

HUMAN VALUES AND HUMAN EXPRESSION CLUSTER REPORT
Prepared for Provost Lois Muir

MAY 7, 2002

I. PERSPECTIVES

Breadth and Importance of Subjects

Members of the Planning Cluster for Human Values and Human Expression grappled with the ambiguity inherent in our Cluster's title. Our preliminary discussion concluded that the net cast by this title is exceptionally broad. Virtually any class on campus deals at some level with either values or expression or both. Nevertheless, members are in complete agreement that the disciplines and concepts grouped under Human Values and Human Expression play a critical role in our mission as a university. Indeed, members believe that The University of Montana, as the flagship liberal arts university in the state system, has always taken very seriously its responsibility to help students understand issues and concepts related to human values and human expression. We, as faculty in these areas, understand and appreciate our responsibility to prepare our students for the world they will encounter when they leave UM, including extraordinary global issues. Likewise our current classes in ethics and human values seek to provide our students with the tools they need to recognize ethical issues, to analyze those issues, and to make careful and thoughtful ethical decisions.

Excellent existing UM programs bear on human values and human expression. These include, and are not limited to, creative writing, the arts, the humanities including religious studies, women's studies, and the liberal arts in general. Courses in business, law and a multitude of other curricular areas carry components of human values and expression as well. Beyond formal coursework, UM provides a wealth of opportunities to gain understanding and perspectives in the areas of human values and human expression through campus lectures, seminars and student activities. However, we are often each so involved and invested in our respective domains that we-and perhaps a majority of our students-may not be fully aware of many of the opportunities available in these areas. Increasing awareness of such events is therefore one of the goals of this committee.

An important function of the university is to provide for the free exchange of ideas. Members believe it is important for The University of Montana to reaffirm regularly its commitment to discussion of divergent views that are supported by rational thought and scholarship. The university can do this best by providing a challenging intellectual environment that promotes the interaction of people and ideas and encouraging and supporting many opportunities and settings in which such exchanges can occur.

Teaching by Example

University personnel and university offices' interactions with students are sometimes reported by students to be unfriendly and less than helpful. Committee members suggested that we approach the concept of human values first by focusing on the extent to which we communicate to our students that we value them. It matters little what we say or what we put in our curriculum if students do not see good role models in their faculty, staff and administrators. Our students need to perceive our interest in and commitment to them from their recruitment and admission to their graduation and beyond. Members suggested that everything we do needs to reflect and reinforce our belief that all human beings are worthy of our respect, and that we value students of every ethnic origin and religious persuasion, and every level of sophistication and academic achievement.

Concerns Regarding Asset Allocation

Committee members expressed a concern that with the thrust toward new programs, a number of programs that squarely address human values and human expression are dying on the vine, so to speak. UM currently possesses excellent nationally prominent programs in human expression-notably in Creative Writing and the arts-that have a high number of applicants. However, recruitment is a major issue because the stipends are not competitive with other institutions, particularly at the Master of Fine Arts level. These existing programs have many characteristics of the newly defined niche programs, including actual status as, or the potential to be, national models, yet they are severely limited in their scope and success by shortfalls in resources. The committee believes that existing programs ought to be funded adequately before significant resources are diverted to new programs. Specific concerns centered on the level of funding support for graduate assistantships in areas such as Creative Writing, Media Arts, Drama and Art. Committee members noted that we are losing the best graduate prospects to other universities because other universities offer larger stipends with tuition waivers.

General Approach

Initial recommendations of this committee will suggest ways to make more apparent and attractive what we are doing already in the areas of human values and human expression. We also are offering several ideas to augment existing efforts, and to configure specific events and activities into a credit-generating course or colloquium.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

- A. **Highlight current** events. We propose that a system be developed by which important events occurring on campus that are related to Human Values and Human Expression be highlighted or pulled together with the Human Values and Expression thread on our UM web site and in our campus publications. This would bring to the attention of the entire campus the activities that are taking place, and also would

remind us of the many opportunities we have each semester to learn and share in these important areas. Faculty would be able to refer to the site, include events in their lesson plans, if helpful and appropriate, and make class assignments featuring current events and activities on campus. This proposal would involve the creation of a clearinghouse for such events and activities as well as the development of a web page devoted particularly to Human Values and Human Expression, linked to the UM Home Page.

