

EDUCATIONAL STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE

Report on Concerns Raised Re: LCOM, MMG 201 and Undergraduate Offerings

March 15, 2018

The Educational Stewardship Committee (ESC) investigated several interrelated concerns with the Larner College of Medicine (LCOM):

- 1) MMG 201. In Spring 2017 concerns raised by Profs. Rob Hondal, Stephanie Phelps, and Susan Wallace to the effect that IBB-related budget cuts had forced the Department of Microbiology and Molecular Genetics to offer MMG 201 in alternating fall semesters only, rather than every fall semester. These faculty members noted in their correspondence to us that the reduced frequency of MMG 201 offerings was having an adverse effect on students' learning and progression in the Biochemistry and MMG undergraduate majors.
- 2) The Committee sought to better understand the curricular review and oversight processes of LCOM's undergraduate programs and courses and how those processes are managed with partnering undergraduate units. This item was a follow-up to the ESC's report of November 20, 2015, and the intent was to ensure academic quality, shared decision-making with partnering units, and an understanding of undergraduate curricula and requirements.
- 3) The Committee wanted to understand the intent and scope of LCOM's future plans for involvement in undergraduate programs and courses. This concern was sparked by the advent of the Wellness Environment (WE) program, which is based in LCOM, and listings of new special topics courses sponsored by LCOM. There was concern that the content of some of the special topics courses might duplicate content taught in existing courses. The ESC is aware of a general perception among faculty that, under the IBB budget model, LCOM enjoys an unfair advantage over the undergraduate schools and colleges because LCOM can access undergraduate student credit hours as a revenue stream, but the other academic units cannot derive revenues from students enrolled in LCOM.

Our investigation included interviews with the Provost's Office (Kerry Castano), the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (Dean Thomas Vogelmann), the University Budget Director (Alberto Citarella), and the Larner College of Medicine (Brian Cote, Jan Carney, and Dean Rick Morin). It culminated on 11/28/17 in a meeting with Deans Morin and Vogelmann, Associate Dean Carney, and ESC members Rosemary Dale, Laura Almstead and Brian Reed. Dean Morin was provided with a set of questions in advance regarding the concerns that had been raised. There was an additional follow-up meeting with Associate Dean Carney on February 9, 2018.

MMG 201:

Prior to the implementation of IBB, the Larner College of Medicine (LCOM) and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS) shared responsibility for MMG courses. With the implementation of IBB and by mutual agreement, responsibility for the support of MMG courses, including MMG 201, was transferred to LCOM. Because LCOM cannot award undergraduate degrees, MMG majors get their degrees through CALS; Biochemistry majors get their degrees through CAS.

By all accounts, MMG 201 is an excellent, rigorous laboratory course, but it is expensive to teach because of the necessary reagents and supplies, and because students work closely with the senior faculty who teach it. Under the old incremental budgeting system, the funds available for the course were artificially high due to an idiosyncrasy in the funding formula. When this was corrected, the budget for MMG 201

became markedly reduced, but this was independent of IBB. The MMG Department had to make choices about all of its offerings in order to maintain a balanced budget, and consequently the decision was made to offer MMG 201 in alternate fall semesters only. Adjustments to balance the Department's budget would have been necessary regardless of the change in the University's budget model.

At the meeting of 11/28/17 Dean Morin reported that he had decided to underwrite the costs of MMG 201 so that it could continue to be offered every fall. This action will resolve the concerns about adverse impacts on MMG and Biochemistry undergraduate majors.

High Quality, High Cost Laboratory Courses

The investigation of MMG 201 concerns has called attention to the broader issue of support for high quality, high cost laboratory courses such as MMG 201. Considering the federal definition of a credit hour, the credit allocation for such lab courses or sections is typically low for the amount of work expected of students. Consequently, the revenue stream is also low, so lab courses are potentially at risk under the incentive-based budgeting model (trends in lab offerings are one of the metrics tracked by the ESC). Increasing the credit allocation for labs was suggested as a potential solution, but that does not seem feasible since the credits would have to be taken from other courses. At this time there is no obvious solution. The ESC urges the academic units to consider what is best for students' education when making decisions about valuable but high cost labs and experiential learning courses.

Curricular Oversight Mechanisms in LCOM:

Associate Dean Carney gave an overview of the curricular review and oversight infrastructures and processes in LCOM. These are described under the Faculty Affairs tab on LCOM's website <http://www.med.uvm.edu/facultyaffairs/courseapproval>. Dean Carney assured us the processes are rigorous and do include shared decision-making in cross-college collaborations. It was the ESC's assessment that the infrastructures and process seem sound and well conceived.

LCOM's Current Involvement in Undergraduate Curricula:

Background: LCOM has for some time played a significant role in undergraduate programs. These include Microbiology and Molecular Genetics (two majors and two minors), Pharmacology minor, Biochemistry major, and more recently, the Biomedical Engineering major, and Wellness Environment (WE) program. With the exception of the Pharmacology minor and WE, these programs involve a partnership with one or more undergraduate teaching units where there is some overlap in subject expertise.

Wellness Environment: Dean Morin acknowledged that LCOM derives substantial undergraduate tuition revenue from the Wellness Environment (WE) program.

