

**ACADEMIC COUNCIL
MEETING of April 14, 2014
McKenna Auditorium
3:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.**

Members present: John Affleck-Graves, Panos Antsaklis, Christine Becker, Robert Bernhard, James Brockmole, Matthew Capdevielle, Laura Carlson, Donald Crafton, Greg Crawford, Michael Desch, Margaret Doody, Dennis Doordan, Kevin Dreyer, Nick Entrikin, Michael Ferdig, John Gaski, Nasir Ghiaseddin, Erin Hoffmann Harding, Roger Huang, Jeff Kantor, Peter Kilpatrick, Catherine Kromkowski, Jose Limon, Paul McGinn, John McGreevy, Dan Myers, Nell Newton, Hugh Page, Cathy Pieronek, Thomas Pratt, Ava Preacher, Jeff Schorey, Joshua Shrou, Casey Skevington, Cheri Smith, Carter Snead, Alex Taylor, Alain Toumayan, Diane Parr Walker

Members absent: Cindy Bergeman, Kathryn Boehlefeld, Maxwell Brown, Thomas Burish, Rev. John Jenkins, C.S.C., Marya Lieberman, Michael Lykoudis, Chris Maziar, Elizabeth Moore, Robert Norton, Maria Rosa Olivera-Williams, Ramachandran Ramanan, Antonio Schreier

Observers present: Kevin Barry, Kasey Buckles, Earl Carter, Mary Hendriksen, Chuck Hurley, Jim Morrison, Dale Nees, John Polhamus, Frank Rossi

Guests: William Stackman, Sarah Senseman

1. Welcome and opening prayer:

Dr. Laura Carlson, Vice President and Associate Provost, opened the meeting at 3:30 p.m. Prof. Matthew Capdevielle offered a prayer.

2. Approval of minutes:

The minutes of the meeting of February 17, 2014 were unanimously approved.

3. Executive Committee decisions

Dr. Carlson reviewed two actions by the Executive Committee at its meeting of April 3—both of which had been vetted by the Advanced Studies Committee. The first involved the Policy for Postdoctoral Appointments and reflects the move of responsibility for these appointments from the Office of Research to the Graduate School. The second involved changes in the Academic Code of the Graduate School, including statements about how credit is assigned, nomenclature for programs concentrated in the summer sessions, and procedures for determining a student's readiness to resume academic work after withdrawal for health reasons. The Executive Committee voted to approve those changes; they are now under consideration by Fr. Jenkins.

4. Proposed Excused Absence Policy for Undergraduates

Prof. Kevin Dreyer introduced the proposed Excused Absence Policy for undergraduates, being presented by the Undergraduate Studies Committee. This item has been under discussion in

committee for six or more years. He invited Ms. Cathy Pieronek, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in the College of Engineering, to present the proposed policy.

Ms. Pieronek reported that the need for a policy was raised by associate and assistant deans who were concerned about a substantial increase in the number of excused absences, particularly for personal illness. Faculty had also raised concerns about timely notification of absences.

Currently all excused absences are managed by the Office of Student Affairs, which issues absences through the deans' offices in accordance with *du Lac: A Guide to Student Life*. *Du Lac* permits three types of absences: representing the University on official business; death in a student's immediate family; and a student's personal illness.

A committee was convened by Mr. Bill Stackman, Associate Vice President for Student Affairs, who oversees this policy. The Committee has drafted a new policy that reflects best practices at other institutions while also responding to other concerns of the deans and faculty.

Ms. Pieronek reviewed the current class attendance policy: As a longstanding University policy and a key element of academic freedom, class attendance is under the control of faculty at all times. The one exception is officially excused absences as defined in the Code. The current version of the Academic Code requires faculty to provide a written attendance policy to students at the start of each semester.

The excused absence policy controls only those circumstances under which faculty must consider an absence excused, allowing a student who has missed class to make up the work. Faculty are free to excuse any other absences as they choose. They are also free to allow students to make up missed work as they choose. However, they *must* allow absences and make-up work in these specifically defined circumstances.

The proposed policy retains the excused absences for representing the University on official business and for a death in the student's immediate family. The definition of "immediate family" has, however, been expanded to recognize the needs of blended families—and by including both the serious illness and death of members of the newly defined immediate family.

The new policy adds several new categories for excused absences, based on best practices observed at other institutions:

- Off-campus legal proceedings
- Religious holy days
- Required military service

There are two major changes in the policy. One is the manner in which the policy deals with students' personal illnesses. Illness has been divided into three categories: non-acute; severe or contagious; ongoing or chronic. Non-acute illnesses are no longer covered by the excused absence policy. Severe or contagious illnesses are covered by the policy if a medical treatment provider documents that the student is too ill to attend class and/or too contagious to attend class. Chronic or ongoing illnesses will be managed by the Office of Disability Services, and are not covered under this policy.

