Cluster Two Annual Report (AY 2007-08)
May 2008
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A. Introduction: Overall (*Summary of the Cluster…)
It has been another busy year for Cluster Two. The major accomplishments were:
- Completion of its first self-study;
- Approval of its first new course since 1996 [check date].
Additional accomplishments were:
- Piloting of a new assessment instrument for Group 1;
- Receipt of first Gen Ed summer grant;
- Submission of its first IDEA grant.

B. Cluster Objectives
No changes were made to the outcomes this year.

C. Unit Accomplishments – Planned Cluster Activities
There were three planned activities for this year: Undertake program review; Continue to research creative ways to assess the Arts and Humanities; Continue to explore two possible overlay requirements (one for diversity/nonwestern content, the other for extracurricular Arts & humanities events) that came out of the Su 06 Summer workshop and that were endorsed by the Cluster faculty on April 4. All three were addressed, and two unplanned activities arose in progress.

1) The chief accomplishment for this year was the completion of the cluster’s first self-study. As the final report states:
   “The self-study process for Cluster Two was loosely modeled on the one pioneered by Cluster One. To wit, the Cluster Two committee met on August 23, 2007, and drew up four broad goals intended to address matters of concern to its own members:
   - To survey concerning their ability to appreciate the arts and humanities
   - To evaluate the function and delivery of individual courses within the cluster
   - To consider how Cluster Two advances university-wide initiatives (particularly diversity) and reinforces Cluster One objectives (particularly critical thinking)
   - To review and evaluate the innovative methods of assessing the cluster’s new, overarching goals and group-based objectives
   The results . . . reveal a healthy, well-functioning unit that enrolls 6-7,000 students a semester . . . Student surveys, for example, indicated that the nine credits of coursework in Cluster Two successfully meet the unit’s overarching goals regarding the arts and humanities and that the content of these courses is widely applied in other areas of the curriculum and regularly referenced outside the classroom. Similarly, the self-study showed that the function and delivery of cluster courses is very good. Syllabi reviews found not only a high degree of alignment with the three specific sets of cluster objectives, but a substantial effort to advance the critical thinking competency of Cluster One and the university-wide diversity initiative. Last, the report outlines recent work to improve assessment instruments and procedures. It
indicates an exciting, new direction for the cluster’s assessment as well as its abiding commitment to academic excellence.”

The full report is available at [http://www.jmu.edu/gened/genedcouncil.html](http://www.jmu.edu/gened/genedcouncil.html).

As it was for Cluster One, the chief problem encountered during the self-study was getting the members together for meetings. The Cluster Two committee now has twelve members. Because there was no single time when all could meet, the coordinator began the year with alternating days (first Monday, then Tuesday), then directed the subcommittees to meet on their own until late February, when the full committee convened again. But the full committee never really met as a full body. First, the coordinator’s schedule was constrained by her own various meetings and activities. Second, the members who were junior faculty clearly placed other interests/commitments above this one. For example, one became a Study Abroad FMIR in the Spring term; rather than designate an alternate, he arranged to complete his subcommittee’s report before departure, but still had to be contacted by email for additional info. Another person was overcommitted in her college and so delegated her cluster role to an RTA colleague, who participated in the self-study process via email, but never attended meetings. A third junior professor came to Harrisonburg only three days a week and had few windows of time when on campus. A fourth was sufficiently disorganized that the coordinator finally relieved him of his task in order to meet the GEC deadline. But even senior faculty seemed to consider the cluster a low priority. Thus one person absented himself during the fall to participate in a department review; he specified an alternate, who came to only one meeting. Neither of them attended meetings in the Spring. And the student rep frequently had classes or other obligations that conflicted with the faculty members’ schedules. Although email helped considerably to keep everyone connected, it was a core group of about four people who got the work done. The experience was deeply frustrating, since all had been informed of the scope of the work well in advance of the self-study’s start. Ordinarily, members do the bulk of their work during the few hours per month that the cluster meets. This year, the circumstances demanded much more, and while this situation will not soon apply here again, the lesson may be useful for Clusters Three-Five.

2) Work continued on the Assessment project begun last year. The primary activity was to pilot in February 2008 an instrument for Group 1 that asks students to read, compare, and respond to excerpts from two texts representing two very different worldviews. For more information, see the Assessment section, below, and the Self-Study report.

