

General Education hearings now history

By Chris Streppa

The last General Education Curriculum Review is now history. When the dust clears, and the final decisions are made, (hopefully early next year), UNCA will have a new list of required courses which all students must pass to graduate.

The primary focus of Saturday's new hearing was the largest chunk of the proposed general education curriculum: the three-course, 12-credit Cultural History sequence and the three-credit Capstone course.

The current 16-hour humanities sequence requires all UNCA students to complete four consecutive courses that trace the interconnections between history, literature, philosophy, religion, fine arts, and the natural and social sciences.

The General Education Task Force proposal parallels the content of these existing humanities courses. If approved, however, the name and structure of the requirement would change.

The 12-credit Cultural History alternative includes three (instead of the current four) humanities courses; a separate, three-credit Capstone course would replace the current senior level course, The Future and the Individual.

Dr. Alan Comer, chairman of the Faculty Senate and Task Force member, explained that the Capstone course "grew out of the idea that [the final humanities course] was different."

Whereas the focus of the first three courses is historical, the last course (with its emphasis on the role of science) could "serve as the culminating course" for the proposed natural and social science requirements, he said.

Dr. Ileana Grams, assistant professor of philosophy, agreed that the senior-level course does spotlight the sciences.

But, she insisted, it "flows naturally" from the preceding courses and should remain part of the

sequence.

While Dr. Peg Downes, chairperson of the humanities department, said she supports "continued improvements and revisions of the [humanities] courses," she advised the Senate to look closely at the proposal and the existing sequence before "redesigning" the requirement.

There is not much difference between them, she pointed out.

Downes also questioned the proposed name change. "Humanities," she explained, means the same thing to educators throughout the country. Changing the name would just create confusion.

"Essentially," she said, "we should keep doing what we're doing."

But several faculty members raised objections to the current integrated course approach. They argued that students might benefit more if they took the related courses separately, instead of studying a blend of disciplines.

Dr. Allan Combs, assistant professor of psychology, agreed the humanities requirement exposes students to a wealth of interconnected historical developments. But, he insisted, it falls short of explaining the thought process behind each development.

He called the result an "Oh, wow!" experience. While facts may initially impress students, the memory just "slips away in six weeks." Combs explained that without "intensive instruction" in specific disciplines, students lack the framework to fit new facts into.

"General Education is very different from discipline training," countered Professor of Economics Shirley Browning.

To require each UNCA student to think like an economist, biologist, theologian, and artist would, he insisted, result in a "300-hour bachelor of arts program, and one graduate every decade."

