

UNDERGRADUATE COUNCIL MEETING
November 15, 2006
Johnson Hall Conference Room

Present:

Andrew Bonamici, Herb Chereck, Hilary Gerdes, Dave Hubin, Dan Keller, Anne Laskaya, Dean Livelybrooks, Dan Patton, Martha Pitts, Steven Pologe, Ashley Rees, Ron Severson, Karen Sprague, Arkady Vaintrob, Kate Wagle, Pat Bartlein, Hal Sadofsky (sub for Paul Engelking), and Lyllye Parker

Absent:

Kathy Roberts (Christopher J. Murray), Bill Ryan, Malcolm Wilson, and Ken Calhoon

Guests:

Brad Shelton, Professor, Mathematics

Minutes:

Due to time constraints on the guest presenter, the Chair re-ordered the meeting agenda. (HO #1-11152006) Reading and acceptance of the minutes of the October 18th and November 1st meetings was deferred until after the special topic of Online Course Evaluations had been presented and discussed.

Introductions:

The Chair introduced Brad Shelton from the Mathematics Department, who had requested to be on the Undergraduate Council agenda.

Agenda

Online Course Evaluations

Brad Shelton presented background on the formation of a task force appointed by the Provost to study the mechanics of course evaluations. Members of the task force are Brad Shelton, Herb Chereck, Patricia Southwell, Susan Hilton, Doug Blandy, Wendy Mitchell and student, Zoe Roman. The task force concluded that the current method of evaluating courses on paper (Scantron sheets) is ineffective and the data provided is of little use in improving teaching practice. The Task Force decided that the best way to address these problems was to change from paper to an online method. There are legal questions associated with such an approach, but these have been addressed and the project is moving forward.

The charge of the Task Force is to deal with the mechanics of course evaluations, not the substance of course evaluations. Both quantitative and qualitative data are suspect; there is no control on how it is collected and it is easily manipulated. The current evaluation system is very uneven across schools and departments, and uses incorrect formulas in the analysis it provides. Currently, 75 different academic units utilize course evaluations, and the UO is probably spending \$250k per year to do this.

The current system is very near catastrophic breakdown, returning very little for the money being expended.

Brad observed that data are needed in a different format in order to be used intelligently. After assessing the situation thoroughly, the Task Force concluded that what is needed is an online evaluation system that is third-party and the quantitative data collected must be separated from student identification. In contrast, qualitative (narrative) evaluation must be signed by the student to become part of faculty personnel records.

In the proposed new process, students will access Duckweb during a prescribed evaluation period. They will be directed to a third-party website. They will fill out the evaluation online and will be able to exercise an option to electronically “sign” the evaluation. There will also be an “opt out” button which allows students to decline to do the evaluation, but still be recorded as having completed the course evaluation.

To promote participation, each student will have to submit an evaluation (or decline to do so) in order to get immediate access to his or her grade in the corresponding course. In the absence of an evaluation, the grade will become available after a specified period of time.

Course evaluations are governed by the following state and UO Senate rules:

1. All courses with ten or more students enrolled must be evaluated using the University’s standard questions and procedure.
2. There are four levels of access permitted to any evaluation:
 - Provost
 - Deans
 - Academic unit head
 - Individual instructor of record. Instructors should be able to add questions to the evaluation of particular courses.

As a sidenote, this online system will help simplify the tenure review process. One advantage of the system is that it will allow for aggregate quantitative data to be extracted for comparative analysis. It should also eliminate a current problem with qualitative evaluations –namely, illegible or bogus signatures.

- **Discussion**

Several questions were put to Brad by Undergraduate Council members:

- What does the task force want the Undergraduate Council to do in relation to this new online system for course evaluations? Brad said that the primary reason for his presentation is to inform the Undergraduate Council that the system change to online evaluations is going forward. There will be continued discussion on the legal parameters of the use of these data.

- What are other schools' strategies? Brad explained that Stanford University was a model that was studied by the task force and many of the proposed practices are taken from them.
- What is the likelihood of student participation? Brad noted that studies show that men are less likely to submit online evaluations, while women are more likely to submit online evaluations. The "opt out" feature of the system could encourage responsible participation by providing access to grades without evaluations in situations where this is desirable.
- What is the current UO response rate on student evaluations? Brad said that is unknown.
- How long will the system be on trial at the University? Brad said that the test of the system would last at least one year. The plan is to have the online evaluation system running by Fall 2007.
- How will the effectiveness of the online evaluation system be measured? Brad responded that a measurement of the effectiveness is a substantive question outside the purview of the current planning group.
- Who will be responsible for record maintenance? Brad said that the UO will own the data and will be the responsible party for record maintenance.

After Brad completed his presentation and responded to the Council's questions, the Council membership continued the discussion, identifying the following questions and concerns:

- Concern about withholding grades from students as the incentive to complete evaluations in tight turn-around between terms; concern about requiring students to do four evaluations (that is, evaluations of all courses taken in a term) before any grade can be seen on Duckweb. Herb Chereck pointed out that there can be flexibility in the time period for evaluations.
- How long will these evaluations be? How many questions? How much time will be required? Currently, evaluations are incorporated as part of class periods. Online evaluations that have to be done by students in "extra" time periods outside of class may produce a lower response rate. The qualitative (narrative) evaluations might be particularly vulnerable. There is an educational aspect to changing to the new evaluation system; students need to become informed consumers. They are paying for their education – they should be evaluating the "product" they are paying for.
- What is the Undergraduate Council's role? How can the effectiveness of the system be evaluated? There is going to have to be some discussion on the goals and expectations of the system. It was pointed that if you wait until after you have the mechanics before addressing substance, you may have the mechanics driving the substance.
- It would be better if there were an effectiveness measurement –enhanced response rate, for example. To use this, current response rates need to be known. Perhaps some of these can be obtained from departments that teach large courses that are evaluated routinely.

- What happens to qualitative data – does that get lost in the new online system? Perhaps qualitative evaluations could be handled apart from the quantitative system. Could the qualitative evaluations be done in class and then typed in by a third-party?

Minutes:

The Chair directed the attention of the Council to the minutes of the October 18th meeting and the minutes of the November 1st meeting which had been distributed electronically prior to the meeting.

The Chair called for a motion on the acceptance of the minutes.

The motion was made that the Undergraduate Council approve and accept the minutes of October 18th.

Moved: Steven Pologe

Seconded: Dan Keller

The motion passed unanimously.

The motion was made that the Undergraduate Council approve and accept the minutes of November 1st in principal with final revisions due by Friday, November 17th.

Moved: Ron Severson

Seconded: Steven Pologe

The motion passed unanimously.

AAA Program Proposal

Kate Wagle presented a proposal for a new program from the departments of Art and Architecture. In brief, a new BFA program in the Portland area is being proposed. Council members will review the proposal and discuss it at the next meeting.

UO Accreditation Self-Study

Karen Sprague distributed copies of the Undergraduate Education section of the UO Accreditation Self-Study. ([NWCCU Accreditation Self-Study-Part 2](#)) Council will review the report and discuss it at the next meeting. Karen also asked faculty on the Undergraduate Council to help with providing student work samples as part of the supporting documentation for the Self-Study.

The meeting was adjourned.

The next UGC meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, November 29, 2006, 1:00pm at Johnson Hall Conference Room.