Without question, the WE program has had a positive impact on recruitment, student behaviors and the University's image, however, we note there are two factors that provide LCOM with disproportionate financial benefit. First, the required course for the WE program, which is offered under an LCOM prefix, is assigned three credits, whereas the courses in other residential learning communities are assigned only one credit. Secondly, the IBB "multiplier" for LCOM is higher than for any other academic unit. The combined result is that LCOM receives disproportionately more revenue from WE than other units receive from residential learning community courses they sponsor. We see two solutions to this disparity:

1) reduce the credits for the WE course from three to one, making it comparable to the other learning community courses (this would also make WE more available to students with highly structured majors); or 2) make adjustments in the IBB 2.0 model to achieve financial equity.

Special Topics Courses: On February 9, 2018 Brian Reed and Cathy Paris met with Jan Carney, Associate Dean in LCOM, to review LCOM's undergraduate special topics course offerings and discuss the concerns that have been raised. Those concerns included 1) the appearance that some of these courses are not part of a strategic plan, but simply "one-offs"; and 2) lack of clarity about the reasons why LCOM is offering undergraduate special topics courses if the college is not interested in the undergraduate enterprise and associated tuition-based revenues.

We came to a mutual understanding and some creative solutions. It was agreed that special topics courses can serve an important function for course innovation and development, especially in strategic collaborations between LCOM and the undergraduate units. Such collaborations can result in high quality curricula with the potential to attract prospective students. However, "stand alone" undergraduate special topics courses offered by LCOM can be seen as tapping into the finite pool of undergraduate student credit hours. Dr. Carney expressed understanding of and sensitivity to concerns that have been raised about LCOM's undergraduate special topics course offerings. She said she would undertake a campaign to raise awareness of these issues among LCOM's faculty, department chairs and curricular review bodies, and emphasize the appropriate use of undergraduate special topics courses.

To further promote understanding and collaboration between LCOM and the undergraduate units, Cathy Paris, president of the Faculty Senate has agreed to appoint an LCOM faculty member to the Senate's open ad hoc seat on the ESC. The appointment will be made in consultation with LCOM, and ideally, the LCOM faculty member will also be a member of the Faculty Senate's Curricular Affairs Committee. This arrangement will provide the ESC with perspective from LCOM, and it will provide LCOM with an understanding of and an active role in addressing the issues and concerns the Committee grapples with. In addition, Laura Almstead, ESC member and Chair of the Faculty Senate's Curricular Affairs Committee, will meet with Paula Tracy, LCOM's curriculum committee chair, to discuss University policies and best practices regarding undergraduate courses and curricula.

General Concerns about Special Topics Courses

The ESC has discussed other concerns that are common to all special topics courses, not just LCOM's. Special topics course titles are "invisible" until they are posted in the Schedule of Courses, and because they are not part of an academic program, they are not subject to review outside the sponsoring department. Consequently, there can be varying degrees of duplication with existing permanent courses. And although special topics courses are supposed to be temporary, not offered more than three times, there is currently no common mechanism for monitoring special topics titles. The ESC is currently developing a protocol by which the academic units can monitor their special topics courses as well as potential overlap between existing courses and proposed new courses.

LCOM's Future Plans for Curriculum Development

Dean Morin reiterated that LCOM does not have aspirations for new undergraduate programs except to the extent that undergraduate units want to partner with LCOM to make their programs better and stronger. Dean Morin said LCOM does not want to compete with the undergraduate enterprise, but rather

with other institutions of higher education in *collaboration* with the undergraduate enterprise. LCOM can provide faculty expertise in certain areas and student research opportunities through its graduate and research programs. These unique opportunities are possible because UVM is one of the few universities in the nation with an academic health center on campus. The ESC agrees the academic units should capitalize on valuable collaborations with LCOM where appropriate.

Dean Morin stated that LCOM does want to increase its curricular offerings, but the thrust will be at the post-baccalaureate and graduate levels, not undergraduate. This has and will continue to include certificates of graduate study, masters and doctoral degree programs. This planned growth of graduate programs is consistent with the University's strategic plans.

Summary of Outcomes and Recommendations:

MMG201

- LCOM has restored the original schedule of MMG 201 offerings (every fall semester). This resolves the expressed concerns about adverse effects on students' progression and education.
- The ESC urges all academic units to consider what is best for students' education when considering decisions about high cost laboratory and experiential learning courses.

Curricular Review and Oversight in LCOM:

- Appropriate infrastructures and processes appear to be in place. The ESC urges LCOM to maintain these structures and ensure that new programs, program changes, courses, and other curricular items normally reviewed by unit-level curriculum committees receive critical review and meet University policies and standards.

LCOM's Current Involvement in Undergraduate Curricula:

- WE Program: The ESC recommends that disparities relative to the other residential learning communities and their sponsoring units be resolved by either 1) reducing the credits for the WE course from three to one to make it comparable to the other learning community courses; or 2) make adjustments in the IBB 2.0 model to achieve financial equity.
- Special Topics Courses: Associate Dean Carney will undertake a campaign to raise awareness of the issues among LCOM's faculty, department chairs and curricular review bodies, and to emphasize the appropriate use of special topics courses.
- As an additional step to promote understanding and collaboration between LCOM and the undergraduate units, the Faculty Senate leadership will appoint an LCOM faculty member to the Senate's open ad hoc seat on the ESC.

General Concerns about Special Topics Courses

- The ESC is currently developing a protocol by which all academic units can monitor their special topics courses as well as potential overlap between existing courses and proposed new courses.

LCOM's Future Plans for Curriculum Development:

- LCOM does not intend to offer new undergraduate programs, but is eager to collaborate with interested undergraduate units to create strong curricula and unique opportunities for students.
- LCOM does plan to grow its curricular offerings, but the thrust will be at the post-baccalaureate and graduate levels, not undergraduate.