

**UNDERGRADUATE COUNCIL MEETING**  
**January 29, 2009**  
**Rowe Conference Room, Knight Library**

**Present:**

Andrew Bonamici, Amy Goeser Kolb, Dave Hubin, Jennifer Joslin, Andrew Leavitt, Dean Livelybrooks, Karen McLaughlin, Ian McNeely, Caleb Owen, Ron Severson, Josh Snodgrass, Karen Sprague, Laura Vandenburg, Tom Wheeler, Trudy Cameron, and Elizabeth Reis

**Absent:**

Sue Eveland, Lisa Feldhusen, Sean Jin, Anne Laskaya, Arkady Vaintrob, Morgan Williamson, and Paul Engelking

Karen Sprague convened the meeting and called for discussion on the minutes of January 15. Ian McNeely was congratulated on his shepherding of the agenda at the January 15, 2009 meeting.

**Minutes:**

**The motion was made to accept the minutes from the January 15, 2009 meeting.**

**Moved: Josh Snodgrass**  
**Seconded: Karen McLaughlin**

**The motion to accept the minutes passed unanimously.**

**Agenda**

***Proposal from School of Journalism and Communication to change the curriculum for majors [ [SOJC Curriculum Summary 1-9-09](#) ; [SOJC Curriculum Change Proposal](#) ]***

The presentation of the SOJC proposal by Julie Newton and Greg Kerber at the January 15, 2009 meeting was briefly summarized.

**Discussion**

Council member Tom Wheeler, from SOJC, addressed remaining questions from the Council:

- What was the purpose for changing the curriculum?  
The purpose of the SOJC curriculum proposal is to create a greater cohesion of the core curriculum of the major rather than have it broken out into narrow blocks

of study (as it currently is in Journalism). In the proposed structure, all SOJC majors will be exposed to all media in journalism and communications. The *Information Gathering* course is moved from the pre-major to the major curriculum. The pre-major was previously longer (in time and credits). The proposed new curriculum structure gets students into the major more quickly and better accommodates the reality of the media industry today. However, pursuit of the narrower tracks of study are still available to students.

- How are admission standards to the SOJC major influenced by this change: is it easier to be admitted? Harder to be admitted? Does this change affect the size of the program?

There was no discussion within SOJC of changing the size of the program. The impetus for the change is principally to better serve the students.

- How will the increased number of required J-prefix credits affect students' ability to explore other areas of interest?

The major is capped at a maximum number of J-credits to meet accreditation requirements, so students must take courses in other academic areas.

- Why has the *Information Gathering* component been moved from the pre-major requirements to the major curriculum? Did this course serve as a filter in the past?

Integrating *Information Gathering* with the other two *Gateway to Media* courses will be more effective educationally.

- Is there a way to schedule the *Information Gathering* component of the new *Gateway to Media* module later in the curriculum to make the interviews of faculty less onerous? The problem is that students generally are not skilled as interviewers and have no background in the subject they are investigating. As a result, the interviews are seen by faculty as a waste of time and many now simply refuse to grant them. Could students be encouraged to interview people other than faculty?

SOJC will study this issue.

- How are student portfolios assessed? This is not spelled out in the proposal. Student portfolios will be evaluated throughout their major coursework, beginning with the *Gateway to Media* module. They will have a variety of media samples in their portfolios, rather than a portfolio of just a single medium, as was often the case in the past. SOJC is in the early stages of designing a systematic approach to assessment.

Tom summarized the SOJC curriculum change as being a recognition that all SOJC students need basic skills applicable to all media, but student projects will allow specialization within the newly consolidated tracks. All SOJC majors will be required to take the restructured Core Curriculum.

The Council was generally in favor of Proposal from the SOJC. The Convener called for a motion.

**The motion was made that the Undergraduate Council endorse the proposal from the School of Journalism and Communications to restructure the curriculum for the pre-major and major programs.**

**Moved: Ian McNeely**  
**Seconded: Ron Severson**  
**Amy Goeser Kolb**

**The motion passed unanimously.**

### *Undergraduate Council Website*

Karen Sprague demonstrated the new Undergraduate Council website for the Council members. The new site is live and members were encouraged to explore it and make suggestions for improvements.

Members were pleased with the site and particularly with the search capacity for ease of locating resources.

### *Draft of UGC Motion Addressing Grade Distribution and Faculty Reflection*

The third draft of a UGC Recommendation on addressing Grade Inflation was distributed and discussed by the Council. Several questions arose on language within the draft:

- In point 1. of the *UGC Motion addressing Grade Distribution and Faculty Reflection*, who decides what constitutes “relevant departmental/course prefix averages”? How are these defined?
- In point 3. of the *UGC Motion addressing Grade Distribution and Faculty Reflection*, what is meant by “a clear explanation of grading practices”? Specifically, what does “grading practices” mean in this context: how grades are calculated? What characteristics work at the “A,” “B,” “C,” etc. level?

There was considerable discussion of the third paragraph under *UGC Recommendations to Accompany the Grade Distribution Motion* which deals with informing students “on the way grading at the U of O may differ from grading in high school or other institutions of learning”:

-faculty frequently encounter highly emotional responses from students, especially new freshmen, who receive a grade less than “A”, e.g. a “B” on a quiz counting only 5% of the final grade.

Some ways of addressing this problem were discussed:

- A presentation, such as a faculty panel, could be developed for IntroDUCKtion / WOW to educate students on the meaning and value of grades in the overall picture of the college experience; this would be

repeated a term or two later. Karen will do this for IntroDUCKtion and WOW this summer (2009).

- Students need to understand the difference between the high school and the higher education culture; their expectations need to be managed; AP courses in high school reinforce a wrong idea of college culture; students are told that these are college classes, but they're not.
- Grade inflation in high schools is a big problem which creates an unrealistic view of grades by students. The state of Oregon is looking at strengthening admission requirements for college, and using criteria other than high school grades.
- Other institutions run a "College Experience" class that deals specifically with these issues – grading, adapting to a wide variety of teaching personalities, managing expectations, the difference between high school and college.
- This issue is already addressed in some FIG classes.
- Students AND their parents need orienting to grading practice in college. This topic should be included in the IntroDUCKtion parent program.
- Grades should serve as bench marks. An analogy is track: an athlete may work very hard, but still not be able to become an Olympian. This does not negate the value of the hard work, however. All of the physical training has a positive value. Likewise, a "B" shows you where you are in a field of study and in a particular course. A "B" is a good mark, and a student should be proud to have earned it.

Generally, the Council felt that the proposal is moving in the right direction, but there is a danger of taking steps that are too small to produce significant change. Encouragement of departmental reflection on grading philosophy and practice needs to be accompanied by something else that will add momentum in the desired direction. There was enthusiasm for indicating the context of grades on transcripts. The simple method used by Columbia University of reporting % of "A"s in the course, along with the grade, is appealing. Karen will contact people at Columbia to learn how well this system has worked. It is too easy to get overwhelmed and revert to a pattern of grade inflation. A more dramatic step, such as reporting normalized grades, would indicate the seriousness of UO's efforts to curb grade inflation and help to sustain the effort over time.

The Council agreed to resume the discussion at the next meeting, focusing on the question of reporting grades in context, and refining motion Points 1 and 3.

The meeting was adjourned.

**The next UGC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, February 12, 2009, 8:30am at the Rowe Conference Room, the Knight Library.**