

To: Committee on Academic Policies
From: Bob Kolesar (HS)
Marian Morton
Sheri Young
Re: FYS Study Group Proposal
Date: March 19, 2007

As members of the FYS Study Group, we thank all the members of the study group for their work and their commitment to the importance of a first year seminar to John Carroll and its students. While we disagree with the recommendations of the report, we recognize the efforts of all involved. We write to let the Committee on Academic Policies know that we do not support the proposed revision of FYS for a number of reasons:

- it does not effectively address student concern about variability between sections. There is little reason to believe that 5 faculty learning communities will be any more effective than the current common model in policing deviations from norms, and there surely will be significant variations between the different learning communities.
- it will less effectively provide a structure to engage faculty with the student learning experience outside the faculty member's own discipline or interests, and the faculty learning communities may easily devolve to groupings of related disciplines.
- it will require more time and effort from individual faculty and more release time from departments, which means that it is quite likely that the problem the revision is meant to solve--recruiting engaged faculty--is not likely to be significantly impacted, and additional release time and faculty development also raises concerns about the long-term financial viability of the revised model which we do not believe have been addressed sufficiently.
- by formally linking each learning community to liaisons from the library, student affairs, and the writing program, it implicitly imposes requirements and burdens on individual sections that add to, rather than clarify, the objectives of the course.
- by dividing the topic and resources 5 ways, it will make the co-curricular activities more difficult, and will likely make the program less rather than more visible.

Less dramatic changes to the course could address student and faculty concerns:

- revising the selection of the FYS core committee so that it included directly elected members as well as representatives from the core committee.
- enhancing the stipend offered faculty to recognize participation as faculty development, and to support the collaborative development of particular learning objectives, assignments, and assessments (perhaps in faculty learning communities organized around particular readings or aspects of the course).
- the election or appointment of a faculty director for each iteration of the seminar (as opposed to chair of a committee).
- revising the process by which the theme and readings are selected (we could, for example, choose a single book to set the theme, and then proceed to select additional common readings to support the theme).

There are other recommendations in the report, particularly related to administrative support and recognition of faculty that we would be happy to see implemented. We thank you for your time and attention to our concerns.