UNDERGRADUATE COUNCIL MEETING  
March 12, 2009  
Rowe Conference Room, Knight Library

Present:  
Andrew Bonamici, Sue Eveland, Amy Goeser Kolb, Dave Hubin, Jennifer Joslin, Ron Severson, Josh Snodgrass, Karen Sprague, Laura Vandenburgh, Tom Wheeler, and Trudy Cameron

Absent:  
Lisa Feldhusen, Sean Jin, Anne Laskaya, Andrew Leavitt, Dean Livelybrooks, Karen McLaughlin, Ian McNeely, Caleb Owen, Arkady Vaintrob, Morgan Williamson, Paul Engelking, and Elizabeth Reis

The Convener opened the meeting by reading a two-minute speech by Stewart Brand entitled “Pharoah Dreamed.” It is the basis of a new discussion-based recruiting strategy for excellent undergraduates, and makes a nice point about the enduring character of .orgs (e.g. universities) vs. .coms.

A vote was called for to accept the minutes of the February 26, 2009 meeting.

Minutes:  
Since some members had not had sufficient opportunity to read the minutes, the following motion was made:

The minutes from the February 26, 2009 meeting are provisionally accepted, pending review by Council members. Corrections to the minutes must be submitted via e-mail to the recording secretary by Thursday, March 19, 2009.

Moved: Tom Wheeler  
Seconded: Ron Severson

The motion to accept the minutes passed unanimously.

Agenda  
Karen Sprague distributed a summary of McGill University’s practice of providing context information along with grades on their transcripts. McGill reports that this
practice is very popular with students, who would likely object strongly if it were discontinued. They view it as protection for students who take courses in which the mean grade is low. The Council continued its discussion of adopting a similar practice for UO.

**Points Made During Discussion:**
- Thinking about context-reporting as a way to help students who take hard courses is a new approach.
- Contextualizing grades addresses a *symptom* of grade inflation.
- Perhaps we should look at ranking students in courses. That would provide precise context information without the potential for violating FERPA by revealing other students’ grades.
- Grade compression is a problem. The UC system eliminates “+” and “-“ on high school grades. The result is serious grade compression: the majority of UC applicants have high school GPAs of 4.0. It is incumbent on UO to get rid of grade compression.
- There is a loose connection between the efforts to control grade inflation that we are considering and grade compression. To have a direct effect on compression, perhaps we should focus on the “Princeton Model,” which establishes departmental responsibility to meet a university metric of no more than 30% “A”s in the departmental average.
- We don’t want our response to grade inflation to be too prescriptive.
- The UO Law School uses an enforced grading range for its classes, as required for its accreditation. The Business School uses a similar guideline.
- There is feeling against enforcement of a specific rubric for grade distribution, but faculty need to be supported in giving “C”s, “D”s, and “F”s for work that is average or below. That is the role of the administration.
- It is important for all faculty to have this discussion and it should be held in all departments.
- Feedback on course grade distributions should be immediate for individual faculty and should move up into departments.
Any discussion on grading should also engage students and the Admissions office; we need to work on what it means to be at UO.

Children are not educated (from pre-school on) as to what grades mean.

“No Child Left Behind” has influenced student attitudes toward testing and grading because teachers have been forced to “teach to the test.” The result is that students have become accustomed to learning very specific information that will be on a test. They have gotten good grades for doing this and expect that pattern to continue in college.

What role do transcripts play in reflecting the ability and accomplishments of an individual? We should work to bring transcripts to a more meaningful level.

Public skepticism of grades is based on anecdotal evidence of the disparity between grades and practical ability (e.g., “A” students who cannot write.)

If we don’t want an external entity to impose assessment on the university, we have to look at this issue ourselves.

The Undergraduate Council needs to take a leadership role in addressing this issue. The University should consider:

- The broad philosophy of grading;
- What kind of reputation UO wants.

The bottom line is the market value of a UO education. The best “outcomes assessment” is to collect data for the next 5, 10, 15 years on the jobs, careers, and post-graduate work of our grads. This should be a goal for the University.

The Council shifted to discussing how it might proceed to its recommendations:

- The UGC has developed some specific ideas on how to address grade inflation and the grading culture. These are in draft form and need to be agreed upon. They include:
  a. Departmental discussions of grading practice.
  b. Systematic dissemination of grade distributions in courses.
c. Reporting grades in context (in principle, method not yet specified).

The UGC should take these recommendations around campus (to other councils and departments) and ask them to consider these specific proposals and/or suggest others. After refinement based on broad campus input, the recommendations will be presented to the University Senate.

- The UGC should take the lead in changing the UO grade culture by creating a positive image of the culture we want.
- Grading practice should be a part of teaching evaluation.
- Students should be encouraged to discuss not only what grades mean, but also how to respond them. How do you use grades to learn? What is a productive reaction to the evaluation communicated by a grade?

The idea of holding an open forum, or several of them, to collect feedback from students, faculty and administrators was proposed. The Council agreed in principle, but also noted that the document describing the Council’s recommendations needs to be completed before invitations to public discussions are issued. The Council’s recommendations should serve as the basis of these discussions.

Karen Sprague and Amy Goeser-Kolb will work on finishing the preamble for the UGC recommendation document. The preamble will be finished by the end of final exam week and distributed to the Undergraduate Council members for review before the first scheduled meeting in the Spring term.

The meeting was adjourned.

The next UGC meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, April 7, 2009, 12:30pm at Johnson Hall Conference Room.