Federal commission recommends changes that would impact faculty

On September 26, secretary of education Margaret Spellings announced a five-point “action plan” for U.S. higher education. Spellings’ announcement was based on a recent report from the Commission on the Future of Higher Education. This group was charged with developing a comprehensive strategy for higher education. The 19-member panel made several recommendations in four areas: access, affordability, quality and accountability (www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/reports.html).

In her speech, Spellings focused on five specific actions:

- Expanding principles of the No Child Left Behind Act to high schools.
- Streamlining the process of applying for federal financial aid.
- Creating a unit record database to track college students’ academic progress.
- Providing matching funds to colleges, universities and states that collect and publicly report student learning outcomes.
- Convening members of the accrediting community in November “to move toward measures that place more emphasis on learning.”

Spellings described her speech as only “the beginning of a process of long overdue reform.”

David Ward, president of the American Council on Education (ACE) and a member of the Spellings commission, did not sign the panel’s final report. He did, however, urge ACE member institutions to act on the commission’s recommendations, saying it would be a “big mistake” to try to avoid them.

Ward stated, “There may be people who believe that if they lay low long enough, this will go away. But I think they’ve caught the tail of something they’re going to hang onto.”

Even if only a few of the commission’s recommendations are implemented, they would affect both students and faculty members at all levels of higher education. The panel, as well as Spellings, clearly supports increasing faculty accountability for student learning. They also clearly expect improved efficiency and productivity in higher education.

Spellings’ fourth “action” point would most certainly impact teaching at the individual and department level. In view of what faculty members and departments may be facing in the next few years, this issue of *Teaching Matters* focuses on meeting unit-level goals for teaching. —JE

Resource: Secretary’s proposals reassure some education leaders, disappoint others. chronicle.com/daily/2006/09/2006092702n.htm
Unit work on teaching shows promise for University

Dan Bernstein, CTE

What we teach is always an important topic for faculty members, and conversations about the goals of an educational experience or disciplinary program are usually quite animated. Often the discussion is very principled, as we argue that certain topics or skills or ways of thinking are essential to our fields. A curriculum is a visible representation of the structure of a field of study, and that symbolism can help define a program’s identity and audience. We may also have a vision of an educated citizen whose participation in society as a lifelong learner depends on the kind of education we offer.

In several places around the KU campus this conversation has moved to another level, as faculty groups are interested in knowing how well their curricular goals are being met. Given an understanding of what a well educated graduate of their programs could look like, these departments are identifying what existing course assignments and projects would provide learners with an opportunity to demonstrate desired skills, knowledge or understanding. In some cases these demonstrations are outside scheduled class work and take place in individual settings or informal seminars and practica. Once opportunities are identified, faculty members can review work students produce and inquire how well it meets program goals.

For example, the School of Journalism has a clear set of curriculum goals. The faculty held a retreat before the beginning of the fall term to consider how to determine how well the goals are being met. Conversations began on two next steps. For each goal they will ask when students have a chance to do work that is related to the goal, and then what criteria they would use to decide how well the goals have been accomplished. The enterprise includes a modest but reasonable sample of work from a range of courses, with many instructors and different students. The feedback they get from looking at this work is intended to speak to the effort of the entire school, not any particular instructor.

Another example comes from the psychology department (see pages 4-5). Meeting in a retreat last winter, the department began to frame a set of shared goals for undergraduate majors, and the faculty voted to have psychology majors generate and maintain a portfolio that documents their education. The framework of that portfolio is under discussion, and it will likely include both examples of student performance and reflection by each student on the overall coherence and meaning of work done in the major. These student portfolios will be a convenient place to find examples of student understanding that can be compared with the department’s self generated guidelines for judging success in learning.

Once these program-based archives of student performance are assembled, they can also provide additional material for a campus wide conversation about a KU education. Currently, we use a set of informal guidelines to describe the performance of select seniors in an hour long oral interview. These conversations provide some useful feedback, but it would be advantageous to include more intentional and organized work. Faculty members could also look at samples of student work and key projects, asking if these performances demonstrate any of the six large general educational objectives that we have identified as our goals. When faculty members consider the quality of select archives of well framed work by advanced students, we can add to our knowledge of the success of a KU education.

Several units on campus will begin to look at their own work this year, and we can all benefit from their pioneering prototypes. Their interest in asking questions about their teaching is a healthy indication of rich concern for the future and quality of their disciplines and for the contribution their fields make to the general education of Kansans. We can learn from them and discover how all programs can benefit from periodic self examination.
Mechanical engineering recognized at KU Summit

At the annual KU Summit on August 15, the Department of Mechanical Engineering was recognized for their receipt of the 2006 Departmental Award for Exceptional Teaching and Learning. Ronald Dougherty, chair, accepted the award on behalf of the department.

