25 February 2011 Minutes of the College Undergraduate (UG) Curriculum Committee

Members Present: Terry Adler, Justine Adkisson, Greg Roth, Dennis Clason, Bruce Huhmann, Kathy Brook and Kevin McNelis

Guest: Dale Spencer

Meeting Called to Order at 1300.

Dale Spencer provided an overview of how he teaches critical thinking in his ECON 251 and ECON 304 courses. He handed out an example of a critical thinking assignment and then described the process he goes through in these courses. Based on this discussion, we were able to model how students develop the ability to critically think so that we could provide CoB faculty with a generalized process of critical thinking.

This semester we would like faculty to mull over if and how critical thinking is taught in their courses. More specifically, we would like faculty through their department heads to identify courses where critical thinking can be taught. While we understand that faculty may already teach critical thinking in their courses, we would ask faculty to formalize what they already do. If something like this is not being taught in a course, all we ask is that faculty consider if critical thinking can be done in their classes.

A general critical thinking process and assignment should follow this format:

1. Students are presented a class-related problem or issue. Students should identify a problem where a decision must be made.
2. Students use terms and topics introduced in class to frame this problem or issue.
3. Students develop an argument or basis for solving the problem or address the issue. Students should develop and present alternative courses of action to address the problem. Students should list “Pro’s” and “Con’s” of each alternative using terms and comments used in the course. Students should choose appropriate course of action from one of the alternatives.
4. Students present the argument or solution cogently in class or in writing. Students should explain why the course of action was chosen.

We emphasize that this needs to be faculty driven. One of the important aspects of teaching critical thinking is that we set student expectations that they are learning this skill and that we spend time in teaching it. We strongly encourage faculty to assign a letter grade to a critical thinking assignment described in the range of 10-20% of the course grade. Based on lessons learned we also suggest that this be an individualized assignment so that students gain the most benefit from this assignment. We would encourage faculty to have their critical thinking assignments ready to be implemented in the Fall 2011 semester.

We will also develop a critical thinking course objective for faculty to use and insert into their course syllabi at our next meeting. This will highlight the importance of critical thinking to students and in setting expectations as to the importance of critical thinking as a skill to learn.

Meeting Adjourned at 1400. Next meeting is scheduled for 4 March 2011 at 1 pm in BC 134.

Submitted by: Terry Adler, Chair