

UNDERGRADUATE COUNCIL MEETING

April 29, 2002

Members present:

John Nicols, Jim Imamura, Scott Pratt, Kate Kranzush, K.J. Park, Karen Sprague, Bob Zimmerman, Herb Chereck, Hilary Gerdes, Wendy Mitchell, Kathy Roberts, Steve Ponder, Anne Leavitt, Craig Hickman

Members absent:

Gail Unruh, John Postlethwaite, Faye Chadwell, Paul Engleking

Guests:

Pauline Austin, Marilyn Linton

Meeting began at 8:35

Announcements

John Nicols made several announcements regarding the council membership. Craig Hickman, whose term expires in June, 2003, will leave on sabbatical for one year in September 2002. K.J. Park, whose term expires in June, 2003, will retire at the end of winter term, 2002. The Senate Executive Committee will need to make supplementary appointments for those two positions. Bob Zimmerman, Marian Smith and Scott Pratt's terms expire in June, 2002.

Karen Sprague presented a document to the council describing the progress in reducing the number of students in the Writing 121 and 122/3 bulge. Both writing bulges have been reduced this year by offering extra sections. By this time next year, we could begin to think about having a requirement for Writing 121 completion. (The document is posted on the Undergraduate Council website.)

The UO senate will address the issue of who can chair the Undergraduate Council.

Document Prepared by the Foreign Language Faculty

To help the council consider whether ASL should fulfill the UO foreign language requirement, the foreign language faculty prepared the following document:

Does the study of ASL fulfill the U of O foreign language requirement?

Prepared by UO foreign language faculty (April, 2002)

1. There is no question that ASL is a visual gesture language of great complexity, with a distinctive and challenging grammar. While teaching it at the U of O should be fostered, it is legitimate to question whether it should count toward the language requirement at

the U of O. What we call in shorthand “the language requirement” is actually the foreign language requirement. In other words, the basic criterion for fulfillment of that requirement is foreignness from American English and the cultures it articulates and emerges out of. ASL, as a form of communication specific to the U.S. (and not, like Spanish, merely spoken also in the U.S.), does not meet the basic international criterion of the foreign language requirement.

2. ASL is used by over 500,000 deaf people in the United States today who share a common culture. However, the culture which they share remains an American culture, that is, a dimension or subculture of the American matrix in which it is used and developed. The culture of ASL is not coextensive with that of the other national sign languages, since none of these exists in isolation from their national / cultural matrix. For that reason, study of the culture associated with ASL could satisfy the Multicultural requirement in categories A (American Cultures) or B (Identity, Pluralism, and Tolerance), but not in C (International Cultures)--and it should not satisfy the UO foreign language requirement.

3. The very welcome proliferation of professional groups and projects across the US devoted to the production of different forms of Deaf culture, ranging from Deaf theater (National Theater of the Deaf, Cleveland Signstage Theatre, Chicago Sign on Stage) to Deaf poetry (Deaf Poets Society) and film (Cinema for the Deaf) testifies to an emerging culture no less distinctive for being emergent, a fact that is already recognized by many anthropologists and ethnographers. Yet as in paragraph #2, the proliferation of Deaf professional groups and projects, like that of analogous groups representing and promoting African American, Jewish American, or Chinese American experience, in no way proves the autonomy of Deaf culture (or African American, Jewish American, or Asian American) from American culture at large. It would be difficult to make a case for the study of any of these cultures as distinctively foreign cultures, when they exist within, contribute to, and draw on the surrounding American culture.

4. The study of a foreign language up to the level of 203 entails a considerable immersion in its culture. That culture is not defined in terms of sound, but rather in terms of undeniably alien ways of understanding (not merely articulating or perceiving) the world around us, global and local history, and one’s place in it. In addition, the cultures of those languages which the UO recognizes as fulfilling its requirement have massive bodies of cultural production which date back at least a millennium, and often several millennia. While one may debate whether these organically-developed cultures and languages differ qualitatively from ASL, there is in our view no doubt that the former represent exponentially more substantial, and substantially foreign, cultural and linguistic corpora than ASL.

5. While ASL already satisfies UO's entrance requirement of two years of language study at the high school level, what the UO requires from its entering students, and what it requires of its students to earn a degree, are two legitimately different categories.

John Nicols pulled all the books at the UO bookstore that met the foreign language 203 requirement. He noticed a wide variety of expectations in the way different departments

meet the 203 requirement. John wonders if the departments should meet and develop some standards regarding content and proficiency for the second year requirement. He would like the departments to articulate what the standards are for 203.

Scott Pratt thinks we must make a judgment on some other basis than the specific content of individual courses, since this will vary according to the language and is the responsibility of the faculty in the department.

Herb Chereck feels that we should refer to the criteria articulated by the Undergraduate Education Policy and Coordinating Council (UEPCC) in 1994. Karen read a letter from Provost Wessells dated March 7, 1994, in which the UEPCC recommendation that ASL not fulfill the UO BA language requirement was officially accepted and put on file with the Registrar.

Anne Leavitt does not think the council has learned enough about ASL to make a decision at this time. The council has not reviewed the UEPCC documents from 1994. Do we want to alter our predecessors' decisions and definitions? The decisions should be made with good, in-depth information. John asked that a complete packet of past and current information be assembled and sent to all council members by the end of the week.

Bob Zimmerman wonders what the proficiency test for ASL includes. He would like to know if the test includes all of the requirements that were mentioned in the UEPCC's definition of foreign language study that would satisfy the requirement.

Herb would like the council to focus on whether ASL constitutes a foreign language that has the characteristics necessary to satisfy our language requirement. ASL does not differ today from what it was in 1994. It was rejected then. Has the basis of its rejection changed?

Summary

John Nicols sees several ways to proceed:

- The council can use the standards and recommendation of the UEPCC.
- The council can use the guidelines we think the departments should be using. These guidelines could be difficult and time consuming to define.
- The council can decide to accept ASL as fulfilling the BA second language requirement. Given that the UO does not currently offer ASL at a level that would meet the BA requirement, the CAS Associate Dean of Humanities will determine whether or not a student has demonstrated proficiency at a level equivalent to the third term of the second year.

A packet of information will be assembled and distributed to all council members by the end of the week. The next council meeting will be on May 13, at 8:30 am in Collier House, Meeting Room A.

Meeting adjourned at 9:35 am