Advisory board members who chose mechanical engineering noted the exemplary way the department uses multiple, converging measures of learning. Based on what measures indicated about strengths and weaknesses in students’ understanding, the department modified courses to improve performance and demonstrated improvement.

CTE considers three areas to distinguish the recipient of this $10,000 award:
• Establishing a culture of learning focused on innovation and collaboration;
• Systematic reflection on goals for student learning;
• Clear evidence of student learning.

New format for CTE Teaching Teas premieres this semester

In October and November, CTE will host several sessions in 135 Budig. All are open to faculty members and instructional staff.

The format for this fall’s Teaching Teas will vary slightly from past years. CTE advisory board members will lead discussions of provocative articles on teaching in higher education. Participants will be asked to read the articles before each session. Registration is requested.

For more information, contact CTE at 864.4100 or cte@ku.edu, or check our web site at www.cte.ku.edu.

Teaching Teas: 3–4 PM

October 2: “The Scholarship of Teaching: What’s the Problem?” with Ann Cudd, philosophy/women’s studies, and Robert Goldstein, geology. Based on Randy Bass’ article that explores how changing the status of a “problem” in teaching from terminal remediation to ongoing investigation is what the scholarship of teaching is all about. Register by September 29.

October 19: “Pedagogies of Uncertainty” with Richard Hale, aerospace engineering, and Dan Spencer, business. Consideration of Lee Shulman’s article that describes the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching’s engagement in a long-term research program on how professionals are educated. Register by October 17.

Essential Teaching Practices workshop
October 18, 3–4 PM:
“Expectations and Civil Discourse in an Academic Community” with Andrea Greenhoot, psychology, and Dan Bernstein, CTE/psychology. Strategies for building a classroom climate conducive to learning. No registration.

Lunch & Conversation:
12–1 PM
October 24: “Review Sessions: Why Have Them? What Should They Include?” with George Semb, applied behavioral sciences. How to structure effective review sessions, and the impact reviews have on learning. No registration.
Steps toward a coordinated curriculum and increased student engagement in the psychology major

John Colombo, Psychology

According to the KU Office of Institutional Research and Planning, the Department of Psychology currently has about 1250 undergraduate majors. This large number represents an enormous responsibility, but it also represents a privilege. The fact that psychology faculty consistently receive high student ratings and are often recipients of university teaching or mentoring awards speaks to the fact that our faculty do not take this responsibility lightly and that they greatly respect this privilege.

At the same time, as I looked upon these numbers in my role as Acting Chair of psychology during 2005-06, I realized that the presence of these majors provides the department with a significant opportunity … the chance to do something different and perhaps something special within the realm of undergraduate education. It presented a chance to build from being very good at undergraduate teaching to being exceptional. Although individual faculty members were exceptional teachers in their own right, I wondered how we might elevate this major to another level.

I thought that the development of such goals and the specification of a means through which to attain them would require some degree of thoughtful and proactive attention. Such attention would be unlikely to be attained under the normal course of events in a semester (faculty meetings, colloquia, etc.). Therefore, I asked faculty for their participation in a discussion of educational issues in the major on the day before the start of the Spring 2006 semester. At that discussion, I requested that the faculty consider what (at minimum) psychology majors should know about the discipline and whether faculty might be interested in striving to instill more comprehensive characteristics or qualities in our majors as a result of students’ exposure to the discipline or to the psychology curriculum. Time was parsed into three divisions and represented specific points for discussion:

1. What characteristics or skills would the faculty like majors to have when they complete their training in psychology at KU?
2. What changes to the curriculum or methods of teaching might need to occur to achieve the characteristics and skills desired in psychology majors?
3. How might the faculty best evaluate whether they are achieving these goals (with the added premise that such evaluation should not incur extra workload for the faculty)?

It occurred to us that the resolution of such steps might address a number of common issues in undergraduate education:

• Improvements in the quality of undergraduate education.
• A systemic means for faculty members to assess their teaching and develop teaching portfolios, which will be particularly salient for those who will be subject to changes in how committees on promotion and tenure evaluate teaching.
• Positive byproducts in graduate training; GTAs working within such a system would have the experience of teaching within a coherent framework.

Twenty-two faculty members, more than half of our regular faculty, attended the retreat.

