Gabriel; I would like to protest the inclusion of these two courses in the Historical and Philosophical Perspectives category of University Studies. Although I cannot speak about the methods of Historical Analysis, the main method of Philosophy is critical analysis of arguments, your own and those of others. I see nothing in these two courses that involves the development and critical analysis of arguments. This would disqualify these two courses on the Philosophy side. If those on the History side have the same kind of objections, the case can certainly be made that these two courses do not belong in this category.

I also feel strongly that those teaching in the departments that make up a category, in this case, the History Department and the Philosophy and Religion Department, should be the ones who decide which courses from outside of those departments will be included in that category. They are the only people whose education, training, and experience qualify them to know whether or not new courses proposed for inclusion in the category actually employ the traditional methods of those departments.

Thank you,
Candace Gauthier
PAR

This is from Tom Scmid:

There are two problems emerging it seems to me.

1. perspectives are invariably tied to disciplines and methods (“form”) of thought, as well as “content.” If the History/Philosophy categories are filled with courses from English (literature), Music (arts), Anthropology (social science), etc., the whole point of taking a variety of different kinds of humanistic studies is lost, and along with it, the very idea of “university education.” As it is, a student can now cover their “Philosophy” requirement by taking two “History” courses—one about America, the other about music, or if mythology is accepted, they can get credit for “Philosophy” and for “History” by taking a course about music, and another about literature or (if the anthro class is accepted) another in social science, i.e. they wouldn’t really take a philosophy or history course at all.
   --The ultimate logic of this might be, e.g. that a music major might take ALL of their US courses in the music department, e.g. a history of music, a ‘philosophy’ of music (music theory), a sociology of music, etc.

The point is, unless there is some strict division according to the departments and the “professional methods of knowing” relevant to those departments (Ph.D. in history, Ph.D. in philosophy, etc.) the very principle behind the university studies structure that was created will be destroyed. As it stands now, with the silly approval of the music class and mythology (a lit class), it is already significantly undermined in this category.

   --Incidentally, this proliferation of “outlier” classes within the categories will inevitably set off defensive tactics in the different departments. So philosophy should create new classes in “Philosophy in Literature” for the lit category, “philosophy in film” for the arts,
something that would fit into the social sciences, etc., since we’ll be losing numbers in ‘our’ US courses. Stop the empire-seeking by the departments!

2. there has to be an agreed upon mechanism for sensibly deciding these issues which (a) respects the different categories (b) represents the departments and their ‘authority’ to at least indicate WHY some classes belong, others don’t (c) does not leave this up to one person or small group, i.e. a “step two” and (d) does not involve including contested classes in a “group” vote put before the Senate, but singles them out for deliberation and decision.

I’d suggest

1. proposals sent to a faculty US committee of members from each of the different category areas for initial vetting;
2. questionable proposals sent to the relevant departments for approval/disapproval and response/argument
3. those arguments assessed by the US committee
4. final decision on contested classes open to vote by the Senate if departments object to second stage committee decision.

This won’t guarantee the right answer, but it does at least offer a clear process with more deliberation and reasoning. To those who argue that this will be too much work, or waste the time of the Faculty Senate, I suggest that these decisions would shape the structure of general education, which is the chief purview of the faculty, and there are no more important decisions that the Senate could address or make.

And,

Having played a role in the formulation of the original US structure, I’m pretty familiar with the issues, in particular the need to compose this ‘dress’ of different pieces/categories.

What is happening now threatens to unravel those pieces, by sewing colors from other areas into one another. Rather than a outfit made of 7 colors in distinct areas (each of which every student must study), you’ll get one made of 7 colors all or partly interwoven (with students studying in 2 or 3 or 4 different areas; what I call the “schmorgisbord” approach in the position paper written then that is attached above). This will be especially damaging to the goal of humanistic education.