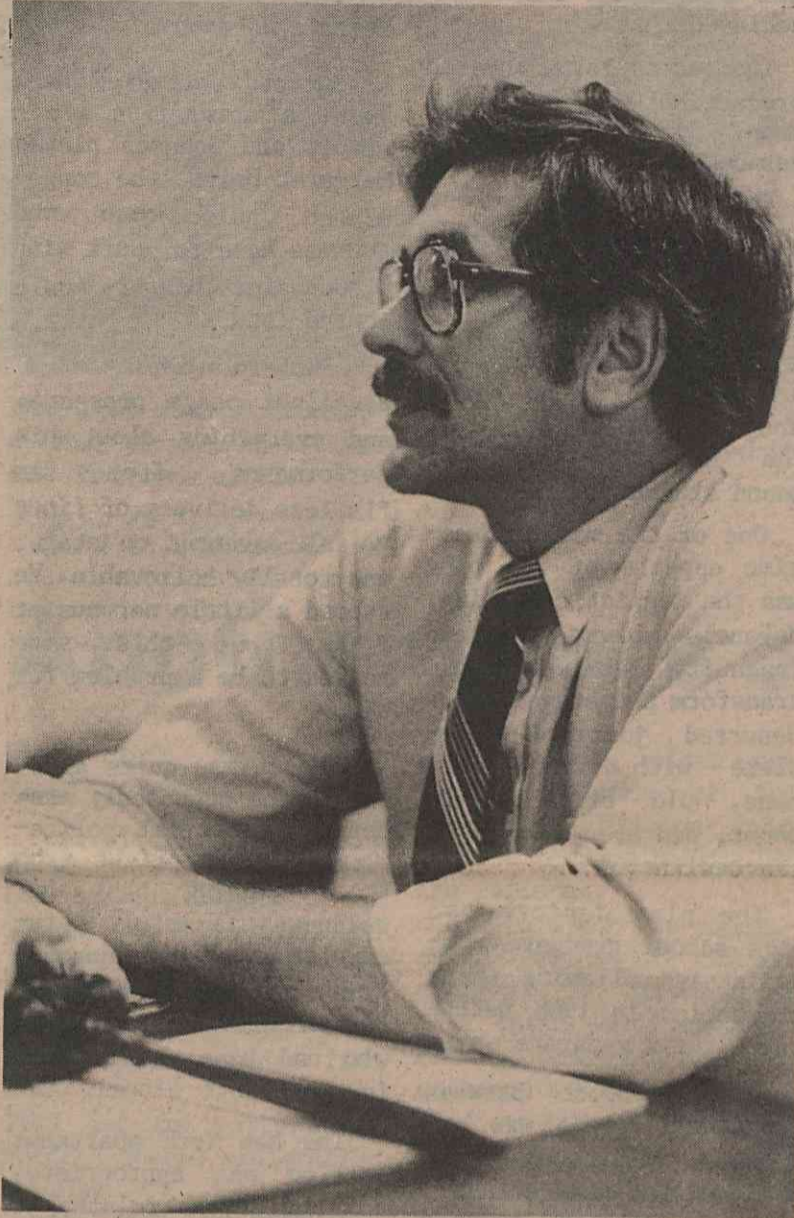
He added that an integrated humanities sequence is "a very good general education experience."

But do students benefit when faculty step outside their fields of expertise to teach humanities courses? Can an economics professor adequately explore and impart the cultural value of Charles Dickens' "Hard Times"?

Combs mentioned that some students had com-

tical Science Gene Rainey defended the current practice of bringing faculty in from each of the related disciplines to teach the humanities sequence.

"Integration," he stressed, "is an attitude. If [an educator]



Staff photo by Sylvia Hawkins

CHAIRMAN OF THE FACULTY SENATE Alan Comer can rest his gavel for a few weeks as the holidays arrive and the GE hearings cease.

plained to him about the "slackness" of certain humanities courses. Volunteering to teach a class doesn't make an educator an expert, he said.

Dr. Anthony Coyne, assistant professor of philosophy, pointed out that the first three humanities courses have "high specific content." Moreover, classes move through subject matter at a fast clip.

"You're in Greece on Wednesday and Rome on Friday," he said. It's difficult for the "non-expert" to teach such specific information at

that pace while they're still learning it themselves, he added.

But Professor of Poli-

Faculty members also discussed two new courses not included in the Task Force proposal: a three-credit Critical Thinking course and a three-credit Ethics requirement.

If approved, the additional six hours would either increase the general education block from 47 to 53 hours, or siphon time from existing or proposed requirements.

Grams proposed the three-credit Critical Thinking course. It's important for students to be able to understand the strengths and weaknesses in their own (and others') arguments, she said.

"The skills learned in such a course would enhance students' abilities in all other areas," added Browning.

Combs pointed out that the concept of "good thinking" is nothing new, while Coyne added that it's "standard fare across the country."

Coyne also noted that UNCA students do not get enough exposure to philosophy as an "alternative method" of learning and understanding; and he proposed a three-credit Ethics course.

Grams seconded his proposal. She explained that there's a "crying need" for a course that teaches students to examine how their day-to-day decisions affect other people.

Downes added it's especially important in these unsettled times for students to see the connection between morality and rationality.

With the hearings out of the way, the Faculty Senate will now get down to reviewing the arguments and shaping the future general education curriculum at UNCA. Comer predicted they will be ready to vote in April.

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