

Minutes
Academic Policy Committee, Faculty Senate
Regular Meeting: 12/9/2014

Senators Attending: Montse Fuentes (Co-chair), Derek Aday (Co-chair), Roy Borden, David Auerbach.

Guests: Jo-Ann Cohen (Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, COS)

1. Developing Issue of Concern

David Auerbach brought to the attention of the APC an issue of concern regarding faculty role in the evaluation of courses and curricula. He reminded the APC that UNCGA conducts program review every two years and that programs can be 'flagged' for low enrollment or number of degrees awarded. He provided an example in CHASS that illustrated the need for a more rule-driven process that is subject to faculty review and input when curricula are flagged. He indicated that SACS mandates faculty input in such matters but that the current procedure seems to leave responses to these flagged curricula at the sole discretion of the Dean. He suggested we might approve a resolution indicating that faculty should be involved in the biennial review process and that all relevant material should be made public

Discussion about this issue centered on the role that college curriculum committees and the UCCC could play relative to the process. A suggestion was made that a workflow be created and that 'typical' cases should go to college curricula committees. Exceptional cases might then be referred to the UCCC.

A side issue was raised about how numbers are counted in these reviews and it was mentioned that a typical problem is curricula that offer both BA and BS degrees in which one might be under-enrolled.

It was suggested that Duane Larick be included in an upcoming meeting before a resolution is crafted and discussion will continue.

Status of this issue: Open.

Action: The APC will invite Duane Larick to attend an upcoming meeting and the Faculty Senate Executive Committee will be notified before a resolution is drafted.

2. Discussion of Grading Consistency, Fairness and Rigor Across Campus

This discussion was initiated by Roy Borden as follow-up to early APC discussion about the issue of grading policy. Some discussion followed about work that has been done at UNCCH on the same issue. A suggestion was made that efforts to address grading fairness, consistency and rigor be handled at the department level. Concerns were raised that students are not being graded consistently and that they are choosing course sections based on previous grades given.

Example data were provided from several different programs illustrating variation in grades across multiple sections of the same course taught by different instructors. Discussion focused on the data provided and appropriate interpretation.

There was discussion among APC members about appropriate steps for addressing this issue. It was generally agreed that efforts should begin at the department level. It was further agreed that one recommendation should be that grade data for specific courses and instructors be easy to access and made available to department heads.

There was a discussion about correlation vs. causation in relation to variable instructor grades for courses with multiple sections. This led to further discussion about how to monitor and manage consistency and expectations. There was also significant discussion about the value of these data relative to faculty evaluations, but the decision was made to handle faculty evaluations as part of a separate discussion. It was agreed that a primary value of initiating discussions across campus about grading fairness and consistency would be bringing faculty together to talk about courses, content, grading policy and other issues that will likely lead to favorable outcomes.

It may be appropriate for the APC to adopt a resolution about this in the future. Before that, Roy Borden will work with Louis Hunt to explore options for making grade data available and Louis will be invited to an upcoming APC meeting.

Status of this issue: Open.

Action: The APC will invite Louis Hunt to attend an upcoming meeting and discussion about grading fairness, rigor and consistency will continue.

3. Discussion of the GSSP

APC co-chair Montse Fuentes reminded the APC that a lot is happening in discussions about changes to the GSSP and asked for help from APC members in gathering faculty input that she can provide to the GSSP committee on which she currently serves. There was some discussion among APC members about several proposed changes to the GSSP and about appropriate strategies for gathering faculty input.

Status of this issue: Open.

Action: APC co-chair Fuentes will continue to gather feedback about the GSSP

The meeting adjourned at 4:45pm

Submitted by Derek Aday (appendix follows)

APPENDIX: Supporting documentation for Grading Policy from Senator Borden:

Academic Policy Committee of the Faculty Senate

December 9, 2014

Issue of Concern: Consistency, fairness, and rigor in grading standards across the university.

Some unintended consequences of non-uniform grading standards:

Lower academic standards in some courses works against an academic culture that promotes excellence. Behavioral patterns that are established in early classes (that reinforce HS habits) can be increasingly hard to modify.

Course selection among “options” within a program can skew enrollment and even make it difficult to offer individual courses with low enrollment.

In fulfilling distribution requirements, anecdotal evidence suggests that students can and do use grade distribution data. This process will, over time, reward some courses and departments at the expense of others.

When students in specific sections earn significantly higher grades than those in other sections, the “appearance of excellence” may exist when in reality it does not. This can have significant impact on student recognition, awards and graduate school applications.

Possible actions:

Work within departments to develop a shared understanding of grading standards. Perhaps choosing to work with something like the UNC-CH description (attached page has agenda item from yesterday’s CCEE Faculty mtg. in which grading standards were discussed-for the 2nd time). Some of my CCEE colleagues are planning to include the following Table in their S 2015 syllabi.

These discussions could be better informed by:

Better access to grade distribution information.

Revising our university policies on grading to include “descriptive statements”, etc

The presence of wide discrepancies could be identified by:

Putting such information on RPT documents and prize nominations Using contextual transcripts.

Discussion of Class Grade Assessment

Motivation

- We should have a common understanding of assessment levels

A	Excellent	Mastery of course content at the highest level of attainment that can reasonably be expected
B	Good	Strong performance demonstrating a high level of attainment
C	Satisfactory	A totally acceptable performance demonstrating an adequate level of attainment
D	Marginal	A marginal performance in the required exercises demonstrating a minimal passing level of attainment
F	Failing	For whatever reason, an unacceptable performance. The F grade indicates that the student's performance in the required exercises has revealed almost no understanding of the course content.

UNC-CH Grading description

- The statistics for several courses and the grade distributions within courses raise questions about whether we have a common understanding of assessment levels
- We have anecdotal evidence that students are selecting courses and even instructors based on their grading histories.
 - o Students can look up the grading history for any faculty member in any course.
 - <https://www.koofers.com/north-carolina-state-university-ncsu/>
 - o Students are making comments about taking classes to manage their GPAs
- We use grades for graduate school admissions here and elsewhere. If a student earns an A, they are a strong candidate for graduate school.

This page added Dec 10, 2014

Documentation of Discussion in CCEE Faculty Meeting

Discussion

This is not the beginning of a movement to mandate grade distributions

This is an attempt to make everyone aware and try to come to a common understanding of assessment. To the extent that there are outliers, then I expect that awareness will result in some self-correction

Should the grade distributions be similar in all 3XX and all 4XX classes?

- If yes, what is the expected distribution and/or class average for a course at a particular level and type?
- What is the expected average GPA?

Should grade distributions be included in annual activities reports and in peer review of teaching materials?

Best Practices

- Watch the % of grade attributed to labs and group homework
- Require a certain grade on exams to earn a C irrespective of homework and lab grades
- Develop ways to assess individual work
 - o Oral exam of final projects
- Establish a course coordinator for courses with multiple sections
 - o Instructors meet once or twice a year
 - o Compare each other's exams for level of difficulty
 - o Suggest that the capstone instructors discuss best practices for assessment of group projects
- We use grades for graduate school admissions here and elsewhere. If a student earns an A, they are a strong candidate for graduate school.

Ideas

- Document this discussion for ABET?
- Can we avoid listing instructor during course registration period?
- Why is the grade distribution available to students?
- Report overall rank by class (this would require R&R but might be something to track when giving recommendations).

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