- B. Enhance support for existing programs. We propose to the Provost that, when additional funds become available to provide greater support for master's degree Graduate Teaching Assistants' stipends, the MFA programs be addressed first. MFA applicants, perhaps more than other master's degree applicants, are nationally recruited to longer terminal degrees, commensurate in their length and rigor in a number of fields with doctoral degrees.
- C. Convene additional conferences and discussions on topics of major public interest. We propose to the Provost that each year a topic of major public concern be selected for campus-wide focus and discussion. Topics might include global terrorism, genocide, the Muslim world, corporate responsibility, fair distribution of economic goods across the world, world-wide gender discrimination, globalization of trade, or cultural pluralism/cultural imperialism. A small committee comprised of faculty, staff and students could select the topic. With careful planning, the program could operate to some extent under existing series, such as the Presidential Lecture Series or the Provost's Lecture Series. The committee could distribute a modest sum of money to the relevant departments each year for some special events pertinent to the topic, and departments could teach some well-publicized special-topics courses on the chosen subject open to all students. We believe this strategy might broaden our students' understanding of critically important topics and make more apparent to all, including the faculty and the public, the wonderful resources available in the domain of human values and human expression at The University of Montana.
- D. Hold provocative events that focus on rights and responsibilities. We propose that money be set aside to fund thought-provoking events (such as lectures, seminars, concerts, art exhibits, film series) dealing with provocative and timely issues as they arise, particularly those dealing with rights and responsibilities. These might, for example, include topics such as plagiarism from downloaded papers, accounting and management improprieties at major corporations, and gay rights. These events could draw on campus resources as well as guests, and they could focus on how these issues arise, why they're important, and what's to be done.
- E. Help faculty teach sensitive topics. We propose that a workshop, or a series of workshops, be made available to faculty/staff on an optional basis to provide them with help in teaching sensitive topics such as issues of gender. We recognize that almost any topic of this nature can become politically or emotionally charged, but we believe that the opportunity to share our experiences with our colleagues might help us address these issues with greater success.

F. Initiate credit-generating colloquia. We propose that some of the events already planned each year (e.g., Presidential and Provost's lectures, music and dance concerts, dramas, film series, art shows, symposia, and perhaps select community presentations) be designated in some way and that students be allowed to earn one (or more) General Education credits each semester by selecting 12 to 15 different events to attend, preferably one each week. A number of options for tracking attendance have been discussed. The most simple of these would be for a student to pick up a card as s/he enters, fill it out, and leave it with an usher at the conclusion of the event. These could be electronically tallied and translated to a Pass/Fail grade at semester's end. Or, student photo ID cards could be presented and swiped at the beginning and end of each event. Perhaps student credit hours generated through this program might be earmarked to assist graduate students, who also might be involved in administering the colloquia.

III. NEXT STEPS

This report reflects our preliminary views. Depending on your responses to our suggestions we would be willing, if asked, to continue our discussions in the fall, with the following objectives in mind:

- A. Involve students and staff in focus groups with committee members to get their Views on:
 - (1) Our proposals and ideas, and on the topics that might be selected.
 - (2) how we, as faculty, might do a better job of assisting students in gaining a greater service orientation and a wider world view.
- B. Meet with representatives of program areas on campus that relate most directly to the human values and human expression domain to gather their views regarding our ideas.
- C. Provide a budget for the Provost's consideration that addresses facilities, equipment and personnel needed to implement the idea(s) that she views worthwhile to pursue.