The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Undergraduate Educational Policy and Curriculum Committee

Minutes

September 19, 2019

Attending: Helena Dettmer; Andrew Forbes; Kathryn Hall (staff); Anita Jung; Andrew Kitchen; Rebekah Kowal; Brain Lai; Ana Rodríguez-Rodríguez; Jennifer Rogers; Shaun Vecera

Absent: Eric Gidal

1. The minutes from September 12 were approved as written.
2. The UEPCC members discussed the difference between the BS and BA, with the goal of creating clearer guidelines for those proposing a new major or revising one to be awarded with the BS. Once recommended by UEPCC for approval, these guidelines will be added to the CLAS website. It is important to remember that a major is a required component of a degree; other requirements for a degree include GPA standards; a certain number of completed hours; and general education requirements, for example. In CLAS, the BA and the BS have these identical requirements though specific requirements for the majors differ greatly. This standardization of requirements for a degree allows students to easily move between the BA and BS.

UEPCC members noted that the distinguishing trait of the BS in CLAS is a rigorous study of the sciences, technology, and quantitative and social science disciplines**.** The required courses for the BS are highly sequenced, often requiring the successful completion of prerequisites, with students having fewer choices about course order. This structure is necessary since upper-level courses in majors associated with the BS rely heavily on foundational knowledge and skills. Quantitative courses are central to the BS, whether they occur as courses taken outside of the administrative home of the major or within it, perhaps through methodology and research courses. These quantitative courses are often a gateway into the discipline, with foundational courses later integrated into the major’s more advanced course work. Generally, these strands of the BS culminate in an activity that finalizes this integration, such as an advanced research experience or a capstone course requiring research and a presentation or paper. The major awarded with the BS might require more than 56 s.h. since courses are required from outside of the home department.

The BA degree, on the other hand, tends toward a greater flexibility of courses with fewer prerequisites and requiring fewer hours than the BS. In CLAS, the BA is first associated with majors in the humanities, the arts, and the social sciences although many CLAS majors related to the sciences, social sciences, and the quantitative disciplines offer both a BA and the BS. The development of knowledge and skills in the BA is based on an intense study at a high level rather than on increasing specialization. One advantage of the BA is that this choice allows students to explore a range of related topics or to focus on an in-depth exploration of a theme, empowering students to explore a topic in an individual way, with related writing and reading skills as foundational. The BA also allows students to earn two majors or to pair a major with a certificate or a minor to increase the connections of knowledge outside of one discipline. The BA with a performance major, such as music or dance, is a particular subspecies of the BA and requires many more hours than a non-performance BA, resulting in a gradual growth of skills in sequenced courses. A specialization is important in the performance major and can occur through the related BFA or the BM, with both requiring an audition or other requirements for admission. The offering of a BA rather than a BS can be influenced by traditions within a particular institution and by the availability of resources. The value of the BS over the BA or vice versa other to a particular student is highly variable. Professional academic advising is essential for helping students to reflect on these choices. In a future meeting, UEPCC members will review guidelines for creating a new major with a CLAS BA or BS, based on the above discussion.

1. The committee next discussed the importance of excellent teaching and some of the obstacles involved in creating a culture of teaching excellence while still maintaining very high standards and regard for research. Support for teaching fluctuates by discipline, department, and by CLAS and UI leadership as well as by resource availability. Teaching can be demanding and support is vital. GE courses are especially time-consuming and can be draining because of the range of students’ needs and the number of enrollments. The GE CLAS Core Review Committee suggested creating a GE fellowship for faculty who are excellent instructors in General Education courses and who have found creative ways to engage students. Travel and research money could be awarded as part of the fellowship, with the fellow asked to give a workshop or talk. Instructional faculty as well as tenure-track instructors would be included in this award since many instructional faculty are master teachers and conduct research and attend conferences, often without support. Creating these fellowship positions could help to define practices that close the gap between the performances of undergraduate minorities or first generation students and others, for example. CLAS might consider requiring all units that employ instructional faculty to give them opportunities for career development. Additionally, the committee embraced the idea that any candidate for a CLAS faculty position must teach as part of the interview process, helping to signal the importance of teaching. Perhaps CLAS could offer a department or program additional funds, even if small, to encourage this requirement. The committee members next suggested that faculty be given a reduced teaching load for the first year or semester of employment while being required to take a course in pedagogy and one in diversity, equity, and inclusion, empowering new faculty to contribute to a change in CLAS culture. Other institutions have tried this approach with success. New faculty might also be asked to work across disciplines in opportunities organized by the Center for Teaching, for example. This strategy of a delaying a full teaching load by a year or even a semester would save resources later on by investing a small amount in the faculty member early in the career, potentially intervening before troubling patterns occur. Poor teaching costs the institution in terms of student achievement, faculty engagement, departmental morale, and in resources used to ameliorate the problem. It is healthier for a unit to set clear expectations, to provide education and support, as well as mentoring for all new instructors from the start of employment. The conversation next moved to teaching assistants and to the importance of training. Much has been done in recent years under the leadership of the Associate Dean for Graduate Education. The committee voiced an interest in updates on these innovative changes. The members of UEPCC also noted that courses encouraging student engagement require intense preparation. Working with course designers in the Center for Teaching or in the Division of Online Education can be empowering. Still, it can be difficult to keep up with changes in pedagogy and technology, for example, without outside encouragement or support. Some funding should be made available by the College to encourage instructors to engage in this supplemental training. Finally, peer reviews of teaching must have value and ideally should support an instructor’s reflection about how to improve student learning, with the focus on incremental improvement, with achievable goals set each year. In other words, peer reviews are less of a judgment on overall teaching effectiveness than a process for creating reflection and constant improvement and updates in teaching and in courses. The above incentives are meant to foster a culture of excellent teaching and will be shared in a briefer form with UEPCC members and those who might be able to help institute related incentives. UEPCC will return to this topic shortly.
2. The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,  
Anita Jung, Professor, Art and Art History   
Secretary for UEPCC