Senate Committee on Undergraduate Education

3/18/2014


Absent: Barbara Brinkman, James Crawford, H. Durrell Johnson, Jeffrey Schiano, Steven J. Van Hook

Committee called to order by Vice chair Smithwick at 8:30.

1. The minutes of the January meeting were discussed and approved.

2. E. Smithwick reported from the Officers and Chairs meeting
   --General Education & Baccalaureate Assessment to be discussed at full Senate meeting
   --Faculty Appointment type: growing imbalance between tenure-line and fixed-term appointments
   -- ARSSA may be reviewing the Academic Drop policy for April meeting – this may come to us at some point
   -- Faculty role in athletics – discussion about how best to involve faculty in athletic coach searches
   --Change in benefits for graduate students – likely to be an issue for Benefits and Faculty Affairs committee in near future-PSU stipends are among the lowest and they are likely to lose quality of care with greater costs
   --Engaged Scholarship report to be summarized by 9 committees involved in initial discussions and will be presented as an advisory and consultative report at the April meeting
   --The April meeting is likely to go until 5pm – be prepared for a long meeting.

3. D. Smith reported for the study committee looking into the Faculty Senate/ACUE Registration Hold Policy. Currently, registration holds can be placed for academic, conduct, financial, and medical purposes. The discussion involved appropriateness of these uses and best practices (Eberly College of Science posts their policy on their website). There was general agreement that the document should insure clarity of the process, due process for students, clear communication to students, and appropriate timing that does not disadvantage students’ ongoing matriculation. It was pointed out that a registration hold currently prevents a student from late dropping a class, leading to an increase in petitions that are routinely approved, and the suggestion was made that registration holds should be decoupled from late drop.

4. Y. Gaudelius led a discussion on the informational report on academic integrity. The report is in the same format as 5 years ago, with updated statistics. The belief is that there has not been an increase in the number of incidents but an increase in the number of faculty filing reports and “going through the process.” It was also pointed out that finding and completing the appropriate forms can be tedious and time consuming. Currently, different colleges have different forms and different polices. Concern was expressed when a course is cross listed in
two colleges that the same behavior may be treated differently. There was support for a standardized form for all colleges, and for a centralized University wide committee to review Academic Integrity (AI) violations. With more and more collaborative pedagogy, faculty need to be clear about their expectations and what is acceptable. A more robust AI website is being developed.

5. Informational Report on Grade Distribution. Discussion indicated dissatisfaction with ongoing grade inflation, “It is a travesty that 44% of students receive an A grade.” Concern was expressed, especially for non-tenured faculty, about the relationship of grades assigned and SRTE evaluations. A recommendation was made to suspend collecting SRTE every other year to test the effect on grade distributions. Following discussion, the informational report was approved.

6. Informational Report on Textbooks. Discussion indicated concern about the report being authored by Barnes and Nobles and potential conflict of interest. It was recommended that one option would be for B&N to present their report at a full Senate meeting, but it should NOT come from the Senate Committee on Undergraduate Education. This should be brought to the attention of the Senate staff to see if this would be possible. Owing to a full agenda for the April meeting of the Senate, this presentation should be deferred until fall. Potential ideas about a larger report that would be authored by UE open educational resources and textbooks were mentioned as a potential agenda item for next year.

7. M. McCleery presented a resolution from the UPUA regarding open educational resources. Textbook prices have put purchasing texts beyond the reach of many students. This resolution calls for creating open educational resources in place of textbooks. Discussion was generally supportive, and included the possibility of incentives for faculty to develop these materials.

5. At 10:00, the remainder of the agenda was deferred to the April meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 10:00 am.

Minutes submitted by
Albert Bartlett