

## **UNDERGRADUATE COUNCIL MEETING**

**November 7, 2005**

**Rowe Conference Room, Knight Library**

### **Present:**

Andrew Bonamici, Deborah Exton, Kelsea Feola, Hilary Gerdes, Peter Gilkey, Dave Hubion, Anne Laskaya, Julie Newton, Kathy Roberts, Ron Severson, Margarita Smith, Karen Sprague, Mary Ann Beecher, Heiner Linke, Paul Engelking, Glenda Utsey, Malcolm Wilson

### **Absent:**

Herb Chereck, Martha Pitts, Steven Pologe, Mark Thoma, Kate Wagle, Wendy Mitchell

### **Minutes:**

Minutes of the October 24<sup>th</sup> meeting were approved and accepted by acclamation.

### **Agenda**

#### **Provost Candidate**

Peter Gilkey thanked the faculty and students from the UGC for attending the Faculty Forum with the first provost candidate. Peter urged all who could to fill out the individual feedback sheets on the candidate and return them to Johnson Hall. He announced the schedule for the second provost candidate and urged members of the UGC to especially attend the Faculty Forum session on Friday, Nov. 11. He noted that the degree of participation and faculty involvement in the recruiting process for a new provost is a unique opportunity.

#### **Previous Discussion of Grade Inflation:**

Due to an emergency, Mark Thoma was not available to present his report on Grade Inflation to the Council. The presentation of his report was moved to a special session on November 28.

The Council decided the issue should be studied and addressed in a two-report process:

- 1) Consideration of factual findings

## 2) Recommendations based upon the findings

Council members felt that the reports could be ready for the February University Senate meeting. Recommendations should be discussed with Academic Affairs and the Faculty Advisory Council in advance of a formal motion in the Senate.

### **Accreditation**

Dave Hubin reported that the Accreditation Self-Study Committee has met and decided to structure the University's Plan B Report around the 11 points of the University mission. The Committee is proceeding with some preliminary steps, such as the assembling and updating of documents. The Committee is still considering how the documents will be presented. Requests for data are being sent out. These requests will be structured and focused so that it is as straightforward as possible for department chairs to respond.

It was noted that the Council's first discussion of the Accreditation Self-Study was a good brainstorming session, but the ideas that surfaced still need to be organized or prioritized into a few big issues. One example raised was the issue of grade inflation needing to be subsumed under a larger umbrella.

The topic of "Ways of introducing students to the institution" was suggested as an umbrella. The Council discussed issues that might be addressed:

- Focus on the entire first year
- Grade inflation: how do we communicate with [new] students what is expected of them?
  - It would be great if there were more standardization among departments. This is especially important with General Education courses; students know what's "easy".
  - Does the assessment we provide to students support learning and relate to other things?
  - We also need a better introduction for faculty coming in from other countries. . Currently we only do the mechanical explanation of what the marks (I, Y, W) are. A larger discussion of what grades mean would be good for all faculty.
  - Standardize what an "A" means. Encourage departments to have this discussion among themselves. The Council agreed that there ought to be dialogues around grades within departments.
  - We should be focused on outcomes rather than the bell curve.

- How do our students get ready for employment? That is, what are the culminating experiences of their education?

The Council continued to discuss larger issues:

- Do we adequately give students information about what to major in?
- Do departments give students a sense for how they frame issues and questions?
- As a comprehensive University, do we arrange matters so our undergraduates can take full advantage of our liberal arts, our professional schools, opportunities to do research so students know what it means? We know what we offer – what do we do for our students, so they understand?
- Many students feel that the General Education program is just hoops they must jump through; they don't see the value. Departments should be communicating the value of their courses to students. Some courses are so ridiculously easy, students take them simply to get an "A," not out of interest in the subject.
- It is not clear to students why the General Education courses count in the particular categories they do.

It was pointed out that most committees have not pursued a review of courses over the past ten years. General Education courses should be reviewed on a five-year basis. During the last Accreditation, the University was cited for lack of coherence in General Education.

The UGC has done significant work to address these concerns, but there is not a general awareness of these accomplishments. For instance, the UGC undertook a complete, course-by-course review of the group-satisfying courses within the General Education curriculum based upon the criteria that had been developed by the Council and approved by the Senate. The review was completed in Spring 2004, and led to: suggestions for improvement to some departments; refinements of group-satisfying course criteria; and the requirement for more effective descriptions of courses. Specifically, course descriptions that

are interesting and accessible to non-specialists, and that indicate how the course is illustrative of its Group (Arts & Letters, Social Science, or Science) must now be provided publicly and on-line. Herb Chereck and others have been having difficulty getting departments to provide these descriptions.

The Council was supportive of this effort, especially the online publication of course descriptions. Communication with other committees will help publicize this effort and ensure understanding of its purpose. Faculty, departments, and curriculum committees need to understand the process and timeline for course reviews and course descriptions. The collected course descriptions, accessible on-line in an appealing format, would be an effective way to showcase UO General Education. Karen and Herb will create a mock up of course descriptions for the Council to look at for the November 28<sup>th</sup> meeting.

The Council enthusiastically endorsed the idea of a regular cyclical review of the entire General Education curriculum (group-satisfying, math, writing, foreign language, and multicultural courses). Peter said that an agenda item for the Council could be to recommend a calendar for such a global review process to the Senate.

The meeting adjourned.

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**The next UGC meeting is scheduled for Monday, November 21, 2005 at the Rowe Conference Room, Knight Library.**