The second major change involves a set of guidelines approved a few years ago by the Academic Council that excuse students for interviews related to employment, graduate school, or professional school. Those guidelines exist only in *du Lac* and only as a set of advisory guidelines. The new policy clarifies that students are expected to use breaks when possible for most interviews, and limits the mandatory excused interview absences to two per semester and in the year of graduation. The student must provide proof that the interview cannot be rescheduled.

Ms. Pieronek noted that in response to faculty complaints about the timeliness of notifications from students, the new policy sets notification deadlines. For absences that can be planned in advance, the student must notify the faculty member one week in advance. For unplanned absences, the student must present proper documentation to the faculty member within two days of the student's return to class.

In addition, there is an added appeal protocol. The student can appeal a faculty member's decision on whether or not to grant an excused absence to the dean (or dean's designate). The only ground for appeal is whether the faculty member's decision comports with the Academic Code and/or other University rules.

The Faculty Senate's feedback to the proposed policy related to concerns about faculty being the "gatekeepers" on the question of absences for their own courses. Overall, faculty would prefer more central control. Ms. Pieronek offered three reasons for the proposed structure of the policy:

1. To comport with the longstanding policy that faculty have control over class attendance at all times and to maintain consistency with the spirit of academic freedom.
2. To prevent a "log jam" at the Provost's Office, because the appeals process would dictate that, if deans were the deciding authorities, then appeals would necessarily move through to the Provost's office. The proposed structure identifies the faculty member as the decider and the dean/dean's designate as the appellate court. This is consistent with other institutional policies which are appealable within the Academic Code.
3. To recognize that a highly centralized attendance policy might lead to an obligation to report attendance to the federal government under Title IV.

Ms. Pieronek invited questions and comments; the other committee members, Mr. Dale Nees and Mr. Stackman, were also in attendance. It was noted that the policy was carried forward out of committee unanimously.

Many of the comments from the Council members reflected the same concerns as expressed by the Faculty Senate, particularly regarding a desire for central control of excused absences.

Prof. Jeff Schorey asked if the new policy would enable effective tracking of excused absences; he said that information is helpful to have as an indicator of trends. Ms. Pieronek responded that while the current policy enables tracking of absence patterns, under the proposed decentralized policy, tracking would not be possible. She invited the Registrar, Mr. Chuck Hurley, to explain the benefit to the University of this arrangement under the federal Title IV rules.

Mr. Hurley referred to the explanation provided by the director of Financial Aid, Ms. Mary Nucciarone: the more centralized an attendance policy is, the more scrutiny it receives from federal regulators. When there is a centralized system of attendance, then a specific last-day-of-attendance report for each class of each student can be required of Financial Aid. This then impacts institutional refund schedules.

A large part of the discussion revolved around explaining that the point of the policy is for faculty to retain control of their own absence policy. Deans' offices will no longer manage absences. Faculty members may excuse any and all excuses proffered by students. The purpose of the Code is to stipulate what absences *must* be excused by all faculty.

Ms. Erin Hoffmann Harding, Vice President of Student Affairs, supported Ms. Pieronek's statement that the majority of excused absences are coming from University Health Services. University Counseling Center (UCC) is not issuing absence excuses. The addition of acute illnesses was added in part on the recommendation of rectors who identified anxiety or depression as the most frequent acute condition they encounter; thus, it would be covered under the new policy. Faculty members still have discretion, and input from UCC can be utilized.

Several faculty members asked about leeway in excusing absences that do not rise to the level of "acute" illness under the new definition or referred to the problem of taking attendance in large classes. Ms. Pieronek and Prof. Dreyer emphasized in response to each scenario that faculty have the right to accept any and all excuses proffered by students. The proposed Code sections pertain to the excused absences that *must* be accepted as excused absences. They are not in fact a limitation on the number of absences which *may* be granted by faculty.

Prof. Don Crafton praised the clarity of the proposal. He suggested that after approval, there be a link easily accessible so that faculty can incorporate the policy or a link to the policy in their syllabi.

Arts and Letters Assistant Dean Ava Preacher asked how the new policy will be communicated to students—fearing that the changed policy will be "deeply confusing" to them. Ms. Pieronek reported that there is no established plan as yet on communicating the new policy to either students or faculty. Educating both populations in the locus of control over absences and in the purposes of the policy will be an important next step after approval. She suggested that a partnership with Student Affairs might be useful.

Members voted on the revised policy for excused absences. The policy was approved with a majority of "yes" votes. There were two "no" votes and one abstention.

