

A Brief History
of the
Curriculum Commission

I believe the concept of a curriculum commission resulted from conversations between Joe Borgen and Carey Israel. Borgen, who had been DMACC's Vice President, left DMACC to become the president of Danville Community College in Danville, Illinois. In 1981 he returned to DMACC as its second president. It was immediately clear that he was intent on creating some fundamental changes. Carey Israel had come to DMACC as head of the Legal Assistant program but had since moved into the administration as Dean of Arts and Sciences.

One of the first changes Borgen announced was to convert DMACC from a quarter system to a semester system. This was sure to have significant impact on the curriculum and, I must say, it was received with considerable trepidation by the faculty. There were issues with credit conversion, course numbering, work load calculations, and many other details. As matters progressed, it became apparent that the college had grown and expanded to the point where a uniform process for curricular control and change was necessary. From this need came the concept of a Commission to oversee all curriculum changes across the entire institution. A document was drawn up (almost certainly written by Israel and approved by Borgen) that outlined the charge, responsibilities, powers, membership, budget, reports, and staff support that would create the Commission and define its duties in detail (see Appendix). If I remember correctly, this would have been in 1982 or early 1983. In short, the Commission was to develop a process for the change and implementation of curriculum. Once the process was in place, the Commission would review and approve or disapprove all proposed changes. These actions would become recommendations to the VP for Academic Affairs. The VP was not obligated to accept these recommendations. However, if they were not accepted, the VP was required to explain to the Commission, in writing, why they were not approved. As part of the overall process, a Curriculum Committee was formed in each department with members appointed by the respective deans. The Committee reviewed and approved or disapproved all proposals before they were sent to the Commission.

Carey Israel served as the first chair of the Curriculum Commission. The composition of the Commission was mostly faculty representing all departments and campuses. In addition, the counseling and the registrar offices were also represented. Some of those I recall in the early days were Henry Praeger, Curt Wiberg, Chris Schreurs, Owana McLester-Greenfield, Susan Wager and Sharon Van Tuyl. There were many more, of course, and I apologize to any that I have failed to mention here. In any event, Israel felt that the Commission should be chaired by a faculty member and after a short period of time he was replaced by Owana McLester-Greenfield, an English/Communications instructor. Owana served as the chair for about six months when she decided to leave DMACC. When Owana resigned, I was approached by Israel and asked if I would be willing to serve as the chair. I agreed to assume the duties of the chair while a more permanent chair could be found but that I would not serve more than six months. Twenty-three years later, as I was preparing to retire, I was still the chair.

The chair of the Commission worked closely with the Vice President for Academic Affairs. At least that is the title for the VP that I remember; there may have been other titles as well. The VP's came and went. During my tenure as chair I can recall working with, in chronological order, Del Shepard, Harold Gamm,

Ken Shibita, Jerry Moskus, Curt Vandiver and Kim Linduska. Of course, the chair held that position at the pleasure of the president. While I was chair, the presidents were Joe Borgen, David England and Rob Denson. As chair, I was required to submit an annual report to the president summarizing the accomplishments and activities of the Commission. After submitting the annual report to the president, copies were sent to the VP and all the departmental deans. I do not know if a compendium of these reports still exists. I have a copy of the report for the 2003-2004 school year. For the record, the members of the Commission for that year were Larry Barrett, John Brockelsby, Mike Gatzke, Jan Lewis, Drew Goecken, Susan Mitchell, Alan Hutchison, Kim Kirschman, Keith Knowles, Jan La Ville, Dennis Lowry, Doug Meyers, Ginny Rafdal, Randi Ray, Frank Trumpy, Dick Wagner, Diane Vander Ploegh, Sue Wickham, Nancy Wisnosky, Amy Woods and Jay Nickelson.

As the Commission evolved, it developed processes to effect curricular change and the forms to facilitate those processes. We became, in some respects, the quintessential bureaucracy. In the very early pre-commission days, everyone who needed to know about a change in a program's curriculum might all be housed physically close to each other. When a change was necessary, it had an effect on counselors, credentials people, those preparing the next catalog, communication with the Iowa Department of Education, and so on. As the college grew, all those offices expanded and some moved into separate buildings. The forms standardized the process of curricular change and were a vehicle for communicating curricular changes to all who needed to know about them. In many programs, especially in the vocational areas, filling out forms and adhering to rules and policies were very foreign concepts. I remember that we put on workshops to help faculty/program chairs understand how to make changes to their program's curriculum. I think we were not always the most popular people on campus, to put it mildly.

As I try to recall "issues" that became important and sometimes controversial, a few come to mind. One was how we would number courses to designate whether or not they would be transferable to four-year institutions. Under the quarter system, an agreement had existed with the regents institutions that used a course numbering scheme to make these distinctions. When we switched from quarters to semesters, it took a while to figure out how we would do that and satisfy the receiving institutions.

