The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Undergraduate Educational Policy and Curriculum Committee

**Minutes**

Thursday, October 25, 2018

Attending: Jill Beckman; Helena Dettmer (Chair); Matthew Gilchrist; Kathryn Hall (staff); Anita Jung; Meena Khandelwal; Jerald Moon; Ana Rodríguez-Rodríguez; Tristan Schmidt (student member); Amy Strathman; Shaun Vecera

Absent: Rebekah Kowal

1. The revised minutes from October 18, 2018 were approved with one correction. UEPCC members also discussed the October 4 minutes and approved a clarification in them concerning the difference between a visiting appointment and an adjunct appointment.
2. UEPCC recommended the approval of GE CLAS Core status for SPAN:2050 (LATS:2050) *Spanish in the United States* in the area of Diversity and Inclusion. The proposal had previously been recommended for approval by the General Education Curriculum Committee.
3. Guowei Qi, Senator, University of Iowa Student Government (UISG) and Chair of the UISG Academic Affairs Committee, met with UEPCC to discuss students’ concerns about the UI absence policy. This policy can be confusing for students in part because of the differences in how short-term illness are handled as opposed to ongoing medical issues. Students with a minor illness are not required to provide documentation for the instructor in part because the healthcare community discourages those with an uncomplicated case of flu, for example, to seek care since that spreads the virus. More serious illnesses or events with longer term consequences do require documentation. Committee members stressed that a first step for students is to contact their instructors as soon as possible if they miss a class. Instructors worry about a student who is absent, particularly if an absence occurs more than once; knowing the cause of the absence can help the instructor support the student. CLAS requires that each syllabus states the instructor’s policy about absences in addition to the campus-wide policy; it is thus very important for students to read each syllabus carefully and to ask questions about these policies if there is confusion. Some CLAS departments have one policy for its courses but most allow instructors some leeway in how to handle absences while also adhering to the UI policy. Guowei Qi noted that the Registrar’s absence form is helpful and could be revised to include more information so that students could use the form to aid with this communication with faculty. The form gives a professional context to the information about the absence, requiring specific information which could help the student to reach out to the instructor in what could be a very personal and possibly upsetting situation. The form could also ensure that the instructor receives the details needed while also limiting those to ensure the student’s privacy. The form could be posted on the CLAS website or at Office of the Dean of Students pages where it might be highly visible. Another helpful change would be to align the UI-wide absence policy on the CLAS For Faculty pages with the statements on the For Student pages, with similarities between these highlighted to help avoid confusion. UEPCC members agreed that giving the number of days missed by the student as the deciding factor in whether or not documentation is required is not particularly helpful. Rather than stressing days gone from class, it might be clearer to emphasize the type of illness and its significance for the learning outcomes of the course. Just as important is the continual dialogue among faculty and students about why attending class is important and how the learning of the group can be disrupted for students when some routinely miss classes. It might be helpful, too, if all courses of one department had similar absence policies to help minimize their wide range, some of which are lax while others seem somewhat punitive. The group then summarized its action steps for making these suggested changes.
4. The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Ana Rodríguez-Rodríguez  
Associate Professor, Department of Spanish and Portuguese  
Secretary for UEPCC