

Faculty Senate
Nov. 21, 2005
4 p.m. Birkeland Lounge

Faculty Senate debated an amendment to Motion 4 offered by Core Committee that seeks to clarify the explanation of Capstone courses. The motion had been tabled at a previous meeting and Core Committee charged with providing clearer language. Neither the amendment nor the motion came up for vote.

Madelyn Burchill (German; Chair, Core Committee) offered a motion to remove Motion 4 from table. After being seconded by Eduardo Gargurevich (Spanish), the motion passed on voice vote.

Senate then debated the amendment to Motion 4. The amendment states:

Explanation: In this course students will reflect on their educational experience at Concordia and how this experience, both in the Major and the Core, has addressed the Goals for Liberal Learning. These courses may be offered in the major or as independent courses. The Capstone Course should be taken in the senior year, but may be taken in the junior year at the discretion of the department. (1 credit)

Much of the discussion focused on how the Capstone courses would meet the goals if offered both in the major and independently, and about their logistics, underlying philosophy, and funding.

Marilyn Guy (Education; Division Chair, Social Sciences and Professional Disciplines) asked how students would reflect upon their majors if they took an independent Capstone. Lisa Sethre-Hofstad (Chair, Psychology) said the committee had discussed that the Capstone would be of a different nature in and outside the majors, but that the goals of the course could be met in either class. The Core Committee was trying to provide flexibility, she said.

Dan Breedon (Music; Division Chair, Core and Integrative Studies) said the amendment does not privilege the major over the Core, and that the Capstone asks students to reflect upon their entire educational experience, which could be accomplished in an independent course as well as one in the major.

Mark Covey (Psychology; Division Chair, Natural Sciences and Mathematics) asked if the amendment would encourage or prohibit Capstone courses from being required in as part of a major. Burchill replied that it would be up to the departments to determine whether its students must take a Capstone in the department, as well as whether to exclude non-majors from the departmental Capstone.

Connie Pederson (Nursing) asked why the amendment stated that students could take the Capstone as seniors or as juniors. Burchill said the committee wanted to allow departments to be flexible in its course rotations.

Per Anderson (Religion) said that the Capstone course would seem to ask students to take stock of their experience with the Goals for Liberal Learning. If that is the case, he asked, in what previous courses would students be introduced to these goals?

Dean Mark Krejci said that Motion 1, previously passed by Senate, specifies, in its explanation of the Foundation Courses, that all the Foundation Courses will introduce students to these goals. Not all five of the goals might be relevant in each and every

course, he said, but all Foundation Courses will try to address them, so the expectation is that the goals would be addressed throughout the Core.

Discussion then turned to the logistics and philosophy of allowing the Capstones to be taken in the major or independently. Barbara McCauley (Chair, Classics) asked about students with majors in departments too small to offer Capstones. Linda Johnson (Chair, History and Curriculum Coordinating Committee) said students would be responsible for finding a relevant Capstone, but that small departments could negotiate with other departments to determine which Capstone would best serve these students.

Jonathan Clark (Chair, German) said his department discussed the possibility of allowing any of several courses to serve as Capstones; such existing courses would require additional expectations for the students who would use them as Capstones.

Nick Ellig (Chair, Sociology) said it sounded like we had moved away “from a Capstone course and to Capstone concept.”

“And that concept is not clear,” he said. “This amendment is *very* flexible. If we are moving to a Capstone concept that could be applied to any number of courses I need to know more about that concept before I can vote for it.”

Polly Fassinger (Sociology) said she is concerned that two kinds of Capstone courses will not provide parallel experiences for students. She said the amendment and motion “looks like we really want a Capstone for the major, not for the Core.”

Breedon said the committee discussed that issue, “but our understanding was that at this point we cannot afford to offer all the Capstones independently.” So some Capstones will have to be offered in the majors, he said, though not *for* the major because all Capstones will have common expectations. “Unfortunately, if we don’t have this kind of capstone, we couldn’t have any kind of Capstone,” he said.

Burchill said the committee’s study of Capstone best practices at other colleges showed that both kinds of Capstones work well for students in helping them reflect on their entire college experiences.

Connie Peterson asked how many departments would find it impossible to staff Capstones, and suggested that those departments be given the resources needed to offer Capstones in the major.

Krejci replied that the faculty has decided to front-load FTEs in the first-year courses, and that we cannot afford to continue that allocation of resources and pay for independent Capstones or more Capstones in the majors. “Yes, that would be best practice, but it’s just not affordable, so we are trying to find a way to do more than what we do now,” he said.

Guy asked if double majors would have one or two Capstone requirements. Krejci replied that the Core requires only one, but that departments could decide if a major Capstone would be required of their majors.

Fassinger said she thought Senate had agreed that we would teach the Goals for Liberal Learning in the major. If so, she said, we do not need a separate course to do so.

