

RAAS – Report to the Faculty

The Resource Allocation and Assessment subcommittee of the executive committee of the faculty is an elected group of representatives from the four divisions of the college and interdisciplinary studies and includes the Associate Provost and Chair of the faculty as ex-officio members. Its role is *advisory*, and as such, we review issues with budgetary implications that the provost or executive committee bring forward for consultation. We are also responsible to review assessment documents, and to that end we review the GEARS and DOARS that departments submitted in the preceding year(s).

RAAS has spent this year reviewing the larger budget of the college in order to more accurately place the concerns of the faculty within the proper context. We were encouraged to do so by the reaccreditation team early in the year. To that end we met with most heads of divisions (Teri Blanchard, Ron Griggs, Hank Toutain, Marne Ausec, Pete Williams) to ask what their budget priorities were. We greatly appreciate the presentations of these members of the college. Out of these meetings and our subsequent conversations, we have developed some recommendations with regard to issues that affect academic excellence, which we see as the core of our mission. These will be reviewed with the Provost and possibly sent on as recommendations to the appropriate committees and divisions.

Our recommendations address a variety of issues, including faculty compensation broadly defined, faculty governance, financial aid, and faculty involvement in areas that impact academics.

We have also reviewed a number of more specific proposals and requests from the faculty that pertain to *resource allocation or assessment* issues. For example, we reviewed a proposal for an Asian Studies Joint Major, and considered the possibility of other joint majors as a new model with existing faculty and facilities. We reviewed proposals for concentrations that use current resources. We considered requests for one new permanent sabbatical replacement position and a request for recounting of course loads. We also reviewed guidelines for the allocation and reallocation of faculty positions, should that become necessary in our new economic era. In response to questions by the faculty about these guidelines we have discussed concerns with the full executive committee and formulated responses to faculty questions.

ASSESSMENT: Each year we review all of the GEARS, which talk about general educational goals and we rotate the DOAR evaluations by division, yet look at four years worth of forms at a time. This year was the year for the Natural Science division DOARS. Our findings and recommendations follow below.

Concerns and recommendations:

RAAS discussed a number of faculty concerns regarding student performance raised in the GEARS and DOARS. Such concerns focused on writing, creativity and critical thinking, oral presentations, and perhaps especially collaboration and cooperation. Writing continues to be a concern for some faculty, although it seems to have improved over the years. Still, there are some strong opinions about deficiencies. We think it would be useful to be clearer about our expectations regarding writing and to design specific ways to help accomplish these goals. Creativity and critical thinking remain a primary goal of many departments and yet remain difficult to achieve. Similarly, there was some concern about students' ability to present oral arguments and information. To some degree this was tied to writing in the sense of being able to communicate, though it also requires confidence and experience. That being said, oral

communication skills continue to require attention and support. Finally, several departments reported that, while collaboration and cooperative work are important, they remain difficult to encourage and support.

While facilities such as the Writing Center and the new Center for Innovative Pedagogy can provide important support for the development of such capacities and skills, faculty will need to take the lead here, perhaps by incorporating more in-class opportunities for reflective and analytical writing, constructive criticism, critical thinking, public speaking, and cooperative work. Given that such skills will prove essential for our students after they leave Kenyon, we urge the faculty to give serious consideration whatever curricular and pedagogical changes might best encourage and support them.

General Education Assessment:

The completeness and therefore usefulness of the GEARS we received varied considerably. We ask that chairs *completely* fill in the GEAR form, as it provides an essential summary and record of annual department assessment meetings. We see the primary value of this exercise as a way to encourage a good discussion about substantive issues relating to the curriculum. It should not be rote task. It is especially important that the assessment process circle around to review how well previous assessment efforts have functioned and what has changed over time.

To facilitate that process, RAAS will seek to make rubrics, reminders and forms available earlier in the year so that faculty who are going to fill them out may consider them in preparing their classes. Our current options for the general education goals include opting for the GEAR form, which is available through the Provost's web site or the writing or creativity rubrics. Only a few departments chose to do the writing rubric and no one chose to do the creativity rubric this year. We are also talking about the possibility of a QR rubric, but this would need to be invented first!

Departmental Assessment:

DOARS also vary substantially in their completeness and usefulness – to us and, we firmly believe, to the departments themselves. When DOARS are taken seriously, they can be a very important assessment tool for departments and the College alike. In order for DOARS to be genuinely useful, however, it is *essential* that they serve as the opportunity for sustained *reflection* on how we can best convey knowledge and capabilities to our students, rather than as a justification for the status quo. To better convey what a really successful DOAR looks like, we append below an exemplary one (with permission).

[MATH DEPARTMENT 2009]

Additionally, we suggest that all departments review their mission statement. It should not be the same as the general education goals, but should reflect the uniqueness of the discipline, and the specifics of the learning goals of the department. Then each goal can be addressed more substantively.