Another issue was the idea of "coring" some courses. In the early days, every vocational program had its own math, human relations and communications course. We had "Math for Automotive," "Math for Diesel Technology," "Communications for Building Trades," and so on. Each course had its own unique acronym, course number (e.g. WELD 415 – Related Math for Welding) and course outline. The idea of coring was to create a single course that would serve the needs of many if not all these programs. This would simplify the catalog and make it easier for a student to move from one vocational program to another. The first subject to be cored was mathematics. A comprehensive review was done of all the related math course outlines that produced a matrix of skills and programs. From this matrix a single outline covering all the required topics was developed. This resulted in 16 related math courses being replaced with just two courses, MATH 410 & MATH 411 - Math for Technicians I&II. Similar results were ultimately achieved regarding many other related courses that were replaced by ENGL 410 - Communication Skills, PSCH 106 - Psychology of Human Relations and Adjustment, and PHYL 401 - Physics for Technicians. While the old program-specific courses were taught by so-called "related instructors," the new courses were taught by instructors in the traditional disciplines.

Deadlines for curricular change also became an issue. In the early days, programs could make changes in their curriculum at any time. It was not unusual for the curriculum in place in the fall to disagree with what had been printed in the catalog for that year. Counselors enrolling students would sometimes find themselves working with curricula and course numbers that were different from what came up on the computer screen. This happened almost exclusively in the vocational programs and it could lead to chaos.

The fact was that the fall schedule was developed early in the calendar year (about February). Room assignments and other scheduling matters had to be in place based on the course numbers, days of the week that a course met, etc., as would be dictated by a program's curriculum. The catalog layout and arranging for its printing also required substantial lead time. Solving this problem fell to the Curriculum Commission. The solution was to set a deadline for curricular changes for the next academic year. After consulting with those doing the scheduling and the catalog, plus looking at the college calendar, it was decided that the deadline should be the end of October in any year for the next academic year's curriculum. I recall that this was not popular, especially with some of the then emerging computer technology programs where course content was changing rapidly. We encouraged those writing course descriptions for some courses to refer to "current" versions of software rather than identifying specific versions by name or number. We added a little wiggle room by stating that the deadline could be ignored for a specific program if the VP permitted it. However, I do not recall that this ever happened.

State-wide uniform course numbering became an issue about the time I retired. I, and others, represented DMACC at several of the state-wide meetings where decisions on numbering were made. However, by the time it was put in place, I was no longer working full-time for the college.

These recollections regarding the creation, staffing and activities of the Curriculum Commission are based on my personal memories, reviewing old catalogs and conversations with colleagues. As I sat down to write this, I was surprised as to how few written documents existed with which I had to refer. When I retired, all the records that I had kept in two, five-drawer file cabinets were transferred to the chair who succeeded me, and I donated my entire collection of catalogs (1972 – 2005) to the Registrar's office. I did some calling and checking as to the fate of all those curriculum records, and I have concluded that they no longer exist. I was able to learn that all the catalogs are preserved in the Ankeny Campus library. Some of the history I relate here came from my looking at those old catalogs. I must acknowledge the very helpful Ankeny Campus library staff in assisting me to find those catalogs and allowing me to browse through them. I am also grateful to Burgess Shriver and Jim Stick for conversations we had that helped me recall names, issues and facts.

Respectfully Submitted,

Franklin D. Trumpy

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The following is a scan of the original "Charge" document for the first Curriculum Commission:

DES MOINES AREA COMMUNITY COLLEGE
CURRICULUM COMMISSION

CHARGE

The Curriculum Commission will assess institutional curricula and make recommendations regarding:

- 1) the purpose, design and accessibility of existing curricula;
- 2) curricular needs identified by students;
- 3) curricular needs identified by the external community; and
- 4) anticipated student/community demands and the creation of educational offerings which will accommodate those demands.

RESPONSIBILITY

The Curriculum Commission is responsible for reviewing and evaluating all data pertaining to the institution's curricular offerings. That data will include specific information regarding student achievement, retention, transferability and placement. Data will also include information regarding external factors such as employment supply and demand, employer follow-up, continuing education training demands and existing/emerging business and industry demands.

In the context of these data, the Curriculum Commission is further responsible for recommending:

- 1) the appropriate integration of existing curricula, courses and cored courses;
- 2) a coring typology and method for identifying and placing existing courses within the typology;
- 3) discontinuation and creation of curricular offerings;
- 4) approval of new curricular proposals presented by any department or Campus of the College; and
- 5) consistency of requirements for degrees, diplomas and certificates at Des Moines Area Community College.

POWERS

The Curriculum Commission is empowered to vote on any and all developed recommendations. A recommendation receiving approval of two-thirds of the Commission membership will be submitted to the Vice President for Educational Services for response. Any recommendation vetoed by the Vice President will be returned to the Commission; a written public explanation for rejection and/or suggestions

for amendment will accompany the vetoed recommendation. Developed recommendations which fail to receive approval of two-thirds of the Commission membership will be rejected unless the Commission agrees that revision and resubmission are warranted.

MEMBERSHIP

Faculty and staff broadly representative of the College Campuses and departments will comprise the Curriculum Commission. Commission members shall be appointed by the President with staggering terms of service.

BUDGET

A budget of one thousand dollars (\$1,000.00) will be allocated for meeting expenses and materials, to enable the Curriculum Commission to carry out its charge.

PLANS/REPORT

The Commission each year shall present for review by the Vice President, annual objectives and work plans for the Commission activities. Following June 30th of each year, the Commission shall present an annual report to the President.

STAFF SUPPORT

The Vice President for Educational Services and Educational Deans will provide administrative staff support to the Commission. In addition, the Commission shall integrate its work, as appropriate, with the work of the Planning Commission, the Quality of Work Life and Staff Development Commissions.