

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
The Undergraduate Educational Policy and Curriculum Committee

Minutes

240 SH

February 15, 2024

Attending: Jill Beckman, Asha Bhandary, Jean-François Charles, Rodica Curtu, Anita Jung, Cornelia Lang (chair), Liz Lundberg (staff), Cinda Coggins Mosher, Amira Qidwai, Christine Shea, Amy Strathman

Absent: Emilie Maurel-Destruel

1. The committee reviewed the minutes from November 16, 2023, and approved them with minor edits.
2. The committee also reviewed the minutes from February 8, 2024, and approved them.
3. Next the committee reviewed the proposal recommended by the GE Curriculum Committee (GECC) to grant World Language and Cultural Exploration status to LING:1080 *Communicating Across Linguistic Differences*, effective Fall 2024. Students in this course will delve into a variety of English accents and dialects used by non-native English-speaking populations, learning about the speakers' linguistic and cultural contexts. The committee reviewed GECC's feedback on the proposal and agreed that the course should be approved for WLCE status.
4. The committee was also able to add to the agenda reviewing the proposal recommended by the GE Curriculum Committee (GECC) to grant World Language and Cultural Exploration status to JPNS:2127 *Books of the Silk Roads*, effective Summer 2024. This course had previously been called *Global Manuscript Cultures* and was in the Historical Perspectives GE category. The committee discussed how the course has been adapted to meet the learning outcomes for WLCE. In particular the course's emphasis on experiential lab work with UI Libraries, the Stanley Museum of Art, and the Center for the Book seem to be a good fit for the WLCE category. UEPC approved this course for WLCE status.
5. Next there was a follow-up discussion about UIGrades, the main topic of the February 8, 2024 meeting. There was a discussion about terms like "curve," and how different students and faculty might use this word differently. A student might think a curve functions as a quota system, putting them into competition with classmates for grades, when the instructor is actually applying a curve to scale the entire class's grades upward. The committee reiterated that CLAS's grading guidelines discourage the use of any grading system that makes students' grades contingent on their classmates' grades (by limiting the number of A's awarded in a course, for example). Part of the challenge for UIGrades is helping students understand what grade data mean, and what kind of curve/distribution/grading system they might be seeing reflected in the data for each course.

There was also a discussion about the role and availability of course syllabi prior to registration for courses: what information students want and need from a syllabus, whether the labor of creating, updating, and uploading syllabi far in advance of teaching is worthwhile for faculty and administrators, and how that labor can be reduced or streamlined. Dean Lang explained that

instructors also have the option for [one-page informational documents](#) about their courses to be created and provided to students instead, so students have the most pertinent information while making decisions about registration, but the syllabus itself does not have to be finalized so far in advance.

6. Next Dean Lang gave a report on the Teaching Effectiveness Task Force, which has been looking into how we evaluate teaching. The Task Force is trying to move the University to a model where the development of a teacher over time is the focus, rather than teaching performance assessed at one discrete moment. Seeing teaching as a journey and a set of skills that grow and shift over time aligns it more with the way research is discussed and evaluated. Just as grading policies have shifted away from evaluating students against their classmates, the Task Force also encourages academic units to move away from review models that judge instructors against their colleagues.

The Task Force has done a variety of things since its inception in 2018, including revising the ACE questionnaire used for end-of-semester teaching evaluations. Their revisions included capping the number of questions and trying to reduce the bias of evaluations by shifting the focus away from specific teachers and onto courses, learning outcomes, and students' engagement. Evaluations also include open-ended questions that allow instructors to incorporate student feedback into their pedagogy and then discuss those changes in performance reviews. The Task Force has also worked to encourage mid-semester assessments and elevate the culture around peer observations, making them deeper and more meaningful.

Dean Lang also explained that the University of Iowa is building its own course evaluation software. This change will provide opportunities to address some longstanding issues with course evals: there has been discussion of building in better ways to address team teaching, for example, and removing automatic means and comparisons to other instructors.

The committee stopped there for time; next week we will continue the discussion about the Teaching Effectiveness Task Force.

Respectfully submitted,
Anita Jung
Professor, School of Art and Art History