Overview:

As in the past, the main work of the committee has been to evaluate courses from students, faculty members, and the Committee on Curricula – to decide whether courses count toward distribution, culture, and world civilization requirements. This academic year, the committee processed all of the petitions it received.

The main developments this year had to do with reorganizing the subcommittee structure, developing and implementing petition forms and insuring a uniform process for all three subcommittees, and increasing the functions of the Trunk website.

With regard to reorganizing the subcommittee structure, in the past, ARB, discussions of petitions were done by the full committee, which resulted in discussions with more people than were needed and in more time spent than was needed. To streamline, the ARB selected three committee members who would each manage a subcommittee. The subcommittees had the power to either make decisions on their own or call for a full, ARB discussion. To insure coordination, the committee chair served as a member of all three subcommittees, however, the subcommittee chairs remained the charge of subcommittee activities. By all accounts, this system worked better than the previous system.

The development of faculty petition forms began last year, but was completed this year. Petition forms are now found on the ARB Trunk website and available to faculty on the faculty information website, (http://ase.tufts.edu/faculty/). Also, petitions for courses now require approval of relevant department chairs or a department’s program representative – including petitions for Ex. College courses.

With regard to the Trunk website, Courtney Spieler developed the website. There is a folder for each subcommittee (World Civilizations, Culture Option, Distribution Requirement). Petition forms are available to all, and so that archived material from previous years can be retrieved.

Chairs:

George Scarlett will continue as chair next year.

In the fall, Susan Ernst served as subcommittee chair for distribution requirements. Joe DeBold took over in the spring and will continue as subcommittee chair next year.

Laura Baffoni-Licata served as subcommittee chair for culture option requirements, and she will continue to serve in that role next year.

Karen Overbey served as subcommittee chair for world civilization requirements, and Sam Kounaves will serve in that role next year.

Issues for Discussion

While the streamlined ARB worked well this year to make ARB more efficient, at the end of the year we realized we needed more time to discuss ongoing, conceptual, issues. Our two meetings, one to open the year and one to end of the year, were enough to handle organizational issues but not conceptual issues.

The main conceptual issues seem to be the following:
1. Culture is the most obvious ongoing conceptual issue – in part because culture no longer has a clear, geographical criterion for defining, but also because so many new culture petitions have to do with so-called “trans-boundary” courses on global issues such as health. Without a clear geographical criterion, we have in place a fifty percent or more rule, to decide whether a course has enough content about a culture to count toward the culture requirement – however, it is difficult, to say the least, to apply this rule with great certainty. Similarly, with trans-boundary” courses, it is difficult to determine just how much a course is introducing students to perspectives from other cultures vs. speaking about a global issue from one, American, perspective mainly. We need more discussion to develop better criteria or better ways to measure.

2. Another conceptual issue has to do with the overlap between petitions for culture and petitions for world civilization. The overlap seems to have grown now that students do not generally take courses that are “dedicated” world civilization courses – raising the question of whether we really need a separate world civilization requirement. We have no answer to this question, only the feeling that the question needs to be raised and discussed.

3. Finally, committee members raised some concern that the meaning of “social science” has become so diluted that courses have no commitment to analyzing methods and data, yet count as social science courses. If the meaning of science is primarily found in these two activities (analyzing methods and data), then counting courses as social science courses that do not require these two activities seems problematic. Our students will (and many do) leave Tufts without a clear understanding of what constitutes social science, but also without understanding what constitutes science in general. We plan to discuss this further.

Concluding Remarks:

This report could not be complete without mentioning the outstanding contributions of our sub-committee chairs and without mentioning the outstanding support given to the committee by Courtney Spieler. As sub-committee chairs, Susan Ernst, Joe DeBold, Laura Baffoni-Licata, and Karen Overbey did the bulk of the work. Courtney Spieler not only developed the Trunk site, she provided all of the background work needed to keep the committee organized, on time, and with much needed supports.