Senate Committee on Undergraduate Education

4/28/2014


Absent: Sydney Aboul-Hosn, Paul E. Barney, Albert Bartlett, Madison Benefield, Christian M. Brady, James P. Crawford, Karen Pollack, Jeffrey Schiano, Steven J. Van Hook

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

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

2. D. Johnson provided a summary of the Officers and Chairs meeting held April 27. Discussion focused on topics related to University policy: ARSSA revision of Senate Academic Warning, Drop Action, and Reinstatement policy (54-00) and Curricular Affairs examination of the Certificate Program approval as it relates to curricular oversight and approval.

3. The committee discussed approval of the Informational Report based on Academic Integrity reported to the committee at the March meeting. R. Singer suggested a statement in the presentation was an unsupported position which warrants clarification. Y. Gaudelius stated the wording of “our belief” is based on the difficulty in determining why reported violations are increasing. A. Rose agreed with R. Singer the statement regarding increased violation reports is an inference and should be qualified as such. Y. Gaudelius stated she will look into why the change is evident, and that Karen would be willing to change the statement to reflect the uncertain nature of the report statement.

Discussion then focused on the issues facing faculty when faced with academic integrity violations. A. Rose stated that some faculty believe the process is not fair to faculty as the Board review is on the student’s side, and the process may not work due to a bias towards student. Y. Gaudelius agreed that some faculty may view the process as an onerous and intense process (which it should be) which may turn off faculty to following through with the process. J. Moore agreed with the onerous description as it can be a time-consuming process. Y. Gaudelius qualified that one aspect of the process is 90-95% of the time a student admits what they have done. The remaining cases are generally the more time-consuming ones. Discussion then moved to the belief there is no incentive for faculty to engage in the process as it involves a lot of work with little reward. D. Smith argued the reward is to benefit our students by impressing upon them the reality of its importance. R. Shannon supported this position and added it is our ethical obligation to those who are not cheating. Y. Gaudelius provided information regarding Schreyer’s assisting faculty with guiding faculty on how to create course assignments that minimize incentive to cheat.
The committee then discussed the role of the Office of Student Conduct in Academic Integrity Violation process. Y. Gaudelius stated Student Conduct becomes involved when the violation rises to a disciplinary issue. During the Undergraduate Education academic review and sanctioning process, Undergraduate Education offices will consult with Student Conduct to see if previous sanctions have occurred. Consultation may result in change of sanction if there were previous occurrences. Discussion occurred regarding the use of XF and the time frame for the XF to remain on a student’s record. M. Woessner stated that he was disturbed the XF goes away after a period of time, and future discussion should occur in regards to keeping the XF on the transcript longer than the currently prescribed time frame.

4. D. Johnson was contacted by Mary-Beth Williams, Co-Chair of the General Education Task Force; and asked if the committee would discuss two questions important to the Task Force’s revision of the University’s general education structure:

What should be the expectation for academic rigor for general education courses? What mechanisms would enable robust assessment of student learning outcomes?

R. Singer asked if all committees were asked to answer these questions and were the same questions presented to those committees that were asked. D. Johnson stated not all committees were asked and the committees receiving the request were not given the same question. Further, D. Johnson informed the committee that the Senate officers were made aware of the request only a day or two prior to the April Officers and Chairs meeting.

The discussion focused on the need to 1) define rigor and 2) clarify robust. J. Moore requested a need for clarification regarding what is “rigor” and what is meant by “robust assessment.” He further questioned why this is a requirement for GE courses and requested the questions be sent back for clarification. E. Smithwick followed with the position that fundamental changes to general education that show evidence of general education’s importance through the course of a student’s education may be one way to consider rigor. The broad statements posed in these questions may provide the necessary discussion that will provide the opportunity to frame rigor across time.

A concern was raised regarding the GE website as it relates to the Task Force’s overall objectives and the objectives for the committee being asked to answer the two questions. The concerns focused on the website presenting more educational theory and a set of ideas rather than something that is implementable. In addition, A. Rose argued that the consultation process is inadequate, and having Senate committees answer questions is not really consultation. Having a discussion with so many unknowns regarding the changes (as the proposed changes are vague and ill-conceived) is difficult, and this is potentially a very expensive endeavor where the money might be better spent elsewhere (e.g., faculty hires).

M. Woessner suggested the committee and Senate has an opportunity to be a part of this process by questioning the larger Senate and faculty to see if there is support for the proposed GE revision. C. Palma presented the position that there is a need to look at general education as a series of classes where students can build useful skills. In addition, E. Smithwick argued the thematic component is only a small part of the GE revision. Rather, the GE
requirements/courses will remain “the same” but are to be tagged as being linked to other “related” courses. R Shannon suggested there is no way ideas will come to pass if there is not open dialogue about the process, and that the Task Force is struggling with time lines for process (e.g., how much time should be allotted to each process). Further, all campuses have to be satisfied, and the process ultimately comes down to the presentation of a legislative report that satisfies a majority of the Senate. The goal of the Task Force’s asking the questions is to assist in the process, and we can be either a part of the process or an impediment to the process.

4. The committee had a brief discussion regarding the possible business for 2014-15.

5. The meeting was adjourned at 10:05 AM.

Minutes submitted by by D. Johnson, Committee Chair.