

**UNDERGRADUATE COUNCIL MEETING**  
**November 18, 2008**  
**Johnson Hall Conference Room**

**Present:**

Andrew Bonamici, Sue Eveland, Amy Goeser Kolb, Dave Hubin, Jennifer Joslin, Anne Laskaya, Andrew Leavitt, Dean Livelybrooks, Karen McLaughlin, Ian McNeely, Ron Severson, Josh Snodgrass, Arkady Vaintrob, Tom Wheeler, Morgan Williamson, Trudy Cameron, and Paul Engelking,

**Absent:**

Lisa Feldhusen, Sean Jin, Caleb Owen, Karen Sprague, Laura Vandenburgh, and Jim Imamura

The meeting was convened by Anne Laskaya at the request of Karen Sprague. Anne presented an overview of the day's agenda.

**Minutes:**

The first item of business was the vote on accepting the minutes of the meetings of October 21, 2008 and November 4, 2008. The minutes had been distributed several days prior to the meeting for members to review. One correction in the attendance November 4 meeting was made. A vote to accept the minutes was called.

**The motion was made to accept the minutes from the October 21, 2008 meeting.**

**Moved: Karen McLaughlin**

**Seconded: Amy Goeser Kolb**

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

**The motion was made to correct and accept the minutes from the November 4, 2008 meeting.**

**Moved: Josh Snodgrass**

**Seconded: Karen McLaughlin**

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

**Announcements**

Cathy Kraus announced the meeting schedule for the Winter term 2009. An e-mailed schedule will be distributed to Council members. The venue for the last meeting of Fall 2008, December 2, will be the Metolius/Owyihee Rooms at the EMU.

Paul Engelking announced that a response to the Undergraduate Council's *Recommendations Related to the UO Multicultural Requirement* has been sent from the UO Committee on Courses to the Undergraduate Council via Karen Sprague's e-mail. The response will be distributed to Council members for comment and discussion at the next meeting.

## Agenda

### **Draft Statement on Grade Inflation**

The Council reviewed the draft statement submitted by Anne Laskaya as a first pass on developing recommendations based on the Council's 2006 report *Trends in Undergraduate Grades Awarded at the University of Oregon 1992-2004*.

Members engaged in a vigorous discussion around several points:

-Faculty access to grade distribution information in their courses

1. Grades need to be meaningful. Decompressing grades is a challenge both at UO and nationally. The Council needs to be proactive to counter external influences that could erode higher education. It is necessary to focus on a first step in addressing the issue of grading trends.

2. Publicizing grading practices to audiences beyond faculty and their departments produces mixed results. It is not clearly established in the research that such a practice produces the desired results of decompressing grades.

3. The Council envisions individualized reports that present data to individual faculty: "This is the grade distribution you gave in course you taught in xxxx term;" "This is the grade distribution given in your department in xxxx term;" "This is the grade distribution given by the university in xxxx term."

Although the Council desires individualized faculty access to grading practices, there are several technical challenges. The Duckweb software used at UO cannot serve reports on grades on a cross-referenced basis. All grading information is stored on the Banner system. Grade distribution is already available in Blackboard. For privacy issues, the information is not publicly accessible. The Council has also field tested a grade report that was well-received by selected departments. It is the practice of the University Registrar to provide tools across the campus for departments to work with their own faculty to provide this information to them. However, the reality is that this information is not distributed in all departments and faculty are not informed of grading practices within their own departments. There is a question as to how much control the Undergraduate Council can exercise over departments to address this issue.

4. Ultimately, faculty should be made responsible for their

grading practices. There is great concern about the idea of incorporating grading practices of faculty with their promotion or tenure reviews. Departmental accreditation would incorporate grading trends in their internal and external evaluations. Grading trends could relate to tenure and promotion in a contextualized way within departments. The Council decided that there needs to be further discussion on this point at the next meeting.

5. Although the Council is interested in utilizing transcript notations to “normalize” grades on transcripts in the manner of Columbia University, there are several problems with the practice related to the UO transcript. A large one is that students already view transcripts as punitive. Within AAU institutions, transcript notating is a non-standard practice. Transcript notes don’t seem to really speak to the causes of grade inflation. Moreover, transcript notes do not necessarily place courses in context and may be more reflective of faculty anxiety.

6. An important corollary to the issue of grading practices is the student perspective on grading. Students at UO are obsessed with acquiring “A”s in their courses. Grade expectations in college need to be clarified and distinguished from the grade expectations of high school. Students need to be educated on the social context of grades and learn to depersonalize grading practices. If students think a “B” or a “C” is a failure, there is a real need to re-educate them on the meaning of grades.

Anne asked Council members to summarize the discussion and present specific points they would like the reworked draft statement to focus on. Four points emerged:

1. Focus on faculty access to specific grading trend data, both individually and departmentally. Sue Eveland will research the technical aspects of this item and report to the Council.
2. Develop a corollary for educating students on the meaning of grades in college coursework.
3. Require a grading rubric to be incorporated in all new courses syllabi.

Anne will rework the draft statement on Grade Inflation and present the revision to the Council at the next meeting.

Cathy Kraus distributed two CAS program proposals (Major in Latin American Studies; Minor in European Studies) to Council members for their review.

The meeting was adjourned.

**The next UGC meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, December 2, 2008, 11:00am at Metolius / Owyhee Rooms, EMU.**