3) The overlay idea was addressed in two ways. First, the committee included diversity as one of the university-wide initiatives evaluated in the self-study. Second, the coordinator organized, wrote, and submitted an IDEA grant proposal to the Office of the Special Assistant for Diversity. The project proposed to gather specific data concerning students’ exposure to diversity issues via their attendance at Arts and Humanities events associated with Cluster Two courses and to apply that data in the development of an innovative assessment instrument for the cluster. The grant team included Bill Van Norman from History, Gretchen Hazard from Communication Studies, and Christine Harmes from CARS. There were more than 40 applications for only six IDEA grants this year; though this one was not accepted, it may become the basis for future work.
4) The Cluster Committee received and approved its first proposal for an entirely new course: GANTH205: Buried Cities and Lost Tribes. Created by members of the Anthropology faculty, it offers an exciting new direction for the cluster in that it adds a new disciplinary perspective on the Arts and Humanities (Anth), a new temporal emphasis (the pre-modern), and a new geographic focus (Meso and South America). The course will add about 65 seats to Group 1 during AY08-09; it is expected that more seats will be forthcoming in the next few years, as additional lines are placed in Anthropology.

5) Cluster Two faculty proposed and received a Gen Ed summer grant. Dr. David Ehrenpries (GARTH) spearheaded an effort to bring together two art historians and two historians to share information about Asian civilizations—information that will inform not only GARTH but GHIST courses. He worked with the cluster coordinator, who worked with the Associate Dean to ensure a positive outcome. This is the first time that Cluster Two has been awarded a summer grant.

D. Assessment Report
Cluster Two is still in a ‘piloting phase’; the coordinator has been worked with the cluster’s CARS liaison, Dr. J. Christine Harmes, and others to pilot instruments designed to assess students’ aesthetic development vis à vis the arts and humanities. This work has chiefly entailed revising the Fine Arts test, which was piloted for the first time in February 2007 (based on an instrument pioneered over a decade ago), and introducing a new instrument for Group 1, which was piloted in February 2008. Details regarding the assessment project as a whole are included in the Self-Study report, which described the work from Fall 2006 through April 2008.

E. SCHEV Report (if applicable)
Not applicable.

F. Other Significant Accomplishments
i. Faculty. Dr. David Ehrenpreis (GARTH) successfully arranged to bring to campus Xu Bing, the internationally acclaimed artist from China. Several thousand people attended Xu’s lecture at Memorial Hall, and hundreds toured the special exhibit of his work in the Sawhill Gallery.

ii. Student

iii. Other

G. Statistical Profile

- Current data (See Attached)
- Specific resource needs
  - Instructional personnel
    - Full-time. The Cluster still needs help in Group 3: Literature. The shortage of seats there is long-standing and stems from a combination of issues that deserve further study. Group 2:
Visual and Performing Arts is a close second, as there is heavy reliance on adjuncts in GTHEA and certain areas of GMUS. The new position in GART200 will alleviate the stress in that course for AY08-09. Group 1: Human Questions and Contexts will be aided by two new positions in Philosophy and one in Religion. The GHISTS are fine, but there is some concern about GAMST, which is stable for the short term but may shift in a few years as the current core of faculty who commit to teach it regularly is dwindling.

- Part-time
- Graduate assistant support. GAs continue to be integral to the GHISTs and are effectively managed by the History department. GAs have also been added to GART200. The recipient, Dr. Lisa Tubach, explained that “the hours are quite limited, but it’s very helpful for exam/quiz grading,” as the sections are 55 seats each. She believes that it would be effective to increase the amount of grad hours in AY08-09, when there will be two full-time faculty teaching the course.

**H. Cluster Activities planned for next academic year**

These four activities came about as a result of the self-study and were approved by the GEC in April 2008:

- To survey two subpopulations of Cluster Two students for their views on the cluster’s learning outcomes: those who meet the requirements through study abroad courses and those who do so via transfer credit. The results are to be compared and contrasted with those compiled during the self-study.
- To work with Cluster One to encourage faculty to be more explicit about the inclusion of both diversity and critical thinking.
- To study more formally the place and purpose of writing in the cluster’s curriculum, as well as the function and delivery of its interdisciplinary courses.
- To have a new assessment instrument in place by Fall 2009.

The committee will also be involved in the search for a new cluster coordinator. Thus, it appears that next year will be as busy as this one was.