5. Proposal by the Ad Hoc Committee on Physical Education Requirement Alternatives

Prof. Dreyer introduced the proposal on Physical Education Requirement Alternatives, for which a presentation was made by Dr. Hugh Page, Vice President and Associate Provost for Undergraduate Affairs, and Dean of the First Year of Studies.

Dr. Page began by explaining that the proposal is the work of an ad hoc committee constituted at the beginning of 2014. A previous committee had studied Notre Dame's Physical Education and Wellness Instruction requirements [demonstrated proficiency in swimming; completion of a two-unit wellness class ("Contemporary Topics for College Students") and four units of life sports activities]; then published a report ("the 2012 report") that was considered by the Undergraduate Studies Committee and released for University-wide comment. Feedback was mixed.

Thus, the ad hoc committee had a three-fold charge:

- To examine the 2012 report and recommendations;
- To propose a final recommendation as to what action should be taken;
- To present that recommendation to the Undergraduate Studies committee for vetting and then to the full council for consideration and a vote.

In its deliberations, in addition to the 2012 report, the committee looked at long-term studies of characteristics of first-year students provided by the Higher Education Research Institute of UCLA's annual publication, *The American Freshman*. Its survey data showed an upward trend in the number of first-year students being "overwhelmed by all I had to do," with its authors suggesting that university administrators should pay more attention to these feelings. A second study, from 2013, provided findings about first-year students and cultural competency, including the students' preparation to enter a diverse workforce. While first-year students felt "very comfortable" about their ability to work with others in a pluralistic environment, they reported themselves lacking in terms of confidence in certain skills—for example, their ability to have their own views challenged and to feel that they were open to the ideas of others. When mapped to the racial make-up of the respondents' schools, Dean Page said, these findings indicate that university administrators have much work to do with first-year students.

The 2012 report proposed three alternatives for handling Notre Dame's Physical Education requirements:

1. Merge the Department of Physical Education and Wellness Instruction (PEWI) and Rec Sports into one co-curricular entity with a dual reporting line to the Department of Athletics and Division of Student Affairs.
2. Retain the PEWI department and replace the current requirements with semester-long voluntary credit-bearing courses available to the entire student population.
3. Reduce the year-long Physical Education requirement to a one-semester Wellness class with voluntary activity offerings per Proposal 2.

In the report, these requirements were not ranked in order; rather, they were provided as possibilities—indicating that while the committee clearly felt that change was recommended, the nature of that change did not garner consensus.

Dr. Page next identified "some emerging realities" on both the national and the local stages that indicate strongly that administrators must be much more attentive to issues of student wellness. For example, visits to health centers are increasing across the nation, and many students are manifesting serious mental health concerns.

At Notre Dame, the total number of appointments at the Health Center has increased by about 19% between 2011-2012 and 2012-2013. Increases are recorded in intake assessments,

psychiatric hospitalizations, mental health withdrawals, and the percentage of student clients who visit the University Counseling Center who present anxiety, or depression, as a major issue. Only one measure was in slight decline: the number of students who have reported that they have seriously contemplated suicide in the previous year.

The ad hoc committee was moved by this body of information to recommend change—believing that the University is presented with a unique opportunity to rebrand and centralize the Health, Wellness and Cultural Competency initiatives on campus and to involve a larger number of on-campus stakeholders in the design and implementation of programming aimed at those particular goals.

Therefore, it formulated a new “hybrid” model consisting of three structural components and presented the model in a report—one that received the unanimous support of the Undergraduate Studies Committee. Those components are:

1. A two-course sequence tentatively titled “You are ND Now-1” and “You are ND Now-2” that are
2. complemented by a series of small-group discussion sessions to be held in residence halls
3. and continuation of a “very robust” set of non-fee based activity courses available to students through Recreational Sports.

The first two of these structural components has seven distinct learning objectives:

1. orientation to University life
2. strategies for health and wholeness
3. community standards and cultural competency
4. strategies for success in the classroom
5. discernment of various kinds
6. cultivation of the spiritual life
7. mind/body awareness through physical activity

The two-course sequence is intended to replace the current “Contemporary Topics for College Students” course as well as the required physical activities which are oriented toward life sports. The structure of this sequence would be as follows: large plenary sessions with specialty presenters; blended learning using digital, classroom, and experiential engagement of students; breakout sessions in residence halls; and ePortfolio engagement. These courses would be directed by the First Year of Studies (FYS), while the content would be jointly developed and overseen with the Division of Student Affairs. FYS would solicit other on-campus units for input—for example, the Career Center and the undergraduate colleges.

