The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Undergraduate Educational Policy and Curriculum Committee

Minutes

Thursday, March 30, 2017

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

Absent: Elena Gavruseva; Lena Hill

1. The minutes from March 23 were approved as written.
2. A revision of the CLAS recommended grade distribution guidelines was presented and discussed. Members suggested that this document may be helpful for new faculty looking for guidelines on grading but also wondered if it should reflect a greater commitment to one grading system over the other or to an overall approach to grading. UEPCC decided that departments might be best able to guide faculty in approaches to grading, which often vary by discipline. In fact, one of the main functions of the document is to encourage departments and instructors to reflect on and discuss grading. Where norm-based grading is in effect, it may be useful to include justifications for it as, for example, when a program needs to distinguish a group of students according to academic performance. Perhaps the document should clarify when norm-based grading is appropriate; this could be better articulated, with a bullet point added that focuses on departmental oversight of grading. The bullet point on the chair's review of final course grades could be shortened to say simply that the chair will "review and approve" submitted grades.

The usefulness of the longer quotations from government documents was also discussed, with the suggestion that they be removed. The question of the A+ was also raised again. Helena Dettmer suggested to the other deans and directors at a recent meeting that the A+ be equivalent to a 4.00 GPA and not a 4.33 as is now the case. If this is approved, the A+ could be given with less concern about grade inflation. However, making this change could take some time since all of the UI undergraduate colleges would need to approve it.

Additionally, in the revision perhaps the grading scale could be introduced by a statement putting the scale into context, such as "below is an example of a grading scale," in order to avoid giving the impression that the grading scale provided is the only one that faculty can use. Perhaps additional students could be consulted, and there may be opportunities to take the document to departmental faculty meetings. There may be funding available for switching from norm-based to criterion-based grading in certain courses. Perhaps the Center for Teaching can be consulted on best grading practices, with workshops offered.

1. Helena Dettmer updated members on the newly formed CLAS Online Education Advisory Committee. The committee is finding ways to incentivize the redesign of existing online courses or the redesign of face-to-face courses to the online mode of offering, with either a total redesign occurring or with online components or modules added to an on-campus course. For example, funds will be available to support revamping of on-campus courses into flipped, blended, hybrid, or modular formats. Gateway courses and high D/W/F courses are targeted in particular but any course proposal will be seriously considered. Faculty will need to provide a description of the proposed or redesigned course and an explanation of how it will fit into the curriculum. The first call for proposals will probably occur in Fall 2017 and will be announced through the DEO memo.
2. The committee was updated on the work of the UI Textbook Committee which is examining how to better uphold the Higher Education Opportunity Act which since 2008 has stipulated that institutions of higher education need to provide textbook information online before students register for the following semester. The University has, in many instances, been out of compliance with these regulations. The main purpose of these measures is to reduce book costs for students since if bookstores receive orders early, they can buy used copies and resell them at inexpensive prices. Often these used texts are found elsewhere in the country but are no longer available later in the ordering cycle since they have been bought by other stores and institutions. Late orders thus directly affect textbook prices. Unfortunately, this new deadline does present issues for instructors. For example, when new textbooks are published, there is often not sufficient time for instructors to obtain and to review the new books before early registration since many textbook decisions will need to be made around November 5 and April 5. UEPCC also considered whether students are reading less and/or retaining less by reading online books and whether or not using online e-books is helpful. For example, the Office of Teaching, Learning, and Technology is working with the Unizin Consortium on e-book offerings and other online textbook possibilities. Although not all books are available now as e-books, this situation is rapidly changing, with e-books in the next 5 years most likely becoming a standard choice. Surveys, though, do show that students prefer printed texts and often print e-books for themselves, thus incurring another expense. But students also report not being able to obtain any type of text in some courses by the start of the semester since those texts were ordered late. This can disadvantage students and affect overall student achievement. Students with disabilities also need lead time in order to make arrangements for access to materials. All faculty should comply with the new campus-wide rule and be mindful of the distress late textbook orders can cause students.
3. The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

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