculty and student needs." Both the report submitted to APC and the program's annual reports indicate an ongoing effort to incorporate new ideas and thoughts. For example, while there is still much to be done, the Humanities program has made an effort to incorporate diversity issues into its curriculum.

The evolution of goals and purposes, however, is primarily done within the program itself. Given the Senate Document's claim that the Humanities sequence is central to UNCA's liberal arts orientation this is philosophically unwise.

2. *There is a need for improved coordination.*

Coordination takes three forms.

- a. Within each course from section to section.

Despite extensive efforts, the impression remains that there is considerable variation from section to section in what material is covered, what students are expected to know, and what skills they are supposed to develop. Weekly meetings of faculty, the common lecture, retreats, and seminars are clear efforts to address this concern. They cannot, however, substitute for faculty consensus on purpose and content.

- b. From course to course.

There is an effort to coordinate the first three courses at least chronologically but the relationship between 414 and the rest of the program is tenuous. Yet the 414 course description explicitly states that the course builds “on information gathered and questions raised in the preceding Humanities courses.”

- c. With other components of a student’s education

Senate Document 3684 places the Humanities program at the center of UNCA’s General Education effort. This role demands that Humanities closely coordinate its activities with other components of general education. This does not happen. It is not clear, however, whether the original charge expects Humanities to coordinate with other parts of the curriculum or other departments or programs to coordinate with it.

An integrated approach is mandatory for a successful general education program, but the Humanities program has neither the resources nor authority to control the content of other general education components. By locating it at the center of general education and requiring it to respond to “faculty and student concerns and needs,” a demand placed on no other general education component, the Senate Document imposes an unfair burden on the program. The task of responding to new issues must be an institution-wide effort and not assigned to one component, no matter how central.

3. *Assessment of the program must be improved.*

- a. Assessment of faculty performance within the courses is necessary to enhance coordination across different sections. Monitoring faculty performance in the context of the program and course goals is essential to achieving consistency in the student's experience. The Humanities program's efforts here are rudimentary and hampered by the lack of clear expectations as to what students should learn in the course.
- b. Program assessment determines whether the Humanities sequence is achieving its goals. The writing test now in use is inadequate because it tests student development across their entire educational experience not just the Humanities courses. To isolate the effect of the Humanities courses, the program must consider control mechanisms which limit the impact of external factors of student development on the assessment instrument

4. *Institutional commitment to the program is inadequate.*

The major problem facing the Humanities courses is whether UNCA is willing to support them to the extent necessary to make them the core of the general education program, the status granted them by Senate Document 3684. The heavy reliance on part-time and temporary nontenure track faculty is unacceptable if the courses are indeed the center of the general education effort. This problem has two origins. First, too few tenure track faculty have committed a portion of their teaching load to the program. They may, as the original Senate Document claims, approve of the sequence, but this endorsement is not sufficiently deep to induce them to participate to the exclusion of other interests. Second, UNCA has done little to encourage participation. For example, without a revision of the contact hours formula faculty have no institutional incentive to reorient their activities. In addition, individual departments must provide basic support resources for their instructors teaching in the program. In short, a considerable gap has emerged between the theory of the Humanities courses' preeminence as defined by Senate Document 3684 and institutional practices and culture. Without redressing the disparity, the Humanities courses cannot be expected to carry the burden imposed by Senate Document.

5. *The Program is too reluctant to consider alternatives.*

While APC recognizes that UNCA has built a national reputation around its Humanities-centered curriculum, uncritical support of the courses risks stagnation. The evidence from the report and the discussions indicate that the Humanities program has not been sufficiently bold in its exploration of alternatives to keep pace with important trends in liberal education.

There have been efforts to “evolve” as mandated by Senate Document 3684, efforts documented by the report submitted to APC and the attached annual reports. The changes, however, have occurred solely within the chronological paradigm. Both the report and the discussions indicate a commitment to this coordinating principle with little justification for its use other than tradition. Senate Document 3684, however, restricts innovation and creative approaches to revising the courses. It requires, for example, that the courses follow “the historical development of civilization.” This emphasis interferes with the program’s ability to consider alternate ways of addressing human concerns. Questions as to whether the courses should be organized around themes or specific civilizations, whether and how a micro perspective should and could be balanced with a macro view of cultural trends, and the degree to which different topics, themes and issues should be stressed, are just some of the issues which must be addressed if the courses’ evolution is to be productive. A change in the charge of the enabling Senate document is necessary to allow the program to explore more encompassing alternatives as a coordinating principle.