At the end of our discussion, the faculty reached considerable consensus on potential changes in the curriculum. Seven were considered explicitly or implicitly. Of these, two were specific to the psychology curriculum and involved making the major more rigorous and comprehensive. Five other changes reflected positive steps toward a more coherent and thoughtful major. These included:

continued page 4
Different disciplines arrive at similar conclusions

Ronald L. Dougherty, Mechanical Engineering

The points raised and addressed by the psychology department at its retreat in spring 2006 are stimulating topics and may indeed be some of the most crucial elements for the University’s teaching focus in today’s world. It is most interesting to see that two different disciplines, psychology and engineering, are arriving at much the same conclusions regarding the crucial issues which govern our respective programs’ directions.

In 1997, the engineering educational accreditation body (ABET—Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology) finished the development of a new set of criteria for accrediting U.S. engineering programs. This set of criteria was termed EC 2000 (Engineering Criteria 2000) due to its being targeted for adaptation by several engineering programs during the millennium year. EC 2000 allowed the faculty of each engineering program to determine which characteristics and skills its students should have at graduation. These characteristics/skills were termed “outcomes” by EC 2000, a concept which dovetails quite nicely with discussion point #1 of Prof. Colombo’s article. Example outcomes are technical skills, functioning effectively in a team environment, upholding professional and ethical standards, communicating effectively, and demonstrating recognition of the need for life-long learning.

EC 2000 also required the outcomes to be measurable, so engineering programs across the country implemented and employed a variety of assessment tools/sources. This assessment concept fits quite well with point #3 of Prof. Colombo’s article. Those assessments came from various sources, such as nationally normed exams, employer input, student input, advisory board input and faculty input (i.e., constituencies)—which were clearly identified and consistently used to determine how and when a specific program should be changed. This concept again fits with Prof. Colombo’s article (point #2).

continued page 7

Steps toward a coordinated curriculum and increased engagement

1. Encouraging student writing throughout the curriculum as a means of improving critical thinking and expression, providing venues for self-reflection and self-evaluation by students, and allowing opportunities for the department to evaluate its performance in the major.
2. Having the department take a more active and visible role in brokering research and service activities to help students develop credentials for graduate study and maximize opportunities for early development of professional skills.
3. Adopting an explicit model both within courses and across the curriculum. Bloom’s taxonomy was found to be helpful as a model for both instruction and the normal developmental course of learning in the major.
4. Designing venues for students to think proactively about issues that span the curriculum in an effort to promote coherence in content and thought.
5. Creating a culture of evidence within the major as a focal feature toward the improvement of critical thinking in psychology majors. This includes the concept of use of evidence as a value, as well as a practical skill.

The coming years will be devoted to the harder task of implementing these changes. However, discussion of these issues provided a very positive and generally enjoyable venue for a heterogeneous group of faculty—all of whom are passionately devoted to the craft of teaching—to find common ground in their avocation and to move toward making the whole major more than the sum of its parts.
Learning Object Repositories: Today’s tech junk drawers

Susan Zvacek, IDS

When I was growing up, we had a junk drawer in our kitchen that was full of wonderful, useful items that really couldn’t be categorized as junk at all. The best thing about the drawer, though, was that I never knew exactly what I’d find in there, because it was a catch-all for tools, toys, utensils and the occasional unidentifiable object. The junk drawer served as a repository of items (from duct tape to roller skate keys) that kept our household running more-or-less efficiently.

The professor’s equivalent of that junk drawer is a Learning Objects Repository (LOR). A Learning Object Repository is a way to store digital materials and learning resources to enable sharing those objects among members of a group. One of the most frequently cited repositories currently available to educators is MERLOT (Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching; see www.merlot.org). MERLOT holds an amazing collection of instructional materials, all categorized by disciplinary area.

The $64 question, though, is, “Does your department have a junk drawer of useful teaching materials that you can dip into for assignments, articles, slide shows, or just for inspiration?” If not, here’s one way to create a repository that won’t take up any space at all—consider using a departmental Blackboard site for sharable materials. Let’s refer to this not as a junk drawer but as a Learning Object Repository.

Think about materials you and others in your department use regularly, or consider how multi-section courses are taught. A Blackboard LOR could serve as your departmental junk drawer of teaching materials, and could prove invaluable to teaching assistants, as well. Here’s how it might work: First, get a Blackboard site established for this purpose (contact IDS to do this) and designate one person to be the “instructor.” This person can add other faculty, GTAs, and/or staff to the site and assign each the role of Teaching Assistant so they’ll have Control Panel access.

