The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Undergraduate Educational Policy and Curriculum Committee

 **Minutes**

Thursday, March 1, 2018

Attending: Amber Crow (student member); Steve Duck; Andrew Forbes; Kathryn Hall (staff); Cornelia Lang; Jerald Moon (Chair, pro tem); Mary Noonan; Ana Rodríguez-Rodríguez; Rachel Williams

Absent: Helena Dettmer (Chair); Steve Duck; Meena Khandelwal

1. The minutes from February 22, 2018 were approved as written.
2. UEPCC briefly discussed the proposal for THTR:2320 Playwriting in a Global World as a Diversity and Inclusion GE CLAS Core class and recommended its approval.
3. Art Spisak, Director, UI Honors Program and Professor, Classics; and Robert Kirby, Associate Director, UI Honors Program, presented a proposal to close the Engaged Social Innovation track within the Interdepartmental Studies major, with the closure effective for Fall 2018. Those students currently in the track would be allowed to complete the major, as required by the Regents and CLAS policy. The major requires four core courses, with two of these designed for students in the major; unfortunately, it has been difficult to meet enrollment expectations for these courses. The lack of interest in the courses may stem, in part, from the large amount of independent work required for the major. For example, students must design a 12 s.h. internship that solves a social issue in a new and innovative manner. Students also choose 12 s.h. of related course work that speaks to the internship. For some students, this is overwhelming, though others have completed the major with great success. However, at this point, it makes more sense to use the related resources to help a greater number of students. The Interdepartmental Studies major will continue to offer the Individualized Plan of Study track which functions in similar ways as the Engaged Social Innovation track, allowing students to “build” their own majors. Both Art Spisak and Robert Kirby stressed the excellent education students received through the Engaged Social Innovation track, with the closure a disappointment but also necessary. After the guests left, UEPCC recommended closure of the track. Members stressed that they were impressed with the work done to date by the UI Honors Program and by students in this major and suggested that the College might want to honor students working in community engagement by offering awards or other recognition for related projects.
4. Wayne Jacobson, Director, Office of Assessment; and Jean Florman, Director, Center for Teaching, discussed the role of ACE evaluations in the assessment of instruction. A campus-wide committee is being created to examine ACE, including the questions and the vended product. The guests suggested that UEPCC members carefully consider what changes might be needed in order to provide effective teaching feedback for instructors. In many ways, it is unreasonable to expect one unrefined instrument, such as teaching evaluations, to provide sophisticated feedback on teaching. A first step might be to consider taking a more diverse approach to teaching evaluations by using a range of assessment strategies. It makes sense to augment student evaluations with those by experts, using peer review, classroom visits, or other tools for a more in-depth look at instruction.

A second problem with ACE has been the low student response rates, suggesting students are not engaged with the questions asked. A great deal of bias, particularly gender bias, is also evident in responses. Completely eliminating such bias is impossible, but it can at least be mitigated through the use of additional assessment tools. Still, if questions are vague and do not target specific information that students understand and can respond to, students are more likely to add biased comments. Faculty and the institution as a whole must decide what can be learned from students and what questions students are best qualified to answer. Students can answer some questions in very meaningful ways, such as “Did the class activities help you to do your best on the final exam?” Broad, general questions, however, such as, “Is this instructor effective?” can result in very unhelpful responses.

Wayne Jacobson and Jean Florman also made recommendations on related reading and on looking at the practices of other institutions using “active assessment,” such as used at the University of Michigan. Many institutions at this time are reevaluating the use student evaluations and how to best assess instruction in a meaningful way. UEPCC noted that Faculty Assembly had recently discussed ACE evaluations and related problems. Many instructors are unaware of how ACE online evaluations work and are likewise dissatisfied with the results. Wayne reminded the group that this was a complex issue; a first step would be simply to ask, “What is it that we want to know from students? What are students qualified to address?” Using targeted questions will result in better answers. Student focus groups could also be used to evaluate any possible questions. Still, student evaluations will always provide a very limited source of data, and instructors should also consider other strategies for meaningful feedback, especially given the importance of teaching to the tenure and promotion process. At the end of the meeting, UEPCC recommended that additional time to discuss ACE be scheduled for future meetings.

1. The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrew Forbes
Associate Professor, Department of Biology
Secretary for UEPCC