

Undergraduate Council Meeting November 10th, 2004 – 3:30pm

Agenda

The meeting covered three agenda items:

- 1) Report on the Joint CIA-Provosts meeting held in Portland (PCC-Rock Creek) on the Oregon Transfer Module
- 2) Consideration of a proposal to drop the Pre-Psychology major
- 3) Consideration of a proposal that students complete writing requirements prior to their junior year

Report about transfer module meeting

Karen Sprague reported on a joint meeting of OUS provosts and their equivalents from the community colleges (Deans for Instruction) held in Portland:

- There were quick reports on all the EDP initiatives and then a more detailed discussion of the Transfer Module proposal
- John Miller and Ed Watson from JBAC presented the proposal
- Peter Gilkey talked about what he's been hearing from around the state; there seemed to be a lot of support for the module.
- There was concern initially that the community colleges would think it didn't go far enough, but that doesn't appear to be a problem.
- Having people from community colleges and universities in a room together is important.

On November 18th, the comments will go back to the JBAC for consideration. Then, a summit including representatives from all groups will be convened on November 19.

Program proposal for eliminating Pre-Psychology as a major

Handout: memo regarding elimination of pre-psychology major

Discussion

- The Pre-Psych major was used as a way of checking prerequisites. Now that the Registrar's Office has a computerized system for doing this, the Psychology Department has proposed to eliminate pre-psychology as a major.
- The CAS curriculum committee agrees with this proposal.

- The proposal does not change programming for pre-majors or majors.
- Any hidden concerns? Psych will just need to make sure they do the advising needed. The Pre-Psych label was acting as a gate-check to ensure that students had the necessary academic [?] . This change will spare paperwork and leave more time for direct advising work with students.

Action: The motion to drop Pre-Psychology as a major passed unanimously.

Proposal that students complete writing requirements prior to their junior year

Handout: Hilary's data on the number of upper level students who have yet to complete the writing requirements.

History on the problem:

- Karen brought this to the Council in the first place (~ four years ago) because it made sense to have students complete their writing when the courses could serve as foundation for other courses.
- Herb researched the issue [need date] and found that over 800 students at the time had not completed writing prior to their junior year. Called "the Bulge," Herb's data accounted for a phenomenon that had been puzzling and irritating for some time. It was decided that the UO couldn't institute a new rule at that time because there wouldn't be enough writing sections to accommodate the students.
- We were never able to identify how the bulge happened. Accidental slippage probably allowed writing section supply and demand to become slightly unbalanced. Then when courses that weren't so easy to get into, students gave up trying to get into them and the gap widened. At IntroDUCKtion, writing sections would fill up more quickly than expected, based on the number of sections needed for incoming Freshmen. Herb's data showed that a significant fraction of these sections never became available to Freshmen because upper classmen filled them when registration opened the previous spring.
- The provost, CAS Deans, and English Department contributed the resources that allowed extra writing sections to be offered for a few years. As a result, the bulge has now been eliminated and the system appears to be operating in steady state. The careful monitoring that is now routine should prevent a recurrence of the imbalance.
- As it stands today, students can take writing courses anytime during their studies, but 90% of the freshmen complete the courses on time. The stragglers are mainly international students

and some transfer students who had not completed writing previously. Others are students whose majors (e.g. music) require a good deal of other coursework during the first and second years.

- Advising sent reminder postcards the last two years. After the postcard campaign there were still many international students who hadn't completed the WR requirements, but otherwise there were big improvements.

Discussion:

The possibility of requiring completion of writing courses by the beginning of Junior year was discussed. Arguments in favor and against are listed.

Arguments in Favor:

- We continue to hear that our students are not prepared as well as they should be in writing (and oral presentations) when they graduate and the writing courses serve as a foundation for writing in other courses.
- Instituting a rule would demonstrate the value the UO attaches to good writing.
- The presence of older students in writing classes creates problems. National research shows that freshmen and seniors have very different writing needs. It is difficult to meet the needs of both in the same classroom. This also creates problems for GTF writing teachers who are not much older than their advanced students.
- Some suggested that there is room in all majors to take writing courses on time, including the sciences and professional programs where students are sometimes slow to complete their writing courses.
- Some suggested that instituting a requirement would save resources currently spent on the postcard mailings.

Potential Problems:

Most of the problems identified had to do with the consequences of instituting a rule and with issues related to enforcement.

- The requirements of some programs, including music, the sciences, and professional degree programs make it more difficult for students to complete writing requirements in a timely fashion.

- International students often need special coursework before taking the regular university writing courses.
- If we instituted this rule, we would also need to reevaluate our admissions policies for transfer students or create an additional rule, for example allowing them one year to complete the requirements.
- If we currently have approximately 280 students who have not completed the requirements, that is still 10 sections of writing even though the number is small.
- Saving resources on the mailings may be offset if additional resources were needed to evaluate individual exceptions to the rule.
- Many, including Tyler Neely, the student representative, argued that the rule might be too constraining for students.
- Some questioned how the rule would work. Would a block be placed on registration for all juniors who had not yet completed their writing requirement? What would these students then do? Some suggested students could then be allowed to register only if they registered for the required writing course.

Alternative Solutions:

Many potential solutions to instituting a rule were proposed, including:

- Continue to send out the postcards since that has had a good effect.
- Have older students take certain sections so they would not be mixed in with younger students.
- Increase advising on this issue within individual departments and have students obtain the signature of an advisor before registering.
- Deny junior status (or implement some other penalty) for students who had not completed their writing requirements prior to their junior year.

Preferred Solution:

Most council members believed that it was premature to institute a new rule and that, in lieu of such a rule, the University could advise students more compellingly on this issue.

- The council supported the idea of adding a strongly worded warning that would pop up on DuckWeb beginning fall term of their sophomore year for students who had not completed their writing requirements by the spring of their freshmen year.

- The warning would pop up whenever students selected the “student” button, which is their entry point to registering, checking grades, etc.
- The warning would say something like, “You must complete your writing requirement!”
- Implementing this system would help us gather data on how this process works and could lead to eliminating the postcards.

Gen-Ed courses and the 3 week rule: *(Karen... I didn't understand this section... thanks.)*

- There will be gen-ed courses offered for zero week (with 50% of work being in week 0 and 25% in weeks 2 and 3).
- There's a five-year schedule for reviewing gen-ed classes. (?) It's been done. It was monstrous. ... “What will come out of that? Herb will be posting the good gen-ed courses for transfer students.

Adjourned 4:43