SENATE COMMITTEE ON CURRICULAR AFFAIRS

A Clarification of “Active Learning” as it Applies to General Education

(Legislative)

(Implementation Date: Upon passage by the Senate)

Introduction:

During Summer 2000, Dr. Louis Geschwindner, Chair of the Faculty Senate Committee on Curricular Affairs (SCCA), appointed the Active-Learning Advisory Committee (ALAC) to review and advise the SCCA on Recommendation #4 from the Report of the Special Committee on General Education. Specifically, the charge for the ALAC was to provide recommendations to SCCA to facilitate improved integration of the “key competencies for active learning” into General Education courses.

As a result of several meetings and on-going discussions during Fall Semester 2000, the ALAC recommended that no modification should take place to Recommendation #4 of the Report of the Special Committee on General Education. However, ALAC recommended that the SCCA consider presenting a motion to the Faculty Senate to modify and broaden the “Framework for General Education” at Penn State in order to clarify the concept of student-centered learning. The SCCA accepted the recommendation of ALAC and makes this recommendation to the University Faculty Senate.

Recommendation:

That the section concerning “Active Learning Elements” of the “Framework for General Education” be changed as follows:

Current:

ACTIVE LEARNING ELEMENTS

Three or more of the following are to be integrated into courses offered in the knowledge domains:

- active use of writing, speaking and other forms of self-expression,
opportunity for information gathering, synthesis and analysis in solving problems (including the use of library, electronic/computer and other resources and quantitative reasoning and interpretation, as applicable),

- engagement in collaborative learning and teamwork,

- application of intercultural and international competence,

- dialogue pertaining to social behavior, community and scholarly conduct.

Proposed:

CORE COMPETENCIES, ACTIVITIES, AND STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCED LEARNING

KNOWLEDGE DOMAIN COURSES MUST REQUIRE EACH STUDENT TO ENGAGE IN ACTIVITIES PROMOTING LEARNING COURSE CONTENT THROUGH PRACTICING, TYPICALLY, THREE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING:

- WRITING, SPEAKING AND/OR OTHER FORMS OF SELF-EXPRESSION,

- INFORMATION GATHERING, SUCH AS THE USE OF THE LIBRARY, COMPUTER/ELECTRONIC RESOURCES, AND EXPERIMENTATION OR OBSERVATION,

- SYNTHESIS AND ANALYSIS IN PROBLEM SOLVING AND CRITICAL THINKING, INCLUDING, WHERE APPROPRIATE, THE APPLICATION OF REASONING AND INTERPRETATIVE METHODS,

- COLLABORATIVE LEARNING AND TEAMWORK,

- ACTIVITIES THAT PROMOTE AND ADVANCE INTERCULTURAL AND/OR INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING,

- ACTIVITIES THAT PROMOTE THE UNDERSTANDING OF ISSUES PERTAINING TO SOCIAL BEHAVIOR, SCHOLARLY CONDUCT, AND COMMUNITY RESPONSIBILITY,
A SIGNIFICANT ALTERNATIVE COMPETENCY FOR
ACTIVE LEARNING DESIGNED FOR AND APPROPRIATE
TO A SPECIFIC COURSE.

Rationale:

Students should be actively involved in a significant part of their own
learning in all General Education courses at Penn State. Through the use of
active learning in assignments, exercises, and other formal activities
associated with a course, students become engaged participants in the
particular course's content and, simultaneously, build competencies, skills,
and abilities that are necessary to promote learning in any situation.

A successful General Education course typically will involve
students in several active-learning activities, not all of the same type.
However, evidence of significant involvement by students is more
important than the count of activities. Activities that promote
intercultural and international competence, or that help students
assess social behavior and scholarly conduct in the community, are
especially valuable.

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