While the ad hoc committee does not want to anticipate the work of those who will be responsible for designing the curricula for the two-course sequence, Dr. Page said, the report offers some samples of the topics which might be covered in the courses: responsible alcohol usage, tools of self-discovery such as might be found at the Career Center, navigating a research university’s disciplinary and instructional landscapes, self-care, stress management, resources for emotional well-being. New concepts might also include a session on how students can responsibly assess their own mentoring experiences in classrooms, or assess the quality of their educational experiences. A course on calibrating one’s physical, emotional and spiritual

competency could have value because it presents opportunities to engage students more directly, at the beginning of their college years, so that they can make the most of the next four years.

Dr. Page next addressed three concerns raised by the Executive Committee: (1) the impact of two additional credit courses on the undergraduate curriculum; (2) whether having two graded courses in fact increases the very stress that the program is designed to decrease and ameliorate; and (3) who will be responsible for evaluating course work in the two-course sequence.

On the first concern, about course credit, Dr. Page acknowledged that some colleges are cautious about increasing the degree-credit threshold even by only two credits. He pointed out however that, currently, students are already committing time for which they receive zero credit. The proposed approach allows the University to award credit for the work that is already being done. Additionally, grading provides a traditional incentive to students for performance. While reiterating that the ad hoc committee's recommendations had received the unanimous support of the Undergraduate Studies Committee, Dr. Page addressed the disadvantages of this facet of the proposal. Per term credit thresholds would indeed need adjusting. The paradigm is compliance-driven, a tried and true approach but perhaps well-worn.

The committee has considered options to respond to this concern. The existing PE paradigm could be maintained while offering the new two-course sequence as *non-credit-* bearing offerings. The disadvantage of this approach is signaling a disincentive to take seriously courses the University considers very important.

Regarding the second and third concerns, Dr. Page listed the advantages and disadvantages of graded classes. Course material is focused on skills oriented to promote wellness with learning outcomes that drive assessment measures. While it could also be argued that grading progress toward a "successful" wellness level is peculiar, doing so sends a strong signal that meaningful instruction even in wellness topics requires structure and measures of accountability. On the other hand, two new graded courses may indeed increase stress. Appropriate evaluative measures would need to be very carefully calibrated, given the large size of some of the courses, and many people may, conceivably, weigh in on the evaluation, including those leading small-group discussion sessions in residence halls.

A resolution for concerns about increased stress could include continuation of the existing PE paradigm of evaluating student performance with a Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory scheme. The advantage of this solution is straightforward; the disadvantage is that in any structured learning environment, it is best to provide suitable incentives for high-quality student engagement and performance, and it is possible that continuing the current grading scheme would dis-incentivize engagement.

Dr. Page next spoke about the advantages and disadvantages of the role of FYS as oversight unit for these courses, an issue that is encompassed by the third concern expressed by the Executive Committee. FYS is already the steward of every first-year student's records; many FYS faculty have been involved in teaching classes for at least the past eight years with traditional grading paradigms. On the other hand, this proposal constitutes an undertaking of a new magnitude for FYS, and great care would need to be taken in creating rigorous grading mechanisms. A

resolution for this concern might include collaboration with multiple entities in crafting the structure of the two-course sequence, and ought to include an annual syllabi review, with reliance on student survey data for a measure of effectiveness of pedagogy as well as student learning toward outcomes. The course design provides a good means for delivery of content the University considers to be “absolutely” essential for students. For perhaps the first time, the design allows full cooperative oversight of an educational experience that touches every student entering the first-year class. Finally, the design is infinitely nimble, particularly as compared to the current structure.

Dr. Page summarized the choices available to the Academic Council on this proposal:

1. Approve the FYS proposal, featuring two traditionally graded courses complemented by a series of small-group discussion sessions to be held in residence halls and continuation of a robust set of non-fee based activity courses available to students through Recreational Sports; or
2. Approve the proposal with two non-credit bearing classes that would be evaluated using the current Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory model.

The ad hoc committee approves the first option. If unacceptable to the Academic Council, however, members then believe the second option is infinitely better than the *status quo*.

In concluding his remarks, Dr. Page praised the value of the contributions made by faculty in the Department of Physical Education and Wellness over many years in providing the courses to fulfill Notre Dame’s requirements.

He then said that if the Council chooses to approve the ad hoc committee’s proposal, a rollout could be implemented through the following suggested schedule. 2014-2015 would be a preparation phase in anticipation of a full rollout in 2015-2016. The current requirements would remain in place for 2014-2015. FYS would begin to work with the Provost’s Office and Human Resources to craft a smooth transition for faculty currently employed by PEWI to help them “find soft landings.” In 2015-2016, the new paradigm would be rolled out, support for affected faculty would continue, with a focus on utilizing appropriate faculty in the new paradigm during the terminal year while also HR and the Provost’s Office continue to assist in affecting a smooth transition for them.

