

Minutes & Agendas

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UNDERGRADUATE COUNCIL MEETING

April 9, 2007

Rowe Conference Room

Present:

Andrew Bonamici, Herb Chereck, Dan Keller, Anne Laskaya, Dean Livelybrooks, Steven Pologe, Kathy Roberts, Ron Severson, Karen Sprague, Kate Wagle, Pat Bartlein, Paul Engelking, and Lyllye Parker

Absent:

Hilary Gerdes, Dave Hubin, Dan Patton, Martha Pitts, Ashley Rees, Bill Ryan, Arkady Vaintrob, Malcolm Wilson, and Ken Calhoon

Minutes:

Minutes from the previous meeting were not ready for distribution and review.

Agenda

The Chair distributed a brief agenda to the Council members. (HO#1)

Karen Sprague briefly updated the Council on the preparations for the upcoming NWCCU accreditation visit scheduled April 16-18, 2007. She noted that although UO had opted for a novel approach in its Self-Study Report, the accreditors might be looking at the university in a very traditional way.

Grade Distribution Report update:

The Chair recapped the pilot project of issuing the Grade Distribution query to three departments (French, Political Science, and Art). (HO#2) When the response to the usefulness of the query was positive from these three departments, the query was distributed to 25 department chairs. Of those, 11 were interested in using the query in their respective departments. A brief questionnaire accompanied the query. To date, six departments had run the query.

The consensus among the departments, based upon data obtained from the query in their areas, was that grade inflation is a problem. In summarizing their responses, the Chair related the thoughts surfacing in the departments:

- a standard for grading is needed – otherwise, grades are meaningless;
- inflated grading skews course enrollment (i.e., there is higher

- enrollment in courses with easy grading);
- there is a need to normalize transcripts;
- the creation of comparative reports would be helpful.

Responses from departments are being collected as they continue to be reported.

Multicultural Course Review

Paul Engelking reported on the reluctance of the Committee on Courses to issue the Multicultural designation to new courses numbered at the 400-level. He explained that the Committee now puts the onus on the applicant for course acceptance to justify why the new course should receive a Multicultural designation. The Committee on Courses questions whether it is appropriate for 4/500 level courses to receive a Multicultural designation and is appealing to the Undergraduate Council for some guidance on the matter. Council members noted that unlike the policy governing Group-satisfying courses, there is no restriction on the level at which multicultural courses can be offered. Whether or not such a restriction is needed isn't obvious. The Council decided that it would be most appropriate to wait until the conclusion of the review of Multicultural Courses to respond to the Committee on Courses.

The Chair invited Council members to comment on the process used to review the syllabi that had been distributed at the conclusion of the March 5, 2007 meeting. Council members had been divided into two review teams:

Team 1: Kate Wagle, Kathy Roberts, Steven Pologe, Ron Severson, Anne Laskaya, Ken Calhoon, Lylle Parker, Dan Keller, Herb Chereck, Andrew Bonamici, and Dave Hubin

Team 2: Dean Livelybrooks, Arkady Vaintrob, Bill Ryan, Malcolm Wilson, Paul Engelking, Pat Bartlein, Ashley Reese, Dan Patton, Hilary Gerdes, Karen Sprague, and Martha Pitts

Each team had received a packet with about 20 syllabi. Karen Sprague described the review process, which was modeled on the Council's previous review of Group-Satisfying courses. Each syllabus was scored with respect to four questions:

1. Does the course meet the criteria of the category in which it is offered?
e.g., Category A (AC) compares at least two U.S. racial or ethnic groups, etc.
Category B (IPT) provides scholarly insight into the construction of collective identities, etc.
Category C (IC) examines world cultures in critical perspective, etc.

2. Does the syllabus for the course effectively state how the course meets the criteria for the category in which it is offered?
3. Does the course require specialized prior knowledge (pre-requisite course work)? If so, what specialized knowledge / prerequisites?
4. Is the course content appropriate for the level at which the course is offered (lower-division or upper-division)?

All score sheets were collected and tabulated by Cathy Kraus for discussion at the next meeting.

Cathy reported that about 38% of syllabi for 2006-2007 Multicultural course offerings had been collected from electronic sources (Blackboard or other course websites). Departments will be contacted individually for syllabi that were not available electronically.

Discussion among the Council members highlighted some challenges in the review process:

- The difficulty in accessing syllabi is the result of very poor internal communication. A result of the course review might be to standardize accessibility of syllabi on-line.
- There are many different styles of syllabi. There is no standard way in which a syllabus and course description relate how the Multicultural requirement is fulfilled by the course.
- Care should be taken in the course description to show students how a course addresses the issues that define its specific Multicultural category.
- It is important to collect samples of good syllabi as the review continues.
- A template for syllabus construction would help expedite committee work.

Council members decided that for the initial screening of syllabi, they would focus principally on Question 1 of the evaluation. The answer to this question would be sufficient to identify courses that may not fit and that require further examination. The Council also decided that Question 2 of the evaluation could be answered either “explicitly” or “implicitly”. That is, even without an explicit statement, reviewers might be able to discuss how a course meets the relevant criteria through the syllabus, through the course description, through the reading list for the course, or any combination of the three elements.

The Council discussed the challenge of evaluating courses in Category B (“scholarly insight into construction of collective identities, the emergence of representative voices from varying social and cultural standpoints, and the effects of

prejudice, intolerance, and discrimination”) of the Multicultural requirement. There seemed to be a great deal of missing information in syllabi for evaluative purposes. It was noted that the Committee on Courses does not require the presence of all three elements of Category B to be present for courses seeking to qualify.

In summarizing the Council’s discussion, the Chair noted that the initial goal of the review is to evaluate whether or not a particular course actually fits its Multicultural category. During the review process, it is important to identify courses that do not fit as well as courses that may fit very well, but don’t make the case effectively. The Chair acknowledged that there will be ambiguities in the interpretation of criteria. Discussion by the full Council should reveal whether there are serious obstacles to systematic review.

Council members turned in their Round 1 syllabi packets to Cathy Kraus for tabulation.

The meeting was adjourned.

The next UGC meeting is scheduled for Monday, April 23, 2007, 12:00pm at Rowe Conference Room, Knight Library.

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