Senate Committee on Undergraduate Education

9/10/2013


Visiting: Careen Yarnal
Absent: Yvonne Gaudelius, Christopher Palma

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

1. The committee introduced themselves to one another, including introduction of Dr. David Smith, new Executive Director of DUS.

2. The minutes of the April 23, 2013 were discussed. No changes were suggested, and the minutes were adopted unanimously.

3. Announcements from the Officers and Chairs Meeting of September 9, 2013. D. Johnson indicated that there were three issues discussed at the Officers and Chairs meeting, including (1) the Wellness Initiative, (2) Engaged Scholarship, and (3) the General Education Task Force.

4. The General Education Task Force segued into a presentation by Robert Shannon, who sits on that committee. He indicated the committee has had a busy summer with multiple meetings, subcommittee meetings, fact finding, benchmarking, and discussion. The committee has implemented what he termed an aggressive timeline, with the goal to implement new General Education requirements for students entering the University in Fall 2015.

Three major suggestions or changes are being considered by the committee; (1) Themes for General Education, (2) Exploratory Courses, and (3) Hierarchical Courses within a subject area or domain. (A question involved how the themes will be identified and chosen.) The committee is considering how any proposed changes will affect adult learners, transfer students, and the World Campus. The committee is also focused on assessment, and how effectiveness of the new requirements can be measured. The committee is working to ensure consistent rigor and challenge across all Gen Ed classes.

Dr. Shannon stressed the committee’s desire to operate with transparency, and that they welcome feedback. The committee expects to have a preliminary report by the October 22 meeting of the Faculty Senate.

5. Senate Council Comments on Legislative Policies Passed April 23, 2013. E. Smithwick reported that the University’s (1) Final Exam policy, and (2) Syllabus policy (required by day one) may not meet the needs of the World Campus and World Campus students. The point was
that WC students prefer to have the syllabus even earlier than the first day of class. A suggestion was made that the World Campus be represented on the UE committee to ensure that their needs and concerns are considered.

6. Senate Petitions Report. E. Smithwick pointed out that the Vice Chair of the UE committee also serves as chair of the Academic Standards subcommittee, charged primarily with reviewing petitions for retroactive drops, additional late drop credits, and so on. She discussed the report showing how many petitions were approved and accepted, and explained that the acceptance rate can vary based on the makeup of the committee, and on the issues brought forward. She pointed out that reading the petitions helps us to recognize the challenges students face. She explained the review process and asked for UE committee volunteers to join the Academic Standards committee. Thank you to Stephen Van Hook and Joyce Furfaro for volunteering.

7. Careen Yarnal gave a presentation on the Committee on Engaged Scholarship and the Engaged Scholarship Initiative. She indicated that this topic was formerly called Service Learning, but the group has an expanded charge.

Engaged scholarship opportunities include Undergraduate Research, Internships, and International Study. The committee’s goal is that every Penn State student will have at least one opportunity for Engaged Scholarship activity, including adult learners, veterans, and students at the Commonwealth Campuses and the World Campus. C. Yarnal indicated that questions and challenges faced by the committee include managing the cost of the effort, and scalability (how do we accommodate all PSU students).

Discussion and questions from our committee included whether this will be proposed as a “requirement,” whether it will be part of Gen Ed or part of major requirements, and how it will be determined if the requirement is met.

8. Chair Johnson reviewed the UE Committee’s 2012-2013 Accomplishments and 2013-14 Priority form. Chair Johnson indicated that the committee must submit an Engaged Scholarship Informational report by January and requested volunteers to serve on subcommittee to draft the Engaged Scholarship committee report. Thanks to Madison Benfield, Christian Brady, Andy Dessell, Jeffrey Schiano, and David Smith for agreeing to be part of this report subcommittee. The committee discussed the academic policies to be examined by the UE committee in 2013-14 and the priority of the future policy discussions.

9. Chair Johnson sought volunteers for UE liaisons, representatives and subcommittees:
   a. Undergraduate Education Senate Petition subcommittee: (Stephen Van Hook and Joyce Furfaro)
   b. Curricular Affairs:
      i. One member to serve on General Education subcommittee (Paul Barney)
      ii. One member to serve on the Retention and Transfer subcommittee (Robert Shannon)
      iii. Two members to serve on the United States and International Cultures subcommittee (Sydney Aboul-Hosn, Christian Brady)
      iv. One member to serve on the Writing subcommittee (David Smith)
   c. One member to serve on University Advising Council (UAC) – no volunteers
There being no further business before the committee, the meeting was adjourned at 10:00 am.

Submitted by Bart Bartlett