Dr. Page invited questions. Dr. Carlson noted that there are, in essence, two proposals before the AC; the first is endorsed by the subcommittee.

Prof. Margaret Doody complimented the committee’s interest and concern demonstrated by the responsive presentation and noted her recognition of the validity of the goals of the committee. She expressed concerns, however, about the paradigm for courses. She asserted that full elimination of the traditional PE requirement would be a mistake. PE has proven successful in lowering anxiety; swimming skills are “very practical” at a university near a river and a large lake. She noted that a danger of “preaching virtues to small groups for credit” is that the experience might make some students more self-conscious. She noted that individuals dealing with any specific problems, such as weight or sexual identity, might become more self-conscious and/or anxious in such a setting. In addition, she fears that minority students, as members of these classes also vying for grades, “will feel they are being looked at as kind of guinea pigs or

examples.” Based on these concerns, Prof. Doody said she would be “very against” making these courses credit-bearing, since the nature of the grade would change the meaning of what is being done. Grading would take “morals into an arena of practical career and thus offers additional stress to students who are very young and at a very difficult time.”

Dr. Page said that Professor Doody’s points were well taken. He spoke about the “extraordinary” stress that students of color are currently experiencing in the curriculum. He suggested that the new paradigm would bring to the attention of all students what it means to be part of a particular group, what it means to understand the perspective of those often identified as “other,” and what it means to develop a precise skill set enabling one to be a responsible, contributing member of a learning community like Notre Dame. In the committee’s view, the benefits outweigh the costs.

Prof. Panos Antsaklis asked about the logistics—specifically, the need to establish grading consistency and for a module or template for the multitude of topics necessary to achieve consistency across instructors. Dean Page replied that the 2014-2015 academic year would be dedicated to building the curriculum. During this year, staff would be hired to develop the curriculum and to recruit instructors from the current faculty. It is expected that after each semester, as is currently done in both PE and FYS, Course Instructor Feedback will be analyzed for successes, effectiveness, and consistency in grading. The advantage of large class sections with one or two people responsible for developing the content is that it is possible to achieve a greater degree of consistency with a common syllabus. The collaborative nature of the design team enables greater consistency and maintenance of quality.

Prof. Antsaklis expressed surprise that a university which prides itself on athletics would opt for no athletic encouragement “other than creating fans.” Dean Page acknowledged that he “wrestled” with this question himself. He noted a difference between *requiring* young people to do things versus strongly recommending and providing incentives for them to do those things. Currently, the University falls on the side of requiring students to do things; at times there is pushback, and at times compliance. The proposed structure offers an opportunity to “do a little less hand-holding,” and to create a paradigm that replicates the world into which students are likely to enter when they graduate, when they will have options to join gyms and to participate in various activities. They will need to provide the incentive themselves. A challenge for the University is to find ways “early on” to encourage students to take greater responsibility for their own learning. The subcommittee decided that the best way to do this would be to provide strong encouragement through electronic portfolios with badges so that students can chronicle their activities for themselves. In addition, the managing unit will develop a very robust advertising campaign that emphasizes the importance of physical as well as emotional wellness. Dean Page noted that since this proposal would enact a program very new to the University, it would require close observation and analysis. He advocated this shift, however, especially since the University supports students becoming more personally engaged in outcomes.

Dean Peter Kilpatrick agreed that if the physical education requirements are eliminated, something needs to be put in their place—especially as the wellness issues are obviously important for students. He noted that the proposed course structure would necessitate between 80 and 100 facilitators—all people important to the success of the program given the estimated

250-student lecture portion of the course. That size class is a “tough sell” without a dynamic lecturer and dynamic material. As had Prof. Antsaklis, Dr. Kilpatrick “highly recommended” the development of “clear rubrics for success” as part of the course development. He asked about the protocol for identifying and ensuring the quality of 80 to 100 facilitators for the residence-hall sections. Dr. Page asserted that there may not be a need for so many facilitators; it is possible that a smaller number of facilitators would be willing to manage a larger number of sections. The Teaching Assistant model for a large Science or Engineering class would be a model for quantity as well as quality. The structure of the class is designed to allow faculty to meet regularly for discussion of successes and weaknesses in the course. In addition, the faculty of the large sections need to be chosen with “great care.” Asked if such people are immediately available, Dr. Page said he was “absolutely confident” that such people have been hired on a regular basis to be part of Notre Dame’s faculty, the staff of the Division of Student Affairs, and other units on campus. He expressed confidence in the ability to find “great people.”