Krejci said Senate had not passed legislation saying the goals have to be taught in the major.

Breedon said that the Core Committee decided it was not its job to define and limit; such is the task of the implementation group. He said the committee had decided not to provide a lot of detail, “because then what we would discuss would be the detail instead of the need for a Capstone.”

Keith Landa (Co-Director, Environmental Studies) asked if all Core requirements need to be course based. “What if we said it is the students’ responsibilities to create portfolios that reflected on the Goals for Liberal Learning and their majors? Would that still accomplish the goals? We are still thinking in boxes.”

Drew Rutherford (Chemistry) asked if there is a middle ground, such as a division Capstone for related majors. Burchill said the implementation group could decide that option is possible.

Bryan Luther (Chair, Physics) asked how such courses, “open to majors A, B and C, would be different from any random course?”

Sethre-Hofstad said Capstones would not have to be in the major in order to discuss the Goals for Liberal Learning, and that students would likely self-select which Capstone is the most relevant.

In response to a question from Luther, Krejci said that faculty could opt to restrict divisional Capstones from students outside the division.

Burchill said that it is possible that departmental or divisional Capstones could require prerequisites.

Breedon said that one of the benefits of an independent Capstone is that it would allow faculty to model liberal learning, as students would see them explore issues and perspectives from other disciplines, those students would have studied and would bring to the class.

Luther said he is concerned that offering both major-specific and independent Capstones would result in two different experiences for students. The major-specific courses would allow students “discussion on a high level about the major,” while independent Capstones “would basically be Inquiry Seminars all over again, open to everyone and addressing the liberal learning goals.” Perhaps, he said, that is all the college can offer right now, but it’s important to be clear on what the result would be.

Mary Rice (Chair, Spanish) said she shared Luther’s concern and wondered if the Capstone was worth doing. “I wonder if we would be replacing a problematic Integration course with another problematic course,” she said. “Right now I would vote against the whole thing.”

Clark said the courses, as outlined in the amendment, would uplift liberal arts because departments will have to think long and hard about what Capstones would best suit their majors. The faculty will rise to the occasion, he said.

Linda Johnson spoke in favor of the amendment and the need for a Capstone. Such a course would extend the Core over the four years, she said; further, the course would differ from the Inquiry Seminar because students would bring their three or four years of experience to the course. She said she appreciated the flexibility afforded by the amendment. We need to think carefully, she said, about which departments cannot offer Capstones and then seek to develop with colleagues courses relevant to their students.

Heidi Manning (Physics) said she favored Capstones in the major. She said the Capstone has to be the most expensive part of the Core if it is to succeed, and asked how expensive major-specific courses would be.

Krejci again said that in order to spend the FTEs on major-specific Capstones, the college would need to reallocate from elsewhere in the Core. Most colleges have to make compromises, he said. Those “best practices” Capstones were at wealthy colleges or those with a weaker first-year experience than that we want to offer.

“We have to compromise,” Krejci said. “Core Committee thought [the amendment] is a step closer to what we want than what we have right now. It is a step.”

Per Anderson asked if the Goals for Liberal Learning were to provide the framework for the Capstones—that is, is there flexibility about which goals to address, or would we be expected to address them all?

Yes, Breedon said, the five goals would be the framework for the course. Krejci said he saw a disconnect between that idea and the flexibility that Core Committee wrote into the amendment. Burchill said the amendment does not specifically deal with the goals, and that the implementation group could chose to be more specific about how those goals would be addressed.

Luther said that he understood Krejci’s argument that we are dealing with limited resources, but that he wondered if the Capstones are truly worthy spending those resources. He said he needed to know how many departments could offer the courses and how many would be independent of majors.

Krejci said he had not systematically asked the departments, but that some have offered their feedback. The common thread in that feedback, he said, was that the departments did not yet know because they did not know exactly what these courses will entail.

Breedon spoke in favor of the amendment. He pointed out that because the Capstones would not be offered for three to four years, we have time to figure out the logistics. A vote for the amendment would affirm that we need a Capstone, he said.

George Connell (Chair, Philosophy) said the discussion seemed to reveal two conflicting concerns—that the course will be difficult to teach and to staff, and that it will be a mere nod to liberal learning. He said we are not yet at the point where we know what the Capstone is supposed to be, so it is difficult to support it.

Burchill said we have to rely on the implementation group to work out the details, but that first we need to vote on the need for a Capstone.

Linda Johnson asked Senate not to rush to judgment on the amendment, since it was offered just today. She said Senate would find it helpful to have a better idea of how many departments could offer Capstones on what kind of schedule. “Let us seek that information before we exclude this possibility,” she said. “If we vote this down, the Capstone will be very hard to bring back.”

Debate on the amendment suspended at 4:55 p.m. and will continue at the next Senate meeting at 4 p.m. Monday, Nov. 28 in Birkeland Lounge.