

TASA-THECB Meeting, Friday, February 6, 2015

Well, they didn't say no. Last Friday's TASA President Carol Fairlie and Richard Lubben met with Assistant Commissioner Dr. Rex Peebles and two staff members regarding the creative arts core curriculum and future plans to review the art field of study in 2016. We will give you more details about the field of study discussion at a later time. At the meeting Dr. Peebles and staff listened to our concerns and arguments in support of studio courses while asking us some tough questions throughout the 90 minutes regarding studio course content, purpose, intended audience, cognitive skills and typical grading criteria. We argued that cognitive skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, creative thinking, innovation, communication...etc. are present in studio courses and used throughout the creative processes. This was really not disputed; however, they were adamant it is the responsibility of the submitting institution to prove these assertions to the THECB in their application and syllabi. In the end they said they would consider individual studio courses based on the details in the applications and supporting syllabi from each institution. We had hoped for a yes across the board but it looks like they are going to make each of us work very hard on justifications and syllabi revisions if to be considered for core inclusion.

Dr. Peebles and staff went on to say that courses must not be primarily "skill" based. This means if accepted into the core the course must be broad in nature and not focus on art techniques specific to drawing, painting, craftsmanship of clay, etc. In particular, the evaluation and grading criteria for the semester grade must have at least 50% of the total grade value of the course focusing on a broad range of assignments. Portfolios, projects graded on skill and artistic quality, craftsmanship etc. are not, in the opinion of the THECB, types of assignments that will fulfill the intent of SACS for the creative arts area. This would make the course a technical course in their view. To be in the core a student who is not an art major, nor has any natural ability in art, must be able to do well and excel in the course based on a combination of assignments designed for a non-major.

Although this is not the outcome TASA had hoped for we will continue to build a better relationship and open communication channels with the THECB to support our member institutions. In addition, Richard Lubben will be meeting with the CAA Education Committee this week in NY to discuss organizing a national response supporting the importance of studio art course in Texas and the nation. Please watch for our updates on the core submission approvals/denials as we learn results later in the spring as well as upcoming TASA news.

Below is what you need to know and consider if submitting for studio core inclusion:

As you probably already know, courses must include the core objectives and syllabi must contain factual clear information that explains how the four core objectives will be fulfilled and assessed, course learning outcomes to assess the core objectives and grading criteria, written so anyone outside of the art discipline can understand. The following items seem crucial for a successful application to the core.

- The four core objectives must be present and assessed
- The core objective assignment(s)/activities that assess the four objectives must be explained clearly, including grading criteria, grading rubric and assignment requirements (we recommend you have someone in your curriculum office help with wording and an institutional core objective grading rubric and you use a common assignment in all sections)
- Course content must not be over 50% “skill/technique based”. There must be a variety of assignments and activities using and assessing a broad range of cognitive skills. If a student’s semester grade is primarily based on a creative portfolio it does not fulfill the SACS requirement (in the THECB opinion) for a core course. This type of course would be seen as a field of study course focusing on training the student for the profession of artist.
- Advice: Faculty do not necessary need to significantly change what happens in the studio sessions; however, the class may need to be redesigned to include additional assignments and forms of assessment to fulfill the requirements of the core area. This may be accomplished through homework and/or online assignments covering art history, design foundations, color theory, reflection papers, essays, critiques, oral reports, presentations, peer teaching, peer critiques, quizzes on assigned reading, etc. etc. These additions not only make the course more rigorous but also fulfill the breadth of knowledge, appreciation and analysis requirements for the creative arts core component area.
- Advice: If your department is considering submitting for core inclusion you will likely have some passionate department discussions about master syllabi, common course content, imposed learning outcomes, assessment, imposed core objectives, mandatory homework, rubrics, more assessments and more work for everyone. Be ready for this discussion.

Background information from SACS:

2.7.3 In each undergraduate degree program, the institution requires the successful completion of a general education component at the collegiate level that (1) is a substantial component of each undergraduate degree, (2) ensures breadth of knowledge, and (3) is based on a coherent rationale.

The courses do not narrowly focus on those skills, techniques, and procedures specific to a particular occupation or profession.