The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Undergraduate Educational Policy and Curriculum Committee

Minutes

Thursday, January 26, 2017

Attending: James Cremer; Helena Dettmer; Steve Duck; Kathryn Hall (staff); Lena Hill; Meena Khandelwal; Cornelia Lang; Jerald Moon; Roland Racevskis; Jacob Simpson; Rachel Williams

Absent: Elena Gavruseva

1. Three new members were welcomed to the committee: James Cremer, Computer Science; Steve Duck, Communication Studies; and Elena Gavruseva, Linguistics, who was unable to attend the first meeting.
2. Steve Duck volunteered to serve as the UEPCC liaison to the Faculty Assembly Agenda Committee and Roland Racevskis volunteered as the UEPCC secretary.
3. The minutes from November 17, 2016 were approved as written.
4. The CLAS Honors in the Major policy was briefly reviewed along with its history. Last year, UEPCC approved the CLAS policy not to require students earning Honors in the Major to also earn UI Honors. This new policy was recommended by the UI Honors Program since UI Honors now requires substantial coursework, making it difficult for all students to complete requirements for both programs. Because of this new policy, the administrative work for Honors in the Major is being moved from UI Honors to CLAS and to departments and programs offering Honors in the Major. In the process, a review of requirements for CLAS Honors in the Major seems appropriate. These policies include the minimum UI cumulative GPA of 3.33 for graduating with honors in the major, and the minimum grade of B- for earning honors credit in a “contracted” honors course. During the discussion, it was particularly noted that a grade of B- is perhaps low for Honors credit coursework. A meeting with the College and faculty who work with honors students in departments and programs will occur in February, with suggestions from that meeting adding to the overall policy and procedure discussion. Meanwhile, the committee agreed the current honors policies should be maintained during this transitional period and should be discussed again in the future.
5. A proposal for a new interdisciplinary major in Neuroscience (BS) was introduced by guests Jodie Plumert, Professor and DEO, Psychological and Brain Sciences; Diane Slusarski, Professor and DEO, Biology; Joshua Weiner, Associate Professor, Biology; and Ryan LaLumiere, Assistant Professor, Psychological and Brain Sciences.The University has had a graduate program in Neuroscience for many years; now there is an opportunity to create a complementary program at the undergraduate level. The approval of the new Iowa Neuroscience Institute (INI) by the Regents, along with the institute’s funding by the Roy J. Carver Charitable Trust, with Dr. Ted Abel appointed as director, has added significant incentives to create this undergraduate program.

During the ensuing discussion, the issue of cross-listing interdisciplinary courses was raised, as was the problem of counting enrollments by a course’s administrative home. Those departments offering courses for this major will not cross-list them in part because only the designated administrative home of the course receives enrollment credit when these numbers are shared with offices outside of CLAS. (CLAS, on the other hand, does credit each department or program offering a cross-listed course.) Credit hour counts do not represent the effort of each department in overseeing a program of study nor do they take into account the complexity of counting undergraduate majors in each department. The number of majors in the existing programs within Biology and Psychology may dip as students transfer into Neuroscience but since this major will be housed in Biology, Psychology may be perceived as “losing” students. Cross-listing helps students to find courses more easily on the course schedule and provides more integration to the curriculum, but these benefits are outweighed by the confusion caused to enrollment counts and how departments are credited. For this reason, the proposed major will not initially request a new subject acronym such as NEUR for courses offerings. UEPCC strongly advised that this issue be addressed moving forward, both for this program and for CLAS as a whole, since credit-hour counting and its limitations for tracking faculty effort and student learning diminishes the CLAS mission and constrains complex partnerships such as this one.

Discussion then turned to the requirements of the program. It was noted that the curriculum for the new major will be comparable to curricula in programs at peer institutions, but with the UI program distinguished by its rigor and curricular integration. The cross-departmental collaboration takes advantage of long-standing strengths at the University and is in line with the new UI Strategic Plan because of the proposed major’s interdisciplinarity. Team-teaching will also be a part of the program, with benefits to both students and to faculty. The major will be open to any student; those already in the Neurobiology track within the Biology major might find the new major especially attractive. However, many juniors and seniors will not choose to move to the new program because of the number of required courses and their sequencing differences from those required for existing majors.

Since a goal of INI is education and outreach, the new major will be a significant part of the larger, state-wide initiative to promote neuroscience. Students will be involved in a variety of INI activities such as talks and seminar series. Research opportunities will also be available, offering unique UI experiences because of the involvement of INI and the Carver College of Medicine and its clinical approach. The undergraduate Neuroscience major will offer an Honors option, with many of the students participating in these outreach and research activities.

Members noted the importance of clarifying the relationship between CLAS and the Carver College of Medicine, which is providing significant resources for the creation of this major, at least in its first five years, and of optimizing access to the new major for underrepresented minorities. The Departments of Biology and Psychology have a history of working with programs including IBA, SROP, and WISE and will create opportunities and access for these students. UEPCC members wondered about overall job placement versus preparation for further graduate study. It is anticipated that students will have strong employment opportunities (e.g. biotech, pharmaceutical companies), even if choosing not to pursue graduate work. After the guests left, the committee unanimously approved the proposal; it will next move to Faculty Assembly.

1. The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

Roland Racevskis   
Professor, Department of French and Italian  
Secretary for UEPCC