Master of Liberal Studies

Response to Program Review Report (2012-2013)

Prepared by the Curriculum and Education Policy Committee

The Curriculum and Educational Policy Committee met on November 29, 2012 to review the Master of Liberal Studies Program. Dr. Howard Ebert attended the meeting for the first hour to provide additional insight and clarification to the program’s written report.

Type of Program Review: Year One Report: Statement of Program Mission, Vision, Goals, Data, and One Year Action Steps

**General Remarks and Recommendations:**

The CEPC acknowledges the strength of commitment to and appreciation of the Master of Liberal Studies program on the part of students and staff. Anecdotal evidence strongly indicates a very high level of student satisfaction with the program and dedicated commitment to the program by its instructors. It is truly a unique approach to graduate study, one that emphasizes breadth, intellectual curiosity, interdisciplinary study, and goals that suit the real, identified needs of potential and actual employers of its graduates. However, the CEPC is concerned about the long-term viability of the program and its need to strengthen its assessment practices. Based on this overview, the CEPC offers the following comments and recommendations.

**Mission:**

The committee sees the current mission statement for the program as appropriate for a Masters degree grounded in the Catholic Intellectual Tradition, the Liberal Arts Tradition, and the Norbertine Tradition. The program’s aim to prepare students who are thoughtful, informed, intellectually curious, and capable of engaging in a variety of endeavors and professions is seen as proper and laudatory.

**Vision:**

In looking ahead to the completion of this five-year evaluation cycle, the MLS report cites a desire to “increase and stabilize enrollment to 60” should more faculty positions develop to allow completion of the program in 2 years; more faculty participation; provide programing to enhance student writing skills; define the thesis project more clearly; create more program flexibility through assignments, course offerings, and use of online instruction; and develop a lecture series. While the committee sees these as understandable and desirable goals, program viability and assessment procedures need to be better established in order to make informed decisions as to what should occur when. Completion of the business plan should aid in these efforts, especially in regard to determining realistic optimum program enrollment, ascertaining accurately the needs of potential students and employers, and expectations of
students regarding their pace in proceeding through the program. This plan should also look at the fiscal realities of operating costs in terms of compensation, resources, and faculty time. Vision and goals can then be adjusted to what the business plan indicates are the “facts on the ground” for the program. The committee recommends this business plan be completed and reviewed as part of the next year’s work and report out in the Year Two report.

**Data:**

As noted in the MLS report, data collection and analysis is thin and at this point not very helpful. The CEPC recommends that the program work with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness to revisit the original assessment plan, develop assessment procedures to document meeting identified student learning outcomes, and incorporate effective data collection and assessment regarding marketing issues. The dependence on a thesis project as a measure of student learning is certainly appropriate, but the dearth of available data suggests that other measures of student learning be incorporated throughout the program and not just at the end. The OIE can be a most beneficial partner in addressing these assessment-related issues.

**Action Steps, Year One:**

Given these conditions, the CEPC recommends the following action steps take place in the next 12 months, the outcomes of which should be reported in the Year Two report:

- Completion of a well-designed, comprehensive, and informative 5-year Business Plan to assist the program in making informed decisions regarding enrollment targets, marketing strategies, operating costs (in all senses of the term), curriculum planning, and faculty allocation and work load. It should also address issues related to program sustainability and provide real numbers in terms of when the program is no longer viable.
- Work with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness to develop appropriate and sufficient assessment measures to document student learning and continuous program improvement.
- Successfully complete the search for a new hire and begin the important process of folding that person’s teaching, research, and service interests into efforts to improve the program.
- Produce a realistic curriculum mapping plan that can stabilize predictable course offerings and faculty instruction assignments so that all participants in the program can engage in more effective planning.