

2/16/19 Meeting of the BOR Philosophy and Religion Advisory Committee

Minutes

In attendance were:

Mark Banas, (Georgia State University - Perimeter College - religion)
Ed Cox (Georgia State University - philosophy)
Karin Fry (Georgia Southern University – philosophy and religion)
Michael Hoffman (Georgia Institute of Technology, philosophy)
Larry Peck (Georgia State University – Perimeter College - philosophy, committee chair)
Jim Winchester (Georgia College - philosophy)
George Wrisley (University of North Georgia – philosophy)

Christine James (Valdosta State University – guest)

I) The Minutes from the March, 2018 meeting were approved. (That was the committee’s last meeting, since it did not meet in fall, 2018.)

II) Latest Revisions of the eCore Introduction to Philosophy Course

Dr. Christine James of Valdosta State was our guest. She and committee member Lisa Yount (Savannah State University) and former committee member Jack Waskey had been working on the revisions of the eCore philosophy course. Dr. James stated that they had revised all question banks and reviewed all videos for the course. All of the readings are now PDF’s with embedded questions. The writing content of the course is now two assignments of five pages each, plus writing on the exams, plus posting and responding to posts.

III) Recruiting Philosophy Majors (Karin Fry, Georgia Southern)

Religion and philosophy faculty at all USG institutions are interested in having a robust number of majors. Dr. Fry discussed the experience at Georgia Southern, where she is chair of the new Philosophy and Religious Studies Department, and where they now have philosophy with a religious studies pathway. They have a Career Night, and Philosophy and Religious Studies Day, and a Philosophy After Dark Club. The latter involves student presentations at a local pub. Faculty members suggest topics (eg. whether “ignorance is bliss”), but otherwise these events are student-led.

IV) Credit By Examination

For Credit by Examination, our committee had been asked to consider three Prometric DSST tests: Ethics in America, Business Ethics and Society, and Introduction to World Religions. The philosophy members of the committee looked at the first two; the religion members, at the third. Several committee members discussed the test(s) with

their department chairs or other faculty. Then we had a discussion about them at this meeting.

We decided that the subject matter evident on the tests is a good match for specific courses in the USG system, but all of us were very concerned by the fact that passing one of these tests would not come as a result of taking a real philosophy or religion course in a classroom or online. To make a contrast, when students pass an Advanced Placement test they do so after taking an advanced high school course, where they have not only learned facts but also gained the deeper understanding that comes from writing and class discussion. But the DSST tests are entirely multiple choice and can be passed through memorization of some facts, without any deeper understanding at all. The online prep courses that we found for these tests are correspondingly superficial, clearly “teaching to the test,” with videos for the student to watch before taking the exam.

We concluded that the process of preparing for and taking these DSST tests would not prepare the students for more difficult philosophy or religion courses, or develop the students intellectually in a way consistent with the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes, and the facts learned in the course would likely be quickly forgotten soon after the test. Indeed, we suspect that after taking the prep course and passing the DSST test, students would be less likely to want to go on to other philosophy or religion courses, or indeed to move on in their undergraduate careers, than if they had experienced the excitement of a real college course in a classroom or online. In other words, these tests could actually work against, rather than for, student success. We therefore decided not to support the USG giving credit for these tests (and have since sent out views to the USG). Moreover, although DSST tests in other subject areas are not for this committee to decide, we suspect that our concerns are relevant to all other DSST tests in the humanities.

V) Pathways to Success / Non-Philosophy Courses for Philosophy Majors

About three years ago, the USG-wide discussion of “math pathways” posed the question to the USG advisory committees of what was the most appropriate math courses in the Core Curriculum for their particular majors. At the advisory committee chairs meeting in fall, 2018, this topic came up again, in the context of Pathways to Success: could the USG advisory committees recommend pathways through the Core Curriculum for their potential majors to take, which would minimize potential problems later on?

Members of this committee – both philosophy ones and religion ones - had discussed this topic with their department chairs before this meeting. They reported at the meeting that there was very little concern about this in their departments. The department chairs did not seem to think that a student’s previous choice of, say, one history course over another history course would have a lot of effect on that student’s ability to pass advanced philosophy (or religion) courses for a four-year major. For that reason, their departments were not refusing to recognize any courses taken outside the

subject area of the major. (For example, they were not saying “The history course that you took cannot count toward our major. You should have taken this other one.”) This inclusiveness is reflected in the departments’ “maps” toward the major, which often are only suggestive anyway.

VI) A New Chair For Our Committee?

Larry Peck will be stepping down as chair of this committee this summer. The floor was opened for people to volunteer to replace him, but there were no takers. Dr. Peck said he would work on this problem.