Senate Committee on Undergraduate Education

1/28/2014


Guests: Steve Falke, Tom Fankhouser

Absent: Paul E. Barney, Albert Bartlett, Christian M. Brady, James P. Crawford, Charles A. Hughes, Jeffrey Schiano, Steven J. Van Hook

Committee called to order by chair H. Durell Johnson at 8:30.

1. The minutes of the December meeting were discussed and unanimously approved.

2. D Johnson provided a summary of the Officers and Chairs meeting held January 27. A question was raised regarding the specific objectives of the Engaged Scholarship (ES) Informational report being reported at the January 28 Senate meeting in relation to graduation requirements. The argument raised in the December committee meeting that ES should be encouraged but not required was raised again. Discussion of this argument centered on the view that ES at Penn State does not appear to have been fully thought out and that the issue may be so broad knowing what is ES may make understanding what it is difficult. A committee member response to this argument stated the report is an initial step in investigating ES at Penn State, and the vision is something that will need further development. Further, discussion focused on the ES report goal of identifying what ES in currently being conducted at Penn State and what steps the University should take in defining and capturing ES activities to better connect with academic work. It was suggested the March 25 Engaged Symposium would provide further insight into the University’s focus on ES.

3. S Falke and T Fankhouser from the University Bookstore presented a updated textbook report. The discussion focused on the overall decrease in total textbooks sold/rented from 2010 to 2013 with the decrease being attributed to the decrease in new and used textbook sales. Text rentals increased and digital textbook sales remained stable from 2011 to 2013. Further, the Penn State Bookstore continues to return 30% of purchases to publishers due to students not purchasing textbooks. Discussion of these trends focused on the issue with getting students to buy and engage textbooks and the availability of texts from different sources (e.g., library and free downloads). A question was raised of the variation in textbook use and sales by college or discipline. T Fankhouser stated sales are examined by course and by faculty member to gauge how textbooks sell and to project expected purchases for future semesters. The use of open resource use at Penn State was discussed as Penn State is viewed as not utilizing open resources at the same rate as other Big 10 schools. S Falke stated the Bookstore is neutral to the use of open resources, and one reason for the low utilization may be that faculty may shy away from open resources due to the questions regarding the accuracy of the source information.
3. K Duncan presented the Grade Report to the committee. The report indicated a similar grade distribution from the previous year with the World Campus (WC) grade distribution being more similar to the University College than University Park this year relative to last year’s report. A possible explanation for this change is the WC adding additional majors and increased enrollment in upper-level courses by WC students. The committee offered a suggestion of reporting information on the classes students frequently drop and/or underperform. K Duncan stated this is not information pulled on a regular basis and has not historically been examined in the Registrar’s Office. However, this information could be included as a part of the regular report in future reports if the committee would like to request this information. A recommendation was made to separate A/A- distributions from B+/B/B-, and a revised report is to be submitted for approval at the March 2014 meeting.

4. M McCleery presented the UPUA resolution regarding the online archiving of course syllabi. The committee discussed how this could be a good idea and helpful for students when making decisions about courses given the additional information provided in course syllabi. M McCleery stated the resolution’s goal was to simplify the process of acquiring and storing syllabi, and the College of Health and Human Development system was a recommended model. Committee discussion moved to whether this was either a policy or procedure issue. A concern was raised regarding how the information in past syllabi would be used by students when evaluating future courses as syllabi change. Additionally, a concern was raised in that new courses would be placed at a disadvantage because previous course information would not be available, and students may pick courses where information is available. A recommendation was made to present the UPUA resolution with the Senate Library, Information Systems, and Technology committee Chair in order to explore possible existing avenues for storing syllabi.

5. As the committee was running over time, D Johnson suspended the discussion until our next meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 10:10 am.

Submitted by Durell Johnson, Committee Chair