Winds of Change

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Something remarkable has taken place at Furman during the last two years. Even though faculty members like to view themselves as progressive agents of change, the truth is that universities find change difficult. Notwithstanding this fact, after 18 months of study, deliberation, conversation, interviews, forums, revisions, position papers, late night discussions, departmental meetings and vigorous debate, the Furman faculty has approved, in overwhelming numbers, a slightly amended Curriculum Review Committee proposal titled “Invigorating Intellectual Life: A Proposal for Furman University’s Academic Program and Calendar.”

The work of the CRC and the university-wide discussion it produced represented the most comprehensive study of Furman’s academic program in almost 40 years. It has set in motion the most sweeping academic changes at the university since the adoption of the current calendar and curriculum in 1968.

To summarize:

Furman’s 3-2-3 academic calendar (12 weeks-8 weeks-12 weeks) will be replaced by a Semester-Plus Calendar. This will consist of two 15-week semesters, “plus” an optional three-week May term. The academic year will begin and end earlier than under the current calendar.

As for the curriculum, the new General Education requirements are not conceived along strictly departmental lines, but developed as an answer to a question: What kinds of academic experiences and exposures does a student need to become liberally educated? The new GERs fall into three major categories: First-Year Seminars, Core Requirements and Global Awareness Requirements.

Every student will take two First-Year Seminars. The goal of the seminars is to ignite students’ passion for learning by introducing them to college-level inquiry on the engaged model of learning.

Core Requirements will be divided into the following areas: Empirical Studies (two focusing on the natural world and two on human behavior and social relations), Human Cultures (one using historical analysis, one on the critical interpretation of texts, and one in the visual and performing arts), Mathematical and Formal Reasoning, Foreign Language, Ultimate Questions, and Body and Mind.

Global Awareness Requirements (modeled on the current Asian-African requirement) will require students to take two courses, one dealing with World Cultures and the other with Humans and the Natural Environment.

Immediately after the approval of the CRC proposal last fall, an implementation plan was drawn up and a steering committee established. On the recommendation of the steering committee, the faculty voted to approve a 2008-2009 starting date for the new curriculum and calendar.

Between now and then, there is much to be done!

You can review the complete plan for “Invigorating Intellectual Life” by visiting the Web at www.furman.edu/itf.

— Ty Tessitore

This article is reprinted from the May edition of the political science departmental newsletter. The author, who has taught political science at Furman since 1992, was chair of the Curriculum Review Committee.