The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Undergraduate Educational Policy and Curriculum Committee

Minutes

Thursday, March 9, 2017

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

Absent: Steve Duck; Elena Gavruseva; Roland Racevskis

1. Guests Anne Zalenski, Associate Dean for Distance Education and Outreach, Division of Continuing Education (DCE); Marlys Boote, Assistant Dean for Summer Session, DCE; and Dawn Freerks, Registrar Services Manager, DCE updated UEPCC about the Division. Anne Zalenski gave a brief overview of the Regents’ UI mandate to offer degrees for distant learners. Around 500 students are enrolled in the two degree programs administered by DCE, the Bachelor of Liberal Studies (BLS) and the newer Bachelor of Applied Studies (BAS). CLAS now offers its own distance degrees, including the Political Science BA and the Sport and Recreation Management BS, with online courses needed to support these programs. However, DCE does not want related online courses to compete with or to detract from on-campus enrollments. The DCE goal is to build summer offerings, allowing UI students to take UI courses online while away from campus.

A second DCE goal is to support faculty as they develop online courses, with professional online course developers helping to guide these projects. DCE is also working to put all online courses into “closed caption,” a project that is ongoing. Additionally, GIS course offerings will end at the close of Summer 2017, with many of those courses replaced by updated versions. DCE is also working closely with the Office of Teaching, Learning and Technology to create more synergy among these offices.

Additionally, DCE is working with CLAS on its transition to a new process for approving online offerings. Under the direction of Helena Dettmer, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Programs and Curriculum, CLAS has created an advisory board to recommend best practices for online courses and programs. The advisory board will help define a vision for online education and to ensure that online offerings and on-campus courses do not compete with each other but rather support CLAS strategic goals.

UEPCC members wondered if there would be incentives for online course creation since developing and proposing a course can be very time-consuming. Helena Dettmer responded that CLAS plans to offer developmental funds to create incentives for new online courses. Additionally, departments will continue to be paid the same percentage of funds earned from online enrollments, as is now the case.

UEPCC members stressed that CLAS and DCE are in the middle of a transition to acceptance by faculty and students of the legitimacy and need for online offerings. It is important that faculty be aware of this transition and of its strategic goals. The UI community must understand why and how online education will function in the coming years.

UEPCC also voiced concern that the incentives for online education might overpower the on-campus mission of UI. If only online course development is incentivized, it will be privileged over on-campus courses, undermining the on-campus curriculum and mission. If one is incentivized, the other must be too, with all faculty efforts supported.

Anne Zalenski stressed that not every course is suitable for offering online and some courses are needed to support the BLS and BAS or CLAS degree programs while others are not. Choices must be guided by a strategic vision and by procedures that ensure that the university will be able meet the proposed related outcomes.

UEPCC members also pointed out that a gray area exists among online and on-campus courses, especially as more courses are offered as hybrids, using a flipped classroom, for example, or other online modules. How would these be defined by the College? Guest Marlys Boote responded that one way to see this is by the location of the instructor; if the instructor is “on campus,” then the course status is considered to be on campus, even if the course has online components. These definitions and related policies and procedures will be discussed over the upcoming semesters with the CLAS Online Education Advisory Board, which will work closely with UEPCC on these matters.

The conversation next turned to the reasons for on-campus students registering for online courses. Many students choose these courses because of the complexity of the student’s schedule, with online courses offering more flexibility while keeping students on track for graduation. Still, online courses can be very challenging for students and are not appropriate for every student. For these reasons, revising an on-campus course as an online offering must be a thoughtful process involving course developers from DCE who understand online pedagogy and best practices. The committee also wondered how the rigor of the course is ensured, especially since some students tend to think online courses are easier than the on-campus counterpart. Meeting with students and discussing this matter, perhaps by using focus groups, might be one way to discover the roots of this misperception and how to better communicate with students. This is an important issue since drop and failure rates of online courses can be high.

UEPCC wondered about particular design elements used for online courses. The guests gave a brief overview, noting that some courses require web meetings at specific times or within a window of time while others require assignments to be completed by deadlines that run continually throughout the semester, with many variations offered. UPECC then pointed out that some populations will not be able to participate in online courses since they lack access to the internet, such as those who are incarcerated. One part of the future CLAS strategic mission might be to create pathways to the degree for this population. UEPCC also stressed that talking with students about the services students need and the design of courses that might work best for students is paramount; too often the student perspective is ignored. Creating a sense of community is especially important and can be done in many ways, with DCE course developers helping faculty reach this goal. Students should be consulted and brought into this process as well.

The conversation ended with a review of the data from ProView of students enrolled in online courses, with that number continually growing over the last five years. In recent years, the number of DCE online courses has grown, with most on-campus students completing 1-3 courses during the course of earning an on-campus degree. The Summer Hawk summer tuition scholarship has increased summer session enrollments but has also added significant costs for CLAS. Summer expenses must be reduced, most likely through lower instructional costs.  No degree program, however, may be staffed only by lecturers or adjunct instructors. This is one of the dilemmas that must be considered during these transitional years to a more carefully articulated program.

Helena Dettmer reminded UEPCC that recommendations made by the new CLAS Online Education Advisory Board would also come to UPECC for discussion. The two committees will work closely together in creating the vision, policies, and procedures for CLAS online education. Helena Dettmer thanked the guests for meeting with the committee.

1. The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,
Helena Dettmer, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Programs and Curriculum
Secretary for UEPCC *pro tem*