Members,

I was glad to see all of the members of the committee at the meeting yesterday and I appreciate the open and honest exchange of ideas regarding course issues. The discussion was certainly lively and we all left smiling - which is a good sign. As Todd, Sol and others have stated, one of the benefits of this course project is the simple fact that we are meeting as members of the science faculty to discuss science and we'll learn from one another as a result of this process.

To summarize the meeting:

1) We discussed the potential implications of the use of the FiLCHeRS terms and the Skeptical Inquirer for use in the course; discussed the issue of using an acronym to serve as a mnemonic device for remembering the essential aspects of the scientific method

2) Paul provided a handout on the latest data pertaining to grade distributions in various classes

3) Marcus provided a list of science topics that could be included in the courses for the purpose of showing that the course does contain science information.

4) Marcus provided a hard copy of selected paragraphs from the Project 2061 web site that deals with the nature of science and science education

5) We discussed potential models for that course that will be discussed at the next meeting. These models are as follows:
a) Integrated, science course with a common syllabus; i.e., 100% consistent from class to class
b) Integrated science course that that contains more than 50% common material and the remainder of which can be developed within each department based on departmental expertise (We tentatively used an 80%/20% split, but with the caveat that the numbers were only an approximation)
c) Course that is discipline-specific but which attempts to incorporate some aspects of the nature of science and critical thinking into the course
d) Course that is discipline specific, but which includes a common seminar/lecture series that students from all departments would attend/view

6) Addressed the issue of whether the course, as conceived originally by Marcus, was rubber-stamped for approval.

7) Agreed to meet the Tuesday following Spring Break at 3:30 to decide on the course model

I hope that I have not omitted anything of significance.

I want to thank Paul for his update on the grade distributions that he sent this morning. I also want to thank Renee for her detailed comments concerning a possible model for the way in which the course might be taught. Also, thanks to Todd for his comments on the acronym and Sol for his Latinized version of the acronym (very creative).

If I might continue the discussion with my 2 cents worth of commentary, I wanted to try to clarify my comments regarding the question of "rubber stamping". The short answer, as I said in the meeting, is, "No, the model for the course is up to the committee to decide upon." This is why we are considering four different models for the course. However, I do want to elaborate a bit on my more lengthy response in the meeting. When I "campaigned" for this course, I presented it as an integrated science course that would use extraordinary claims as a basis for engaging students in real science (both method and content) and for teaching them certain specific rules of critical thinking, such as "correlation doesn't prove causation", that they could then use in their day-to-day lives for purposes of evaluating information to which they are exposed. I presented this idea to all five colleges on campus and it was voted upon by the faculty and the QEP Committee, and selected as the learning initiative for SACS. So, I have concerns that if we don't "deliver" a course that includes integrated science, the use of extraordinary claims (and other sorts of claims and issues), and don't teach specific rules of critical thinking, then I (we) would have "broken the agreement", so to speak. It would be a bit like a politician running on one platform, but, once elected, doing something entirely different than what he or she had promised. Obviously there are different ways to accomplish this integration of concepts - such as that suggested by Renee. There are different mixes of extraordinary and more mundane, but significant, issues that can be addressed. And, obviously, there is lots of room for deciding upon what specific topics to include in the curriculum. But, I ask that you do, please bear in mind the process by which this QEP was selected when considering course models.

As regards the FiLCHeRS acronym, I agree with Paul and Renee that it might be perceived as being aligned with "hidden agendas"; so, I have no problem with giving it up. However, I side with Sol and Todd that an acronym is a useful pedagogical device for helping students to remember the process and use it systematically. If I might offer a metaphor, let's not become a construction crew that refuses to build a highly needed bridge because the crew disagrees with the acronym used by the contractor to characterize the construction process. In short, it's just a device to help people remember the gist of how science is done and how to evaluate information. Let's make our own mnemonic device or leave it to the individual faculty to develop and use one - or not.

As regards the use of information from the Skeptical Inquirer, please allow another metaphor; i.e., "let's not throw the baby out with the bath water." SI is one of the few sources of information that systematically examines pseudoscientific claims and which, over the course of more than two decades of examining these claims, has amassed a wealth of useful, SCIENTIFIC information that can be incorporated into lecture material for purposes of helping students understand the scientific method and how to evaluate claims. Renee mentioned astrology and SI has run numerous articles on this topic. The same is true for Big Foot, and just about any other claim that you can imagine. If extraordinary claims are used in the course, then this is one of the best sources in the world to go to obtain information pertinent to those claims. (Technically, it doesn't even have to be cited; but if it is, so be it.) This is a source, not a textbook. Use of the material from SI regarding natural claims subject to empirical testing is not an endorsement of an organization or a position on the existence or nonexistence of a supreme being. Surely each of us reads books and articles that we do not necessarily agree with? No student is required to

subscribe to the magazine or join any organization affiliated with it. I understand that there is a legitimate, well-intentioned desire to avoid a "landmine" by risking a perceived endorsement of certain ideas that students and administrators might not find palatable; but, to exclude valuable, directly relevant information pertaining to extraordinary claims because "atheists" sometimes write in the magazine seems fairly close to censorship. SI can serve as a source of excellent material to be incorporated into lectures, but it is certainly not the only source. I never intended it to be. That's why I offered suggestions for textbooks and common readers in the draft syllabus. Please remember that some of the members of the Fellows for SI are Nobel prize winning scientists. Again, let's not throw the baby out with the bath water.

Well, that may be more than 2 cents worth - or less, depending upon one's take. Again thanks for all of your efforts and I look forward to seeing everyone after the break. When we come back, we do need to reach a decision on the course model on the 18th. Have a great SB.

Respectfully,

Marcus