Prof. Michael Desch asked about student feedback on the physical education requirements and on the proposed changes. In addition, he acknowledged that “all of these things are important” but that the move from a simple reduction of the requirements to the full implementation of a broad set of topics did not have immediate logical continuity. He wondered if the decision needed to be “zero sum.” He wondered if the extensive PE requirements ought to be continued while also integrating some of these other topics into the curriculum, rather than at the expense of the PE piece.

Dr. Page addressed the student responses. Some students favor the PE requirements, and there are some detractors. The swim test also has supporters and detractors. He addressed the “why” of the change: the data about the fragility of the student body is “sobering.” The opportunity to do something, and collaboratively, to help students to become better oriented to the kind of experience the University wants them to have as undergraduates over a four-year period is quite compelling. Equally compelling is the opportunity to shift the way the University thinks about how it encourages students to engage in wellness-related activities with the “subtle evaluative framework” of an electronic portfolio to measure what they have actually done and where there might be emerging areas of concern.

As regards the question of a zero-sum decision, Dr. Page agreed that both the PE requirements and the wellness topics are “critical components” of the undergraduate experience. He suggested that there are ways to fold physical activity into undergraduate student life without making it an element of the graded curriculum.

Prof. Jeff Kantor asked for more information on how development of the curriculum will be tied to reduction of the particular stressors that students statistically demonstrate. Dr. Page noted that the goals of the current Contemporary Topics course are already geared partially to address those issues of student stress. The subcommittee believed more dimensions could be folded into a wellness-related, cultural competency-attuned curriculum than is currently available. It was seen as an opportunity to do more within the time commitment already being made by students. The Life Sports element was removed in part because it increased the number of hours students needed to commit. Prof. Kantor asked how success will be determined. Dr. Page said the electronic portfolio feedback will be extensively analyzed; student assessment of their own

activity within a class will be analyzed; surveys will be administered; and anecdotal feedback amassed. This will be a fairly comprehensive body of information on which to make a judgment. He emphasized that the process will be identical to that in any structured learning experience at Notre Dame.

Dean Greg Crawford noted that the stated learning objectives are of the sort that should be reinforced over and over; he asked how other units on campus, such as rectors, Residential Life, and colleges should assist in reinforcing them throughout the four-year experience. Dr. Page noted that the initial work would be done in the Division of Student Affairs; development of the course content would be in collaboration with that office. The colleges could provide a continual reinforcement of the objectives if the two-course sequence is seen as an “archetypal feature” of the kind of work that should be ongoing in every encounter with every student—within and without the classroom-- throughout the first year. The concept of orientation has been habituated as a two-day event at the beginning of the year; instead, it should be extended throughout the year. FYS would look for ways to make sure the messaging is consistently reinforced. In first-year coursework, in advising, in work with the deans, directors of undergraduate studies, and department chairs, collaborative efforts will be made to make sure that appropriate supplementary programs reinforcing these objectives are designed.

In response to Prof. Dennis Doordan’s question, Dr. Page stated that the proposed program will add two credit hours to the required credit hours for graduation.

Dean John McGreevy congratulated the subcommittee for its hard work and expressed his willingness to eliminate the current requirements. Addressing FYS and Student Affairs, however, he described potential areas of concern: the number of students, the number of sections, the challenge of finding “charismatic” instructors, the large number of facilitators needed, and the challenge of the “wide” or “disparate” range of topics. He conjectured the possibility of “a very negative student reaction” with the concomitant reluctant engagement factors available to students—poor attendance, half-hearted participation, and hostility. He described the program as “a required 48 to 50 sessions on a wide range of topics with the invariable mixed quality in instructors spread over large lectures and discussion sections which will seem different from PE” which, whatever its flaws, has a “playful” quality to it.

Dr. Page agreed that indeed this proposal represents “a big change.” Dr. McGreevy rephrased his question to ask what will be done to “ensure that we really have as tightly wound a curriculum as we can, a strong set of instructors, and guaranteed capacity” in the current FYS staff to teach 250-student lectures.

Dr. Page noted that two things have already been done to address these kinds of concerns. First, he has reallocated funding within FYS to create a position for an Assistant Dean of Cultural Competency and Student Engagement. One of the chief responsibilities for that position would be to help design the course. The proposal also contains a provision for hiring a new staff in the Division of Student Affairs who would be responsible for student outreach and engagement. These two positions will primarily be charged with developing course content and planning for the logistics. Discussion has already begun with Ms. Marie Blakey, executive director of academic communications, about how to brand this new program, and how to roll it out in a way

that accurately conveys the University's goals. He asserted that this new program is a "value-added" to the University experience.

