The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Undergraduate Educational Policy and Curriculum Committee

**Minutes**

Thursday, February 15, 2018

Attending: Helena Dettmer (Chair); Steve Duck; Amber Crow; Andrew Forbes; Meena Khandelwal; Cornelia Lang; Jerald Moon; Mary Noonan; Ana Rodríguez-Rodríguez;

Absent: Kathryn Hall (staff); Rachel Williams

1. New student member Amber Crow was introduced.
2. The minutes from February 8, 2018 were approved as written.
3. UEPCC members briefly continued the conversation from the previous week concerning Supplemental Instruction (SI). In particular, Rhetoric was used as an example of SI that incorporates faculty into the process. Rhetoric and also Health and Human Physiology use data from the Excelling@Iowa Survey to help faculty identify new students who may be at risk in their courses. Committee members expressed interest in expanding this practice across the College.
4. Hira Mustafa, UI Student Government (UISG), Executive Team and Health and Safety Liaison discussed the CLAS absence policy with UEPCC members. The current policy gives great leeway to instructors, with instructors thus having very differing policies but all must allow students to make up exams because of “illness, mandatory religious obligations, or other unavoidable circumstances or University activities.” (<https://opsmanual.uiowa.edu/students/absences-class>). Ms. Mustafa explained how, at a recent town hall meeting, concerns were raised about whether and how students might be excused for a “mental health day,” i.e., a single-day absence for the purpose of self-care in the event of a mental health episode or crisis. UISG had discussed several acceptable solutions, including requesting that faculty be encouraged to include an allowance for a single absence into their syllabi, or that the registrar provide a “mental health day” absence form for these purposes. Committee members expressed some general concerns about abuse of excused absence forms, noting that it can sometimes seem as if student illnesses increase around paper due dates or on exam days, though it was also noted that this may be due to differences in how frequently real illnesses are reported at other times; i.e., that students may qualify for excused absences at similar rates throughout the semester but only actually seek excused absences during times when their grades will be most impacted.

Committee members noted that a form already exists for reporting excused absences (<https://registrar.uiowa.edu/absence-class>), and that this form does not specify that the reason be limited to a physical illness; further, a mental health issue is a physical health issue, and the two should not be distinguished from one another; doing so may worsen existing stigma surrounding mental illness. The committee agreed that the existing form should be used by students seeking excused absences and that both students and faculty need to be instructed that this is an appropriate reason to be excused from class. UISG will look into providing guidance to students, while CLAS will investigate ways to communicate the policy to faculty, assuming, perhaps rightly, that all CLAS faculty do not assiduously read these minutes.

Committee members also noted that current and anticipated levels of excused absences lead to a need to schedule large numbers of makeup exams, and this can be a strain on faculty time. CLAS will look into ways to provide a central location for exam makeups that might be utilized by any and all faculty requiring makeup exam assistance.

1. Denise Filios, Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, viewed the proposed changes to the Portuguese major that arose from the work of a task force reviewing the major in Fall 2017. Those on the task force recommended the related changes to individual Portuguese courses and to the Portuguese major in order to attract more students and to ensure the Portuguese major combines well with other programs, such as a major or minor in Spanish. The task force looked at titles and course descriptions, deciding what could be dropped or revised. Proposed changes included increasing the number of semester hours in two accelerated courses from 5 s.h. to 6 s.h., reflecting that these courses cover the equivalent of two courses in a single semester; increasing s.h. in an intensive course (PORT:3050) bridging the Spanish and Portuguese languages from 3 s.h. to 4 s.h., reflecting that this course already required 4 in-class contact hours per week; cross-listing some courses between PORT and SPAN to increase the attractiveness of these courses to Spanish majors; and requiring three additional s.h. for completion of the Portuguese major. Committee members were split on the idea of increasing semester hours in the two intensive courses, because the actual in-class time appeared to be commensurate with a 5 s.h. course though there is also a significant online lab requirement. Further, there was concern that this might encourage other programs to increase their s.h. The increase in the s.h. for PORT:3050 was more acceptable to the committee, as it appeared to accurately reflect the student time commitment in that course.
2. The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrew Forbes   
Associate Professor, Department of Biology  
Secretary for UEPCC