Report on Academic Review Board Activities, Academic Year 2015-6

The Academic Review Board (ARB) is charged with evaluating appropriateness of previously unlisted courses to fulfill Tufts’ requirement for World Civilization, or part of Tufts’ requirement for Culture or for Distribution. Roughly 40 courses were reviewed by ARB each semester. Of the nearly 90 courses reviewed over Academic Year 2015-6, ARB approved about 90% of the petitions.

The most active members of ARB are the Chair, the Previous Chair, Sub-chairs for World Civ, Culture, and Distribution requirements, and the advisor to each sub-chair; thus a total of 8 most active members. A meeting was called in Fall 2015, however only four members appeared. Therefore I decided to have all ARB work take place online, with no meetings scheduled for Spring 2016. It appears that a major purpose of a Spring ARB meeting was to select a new Chair for the ensuing year. As of this writing (May 23, 2016) no new Chair for ARB has been selected for 2016-7, though I am happy to continue as chair for that year, if approved.

The ARB is charged with executing policy, not formulating it. In the previous year (2014-5), there were discussions over what exactly was meant by a World Civ course. Some members thought the University description of a World Civ course was so general as to trivialize the original intent of the World Civ requirement, which was to expose students to cultures beyond the Judeo-Christian tradition. In 2015-6, I tried to guide the committee to approve courses as World Civ if those courses concentrated on cultures that did not use Old or New Testament Bible as a foundation. Thus, we would argue against having a hypothetical course such as “Jews in Namibia” count as a World Civ course, despite the geographic (but not anthropological) setting being in Africa. The counsel of ARB’s World Civ sub-chair and her advisor were very helpful in arriving at committee consensus through online discussions and voting on potentially contentious World Civ petitions. As ARB Chair, I support adhering to a robust World Civ. requirement. Elite students need to open their minds to the values that drive cultures other than our own in the world: Asian, African, Pacific Islander, Indigenous Australian, South – and North-American.

Unfinished business looms over Summer 2016. In Spring 2016, a Senior was finally convinced that they did not have enough credits to graduate in May 2016. Nevertheless, they pressured a faculty member to take them on for two Independent Study courses in Spring 2016. The Independent study courses were registered on the transcript on March 17, 2016, a month later than the Feb 15 deadline for adding courses. The faculty member succeeded in getting departmental approval for the Independent Study courses. ARB was informed that we would be asked to approve at least one of those Independent Study courses as fulfilling a Culture requirement. ARB rightfully balked at the idea that a course begun in mid-March (before Spring Break) and finished a month later would in any way be equivalent to a full semester course. The student did not end up graduating in May, but now plans to graduate in
August 2016. To do so, they will petition ARB to approve an Indendent study as a Culture course. In mid-May, the faculty member asked ARB for the deadline we needed in order to approve the Independent study as a Culture, once we were supplied with the title of the final paper. At this writing (May 23) I am suggesting to ARB that we ask the faculty member for a copy of the full paper (not just its title) submitted to complete the Independent Study. Seeing the full paper would allow the ARB culture sub-chair to evaluate its equivalence to a full-semester treatment of a culture. Consulting with Dowling Hall, ARB was informed that we should make our decision by August 15 in order to clear the student for August graduation. I am hoping the Independent Study paper will be available by August 8, to allow ARB one week (at the height of August vacation season) to consider this academic product for fulfillment of a Culture requirement.

Respectfully Submitted from Talloires Campus,

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Chair, Academic Review Board
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