Ms. Erin Hoffmann Harding thanked Dean McGreevy for his comments and echoed Dr. Page in saying "we are anxious but hopeful." She said that the success of the program depends on the collaboration and partnership of a variety of different units across the University. She noted that it would be "a grave mistake" to imply that the instructors will be experts in these many topic areas. The partnership of the specialty presenters is a significant part of the potential for success. In the Division of Student Affairs, she reported full confidence that professionals are in place in the appropriate departments who will be available on the specialty presenter piece. She noted that it is "an extraordinary opportunity" in the small group discussions to broaden and bring greater efficiencies to what is today a quite disparate and confusing experience for first-year students. For example, residence-hall sections do not integrate with what the students are learning in the Contemporary Topics course. She asserted that forging a common structure that brings discussion and coherence across a set of two directors gives the University an opportunity to greatly improve what is otherwise a "pretty inefficient experience today." She concurred with Dr. Page that it will be "a large experiment" and the next year "an absolutely crucial one" to ensure that the program is developed correctly and presented to the student body in an attractive way.

Dr. McGreevy asked about preliminary data from student focus groups on how students might respond to the new program. Dr. Page reported feedback from the single student who was a member of the committee; that student was "fairly favorable." There have not been student focus groups as of yet. Ms. Harding reported on feedback from some of the current small-group discussions required of students: these are occasionally "very powerful" for students. Noting that the quality and content varies, she asserted that the model of pairing students with their residential environment is one that could bear great fruit.

Dr. McGreevy agreed that great potential exists and then summarized his response: the logistical and the communications challenges will be "severe." He conjectured that if the rollout is greeted negatively, it has the potential to multiply quickly.

Prof. James Brockmole expressed concern about scheduling conflicts for the small-group discussions in the residence halls, fearing that the conflicts will present added stress to students. He noted that the new program will require a great deal of time and energy from students. As the curriculum is developed, he suggested that an open mind be kept about the number of learning objectives. He suggested that the program as described might be "too ambitious." He speculated that homogenous groupings might occur in the small discussions because students with shared demographics will sign up for the same session time because of shared schedule limitations—for instance, a group of 20 athletes who are only available at 9 p.m. Dr. Page acknowledged this point.

Dr. Carlson asked for clarification about the time commitment for students under the new proposal. Dr. Page estimated that students would spend about ten to twelve fewer hours on the new program than in the current program. Prof. Brockmole asked about distribution of time; Dr. Page concurred that the distribution will be different and noted that a portion of the current

program already takes place in the residence halls. The new program capitalizes on processes that are part of the student experience but have not been folded into a formal structure.

Ms. Hoffmann Harding explained that the committee has been attentive to concerns, and conducted a “fairly specific conversation” around the student-athletes in particular, as one goal would be to integrate groups. She noted that the intent is to schedule as a small-group discussion section is typically scheduled, that is, within an existing class period and time. This speaks most effectively to the logistics issues. Thus, the time slot will be reserved on students’ schedules and should therefore preclude that evening conflict issue referred to earlier. She also noted that as many sections as is feasible will be hosted in residence halls. She reported that there have been several “exciting” pilots conducted in collaboration with a few courses in this academic year. There are not facilities to offer every section in a residence hall, however.

Prof. Antsaklis asked if a straw vote might be appropriate at this point, given the kind and number of comments that have been offered by members. Then it might be possible to collect feedback from students to address some of the concerns expressed today. Students could be involved more closely in the creation of this new program.

Katherine Kromkowski, student representative, offered her perspective as a student with connections in both Arts and Letters and Science, and as a former student government representative. Students often share discussions about the need to reform the PE requirement. She noted that the desire to include cultural competency has been a “strong one” for the last year. She suggested that first-year students will not have overly complex schedules; nor are they likely to be aware of the change in program from a previous version. She noted that the new program offers the opportunity to provide students a different and more comprehensive background about such topics as financial literacy and the cultural competency areas. From a student perspective, she offered her wholehearted support, noting that it is “necessary.” She conjectured that the stress would not be too much.

Prof. Dreyer spoke about a benefit of the proposal in the opportunity to provide a more coherent FYS experience, as his daughters have enjoyed at other institutions. This coherency is often expressed as a cohort that runs through the entirety of the first year of studies, and that has the potential to set students up “much more strongly” for success moving forward into independent shaping of their individual trajectories.

Dr. Crawford asked about the kind of background that will be sought for in facilitators. He noted that first-year students are “very sensitive” and that this is “a delicate time” for them. Dr. Page said he would use the same standards as used to hire all who work in FYS: intellectual curiosity and a broad range of academic interests. The position of Assistant Dean of Cultural Competency required a master’s degree with a doctorate preferred, indicating that student advising and engagement be seen as a laudable intellectual activity with its own best practices and critical literature and norms. Ideally, this person will be able to hold 250 people in a classroom “rapt in wonder.”

