



The Core Course Setback

The Players:

James P. Ring -- Chair and Associate Professor at South Northern State University. Appointed Chair year before last; had a rough first year but is trying to do better; has developed some standing committees in department including dept. curriculum committee.

Miriam Liu – Chair and Full Professor at The Other State University. Seven years as chair after five serving as associate dean; active in professional organizations and an accomplished teacher scholar, this year she is on sabbatical.

People in Ring's Department

Anthony B. Smart--former Chair of the department prior to Ring. Serves on Faculty Senate and Faculty Club Board; average teacher; described by Ring as "cordial" to him. But last year Ring was a little intimidated by him and uncertain whether Smart accepted him as Chair.

Greg Schmitz – Professor. Long time friend of the former chair, Smart. Research interests focus on a highly obscure and esoteric sub-specialization.

Veronica Barnes--Assistant Professor. Third year in department, just getting started; average in teaching and research. Resurrected internship program after departure of former coordinator.

Donald K. Queens--Associate Professor. Cooperative member of department, excellent teacher, some research--was on University Core Curriculum Review Committee; very interested in curriculum development; serves on University committees including College R&T.

Background

It's late spring, just a few weeks before the end of the academic year. New Department Chair, James Ring, is at a professional conference, having lunch with a colleague, **Miriam Liu.** Ring, an e-mail junkie, sees a message flash on his Blackberry. It's an e-mail from his campus Core Curriculum Committee stating that the committee rejected his department's proposal for a course to fulfill the "World Culture" requirement. The proposal had been developed by an ad hoc departmental committee Ring had appointed. He had asked the former department chair, Anthony Smart to lead that effort. Ring was hoping the proposed new core curriculum course would be approved so it could be incorporated into the College Bulletin for the coming academic year. Ring saw the new course as critical to rebuilding departmental enrollments and attracting new students to their shrinking major. Ring's frustration is evident to Miriam. Being a good colleague, she ask her colleague what was in the e-mail that had upset him so much.

The Conversation

Miriam. Why did they turn it down?



Ring: They said it didn't fit the criteria. They said the goals were not clear, the course methodology did not address the critical thinking component and the assessment plan could be described at best as minimal.

Miriam: Who developed the proposal anyway?

Ring: Well, mostly the old Chair, Anthony Smart, and his buddy **Greg Schmitz**. Remember him? Last year he was pretty ticked off at me because I wouldn't fund his trip to Copenhagen to present a paper on high-altitude rock lichen formations in Northern Europe. He finally got some money out of the Dean and things settled down. Anyway, I set up a 3-person curriculum committee last fall to work on core curriculum proposals for our department. It was Smart, Schmitz and Veronica Barnes.

Marian: A new hire?

Ring: Veronica joined the department 3 years ago. But Smart was chairing the committee. He just wouldn't get off the dime. Actually, he kept telling me it was going fine. I should have listened to Veronica. She mentioned a couple of times that nothing was really happening, but I figured it would work out. Probably it wasn't a very good idea to put her on the committee since she's untenured and not very assertive! But she has some expertise in international cultural geology so I thought she would be helpful. And she went to one of the meetings the University Core Committee held to explain how to develop the viable proposals, so I knew she was interested. Anthony said he didn't have time to get her input, so he just slapped something together and let them take a look at it.

Miriam: Did the department ever discuss the proposal?

Ring: Not really. It came to me the day it was due. So I copied everyone in the department on the e-mail that I used to forward the proposal on to the next level of review. Don Queens was out of town at the time. He will be pretty upset that our department's proposal came in looking so bad. He was on the original University Core Review committee, you know, and really pushed for this "world culture" thing. He said it was important for the students, and that it held serious potential for our department to reverse the drops in our enrollments in recent years and begin to grow again.

Miriam: Is it too late to get something in this fall?

Ring, Well, everything has to be in and approved in time for the College Bulletin deadline, which is December 1. There is another chance to review proposals in November, but I can't risk another fiasco like this one! Queens will be pretty upset if we don't get something in after all the energy he put into setting it up for us. But if we rush something through in the fall again, what assurance do I have that it will be received any better? I really don't know how to proceed. What would you suggest?



“Core Course Setback” Discussion Questions:

1. What dynamics appear to be at work in Ring's department?
2. How does / should the work Smart, Schmitz, Barnes, Queen and Ring did on this curricular matter factor into their annual faculty evaluation?
3. How could the Chair have exercised more successful curricular leadership?
4. Are there things the Chair should do with regard to the “personalities” of the key faculty of the department and how they work or do not work together?