Next, collect the materials to be shared and put them into the site. It might make sense at this point to rename the navigation buttons in the site to reflect the types of materials included (articles, assignments, links to websites), or it may be more useful to indicate the specific courses for which the materials are most useful. When someone wants to use an item, he or she can simply use the “Copy” function to send a copy of that item to another Blackboard site. Finally, plan to review the materials included in the site regularly to weed out dead web links, outdated materials, or items that are no longer relevant.

If your department is interested in establishing a junk drawer—I mean, a Learning Objects Repository—in Blackboard, contact IDS at ids@ku.edu or call 864-2600.

CTE, KU loses valued colleague and friend

This past summer KU teachers lost a valued colleague and friend when James Vequist died of cancer. Jim was Director of Budig Hall, and created an outstanding support program for teachers using Budig’s large lecture halls. He was also instrumental in the design of the rooms and delivery systems built into them.

Many people knew Jim as a charming, funny and unflappable colleague who could work through any presentation challenge, and he was an extraordinarily knowledgeable participant in conversations about the continuing extension of media-based education at KU. He was uniformly helpful and creative, and the best kind of colleague one could have. Those who teach and work in Budig miss both his casual competence and his warm conversation. KU was extraordinarily well served by this very fine man.

—DB
CTE calls for Spring 2007 program applications

Recently, CTE sent announcements and calls for applications to faculty members for its Spring 2007 programs.

The Department Teaching Seminar is a new program. It’s designed to help departments and units identify curriculum goals, evaluate how well those goals are being met, and determine changes required for a department to achieve all of its teaching goals.

Faculty Fellows identify a learning goal for students and develop ways of enhancing their teaching so students can reach that goal. Teaching Grants support innovative ways to enhance student learning.

For more information and for copies of online applications, visit CTE’s website at www.cte.ku.edu.

Last spring, CTE’s advisory board made the following awards for Fall 2006 programs.

Best Practices Institute: Crystal Anderson, American studies; Ed Auer, speech-language-hearing; Robert Bayliss, Spanish and Portuguese; Caroline Bennett, CEA engineering; Anne Soon Choi, American studies; Cynthia Colwell, music and dance; Stephen Dickey, Slavic languages and literature; Patricia Manning, Spanish and Portuguese; Myunghyun Oh, mathematics; Yajaira Padilla, Spanish and Portuguese; Margaret Rausch, religious studies; Gitti Salami, history of art/AAAS; Carsten Timm, physics and astronomy; and Crispin Williams, east Asian languages and cultures.

BPI 2006 was facilitated by Beth Manolescu, communication studies; Margot Versteeg, Spanish and Portuguese; and Dan Bernstein, CTE/psychology.

Faculty Fellows: Hannah Britton, political science/women’s studies, and Elizabeth MacGonagle, history/AAAS.

Faculty Seminar: Robert Basow, journalism; Jorge Perez, Spanish and Portuguese; Dena Register, music and dance; Max Utsler, journalism; Margot Versteeg, Spanish and Portuguese; and Susan Williams, chemical and petroleum engineering.

Teaching Grants: Justin Marlowe and Michael Moody, public administration; Kerry Sabbag and William Comer, Slavic languages and literatures.

Different disciplines arrive at similar conclusions

continued from p. 5

These changes then fed back into the programs, and evaluation/feedback was continuously applied to determine future improvements and modifications.

Thus, the points discussed in Prof. Colombo’s article embody the major tenants of EC 2000. However, the criteria do not satisfy the parenthetical element of discussion point #3: should not incur extra workload. Our experience to date shows that, in order to adequately address these three tenants (or discussion points), considerable time is required of both the faculty and the students.

At the implementation of EC 2000, the criteria were designed to adjust for changing needs and situations. Therefore, it is not surprising that criteria have changed, to add further evaluation and larger feedback loops. As of 2004-05, ABET modified its objectives to be defined as accomplishments which are desired in engineering alumni a few years (two to eight) beyond graduation. This expectation goes beyond the “at graduation” time frame, adding further thought to faculty’s vision for students and alumni. Example objectives are success in a chosen career path, productive contributions to society and relevant organizations, and effective adaptation to our changing global society.

The tenants outlined by Prof. Colombo (and embodied by EC 2000) encourage each program to demonstrate and utilize its individuality. Each can develop unique outcomes, feedback processes and assessments which build on strengths and resources. It will be intriguing to follow the paths of each discipline during coming years as these programs strive to deliver the best possible results for their graduates.
Two phases for developing educational programs

In his book *Designing and Assessing Courses and Curricula*, Robert Diamond presents a model that identifies key factors and serves as a procedural guide for course and curriculum design. The model is shown below.