



FACULTY SENATE ACADEMIC PLANNING & ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE REPORT

TO THE FACULTY SENATE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

11 FEBRUARY 2015

The Faculty Senate Academic Planning & Assessment Committee is a standing committee with a broad charge to consider and report to the Senate on all matters pertaining to academic issues, and specifically to consider the formation, reorganization, or dissolution of academic units.

Since our report of May 7, 2014, which recounted our participation in Realizing UB2020, the Middlestates self-study, SUNY initiatives and Gen Ed progress, as well as ongoing issues, we were tasked by the Executive Committee to assess the formation of a Jewish Studies Department and to report on the final Gen Ed proposal. We attach these reports.

They represent a serious and high level of academic assessment and expertise. The Committee consults broadly within faculty and considers best practices nationally and internationally. The slurs in public attack by Executive Committee member Professor Sternberg were not only slanderous and political, but fundamentally ignorant and insulting.

Respectfully submitted,

Diane Christian,
Chair, Faculty Senate Academic Planning & Assessment Committee
SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor, English

Professor Paschalis Alexandridis, Chemical & Biological Engineering
Dr. Carl Granger, Medicine
Dr. Howard Lippes, Medicine
Professor William Menasco, Mathematics
Associate Professor Natalie Simpson, Management

Associate Professor Satpal Singh, Pharmacology/Toxicology
Professor Dagobert Soergel, Library & Information Sciences
SUNY Distinguished Professor Lois Weis, Educational Leadership/Policy

Finding of the Faculty Senate Academic Planning & Assessment Committee on the
Proposal of a Department of Jewish Studies 2 September 2014

The Committee reviewed the Proposal Documents and the Vitae of the Faculty Professors and had several concerns.

The documents are not adequate relative to SUNY standards for Department formation in terms of proposed courses, graduate development, and scholarly impact. The chief rationale offered for establishing a new department is that the Institute of Jewish Heritage founded in 2008 was promised such development and five professors are now on board. While this is relevant to the argument for the new department, the Committee feels that a case must also be made for its feasibility, and the current proposal contains no practical description of how the relatively small department will both survive and thrive in scholarship and education. Two of these professors are new assistant professors who look promising but are not established scholars. The other three, two Associate Professors and one full Professor, are in Rabbinical, medieval, and Levinas scholarship connected under the rubric of “Jewish Thought.”

This title “Jewish Thought” replaces the more conventional designation “Jewish Studies” in the proposal documents. As an academic matter, the Committee found this of serious concern, as it is unclear who will provide the benchmarks of success as a Department of Jewish Thought, whereas well-known benchmarks and best practices are available for a Department of Jewish Studies. The Committee noted that the first holder of the Gordon and Gretchen Gross Chair in the Institute of Jewish Heritage, Aaron Hughes, was just such a scholar, but that he left for The University of Rochester feeling such rigor and breadth was not pursued here.

The sweeping mission statement —“Our vision is to be a Department of Jewish Thought devoted to the study of all aspects of Jewish life, spiritual and secular, intellectual and existential, cognitive and cultural, past and present”—seemed to the Committee unrealistic, as did the projections of student and graduate base. The Universities cited as benchmark departments of Jewish Studies (Rutgers, Maryland, NYU) draw on large Jewish student populations, wide faculty affiliation, and considerable scholarly history. They tend also to be located in geographic areas that

potentially yield additional and considerable philanthropic support, which may or may not be the case for the University at Buffalo.

The proposal documents argue that this would be the only SUNY graduate-degree-granting department in Jewish Studies, ignoring the SUNY Binghamton department which grants an MA and the SUNY Albany program within History of greater size. Both have overseas programs and wide faculty involvement. The UB MA and PhD degrees are projected for 2017 and 2018, without clear faculty or programmatic sufficiency.

For these reasons the Committee recommends deferral of development of a Department of Jewish Studies until these issues are adequately addressed.

THE FACULTY SENATE ACADEMIC PLANNING & ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

RECOMMENDATION ON THE GENERAL EDUCATION STEERING COMMITTEE
PROPOSAL

31 OCTOBER 2014

The Faculty Senate Academic Planning and Assessment Committee has actively followed the General Education program committees for over five years, and has participated in discussions with faculty, students, and administrators.

The General Education process has been led by faculty and been more comprehensive and thorough than any we have previously considered. We regard it as pedagogically sound and innovative, and we commend the administrative support and investment to implement the program.

We see this proposal as a major step in the improvement of the general education program and the beginning of a continuous process of further improvements in both content and learning. As implementation progresses, we recommend continued and expanded faculty oversight and involvement, and regular reporting of progress and changes.

We commend the emphasis on integrative and collaborative learning. Development and timely assessment of the e-portfolio project will be central to its success.

The issue of university level language competence and the deployment of resources thereto remains an ongoing concern.

The success of the General Education program will depend on faculty support and participation which we strongly urge.

We unanimously recommend that the Faculty Senate approve the General Education Steering Committee proposal as amended—the November 1st document.

Respectfully submitted,

The Faculty Senate Academic Planning & Assessment Committee