Prof. Doody asked about cultural competency, a new idea for her, in connection with a significant difficulty at Notre Dame, which she described as the institutional positions on sex and

sexuality, including sexual orientation, same-sex marriage, civil unions, and acceptance of transgendered persons. These topics all should be broached in any cultural competency course, she asserted, while noting that Notre Dame might find them difficult. Would this situation create an area of unease, difficulty, or careful tip-toeing which would not be very healthy for a course such as has been envisioned?

Dr. Page reported that for the past several years, issues including those listed by Prof. Doody have been included in the Contemporary Topics course. FYS has worked with the Gender Relations Center and with the Division of Student Affairs to craft content that is appropriate for a Catholic context. Prof. Doody wondered if there will be students in discussion groups who might feel differently than this standard of appropriateness. Dr. Page noted that discussion is expected and encouraged in the current course about potentially controversial topics. He envisions that this kind of discussion will be part of the new program.

Mr. Earl Carter, a member of the committee, reported that the committee looked widely at the offerings from other institutions as potential models. He spoke about one model which was investigated in depth; this peer institution eliminated its PE requirement several years ago, shifting to a Rec Sports type model. This program has self-identified that it is missing a “formal wellness” component to the new requirements and will soon add it to its program design. This supports the belief that there needs to be a “formalized” offering in the curriculum.

Prof. John Gaski asked the committee to consider a friendly amendment: to implement a one-course program prior to moving to a two-course model, as a way to ease into this significant change. Dr. Page stated that he would not be in favor of such a plan.

Dean Newton asked for a vote. Dr. Carlson asked for a motion to put the proposal on the floor to a vote. Dr. McGreevy asked first for some comments from Dr. Page on the options of a graded versus a non-graded two-course requirement. The argument for a graded program is that students will take it more seriously; the argument against grading might be that, precisely because students take it more seriously, the “stakes will be heightened.” Presumably there will be a distribution of grades; not every student will get an A; indeed, a certain percentage will receive C’s on this one-credit experience, which will engender a higher level anxiety, presumably, about outcomes, teaching, and standards. He asked for the committee’s reflections on beginning with a graded program rather than ungraded.

Dr. Page replied that the primary justification is to ensure that this course is treated as seriously as any other rigorous academic experience at the University, with an appropriate measure of determining and rewarding student effort. The ungraded scenario has been tried with the existing PE requirement, using Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory rubric. It is very difficult to provide sufficient incentive for performance at a particularly high level. A graded scenario indicates that the effort exerted will be appropriately reflected in the grade received. The key to the success of this model is clearly articulated learning outcomes, a sufficient number of assignments that are graded in a timely and fair manner, and a diversity of assignments to allow students with varying learning styles to play to their strengths and, in some sense, compensate for their weaknesses. This is an opportunity to model the kind of fully engaged learning required of students in any other class they take as undergraduates.

Dr. McGreevy noted that there will be a significant new amount of work for students, as part of the first-year experience for students. Dr. Page clarified that “it will be a slightly expanded amount of work burden.” He noted that during his tenure as chair of PE, there has been a shift to a model in which students take a number of quizzes in Contemporary Topics with a minimal threshold grade to receive a pass for the class.

Prof. Antsaklis suggested a “hybrid model,” given the number of changes being introduced, and in particular the change in requirements for graduation. These kinds of changes are difficult to reverse in the future if the new program does not work. He suggested that the program be started with an ungraded version that can be moving toward a graded version after the details have been “ironed out.” Dr. Page said the proposal does provide this option as a possibility. There are two proposals before the council; the committee favors the first.

Ms. Hoffmann Harding noted that the committee also discussed this question; she added that from a student perspective, the parity concept is “the compelling one.” Pragmatically, she expressed concern that a hybrid model, beginning with an ungraded version, launches the new program at a disadvantage as regards the seriousness with which it is taken. Her concern is that there would never be a return to the question of moving to a graded version. The new program may instill anxiety in terms of concern for its success, but also has a great deal of hopefulness around it, if communicated effectively to students. Prof. Antsaklis wondered if the launch needs to be “perfect.”

Sarah Senseman, student member of the committee, broached a “minor but important aspect of the program.” She pointed out, as had Dr. Page, that some of the topics to be covered by the new courses have already been included in the Contemporary Topics course. She noted that when those sessions are held in the residence halls, there is a required enforcement in the women’s dorms, but not in the men’s dorms. Therefore, a benefit of the graded model is that the enforcement would be much more universally consistent, and will contribute to the goals the program is designed to meet.

The proposal was then voted upon. There were 17 votes in favor of the proposal and 13 against it, with 2 abstentions. The proposal was carried.

With no additional business presented, the meeting was adjourned.