UNDERGRADUATE COUNCIL MEETING,
January 13th, 2010
Rowe Conference Room, Knight Library

Present:

Absent:
Paul Engelking, Sue Eveland, Amy Goeser Kolb, Dean Livelybrooks, Elizabeth Reis, Josh Roering, Matt Villeneuve, and Tom Wheeler.

Minutes:
The Chair called for any amendments or changes or corrections to the minutes from the previous meeting. There were none.

The motion was made to accept the minutes from the December 4, 2009 meeting.

Moved: Karen McLaughlin
Seconded: Caleb Southworth

The motion to accept the minutes passed unanimously.

Agenda:
Debriefing of Previous Grade Culture Discussion

The Chair debriefed the December 4th meeting with the Council, touching on key points made by special guests Richard Lariviere, James Bean, Russell Tomlin, and Scott Coltrane, who participated in the discussion.

Next Steps on Grade Culture

Karen Sprague led discussion examining the critique made of the Council’s 2004 UO Grade Trend report by Mark Thoma – namely, that grade inflation can be explained by “migration” of students from harder grading courses to easier grading courses. While migration does exist, and there is some research supporting the theory, “migration” does not account for the grading trends described in Council’s 2004 report, which were the impetus for the Council’s current proposals to change the UO grade culture. Nevertheless, this criticism often arises.

Examples of the data underlying the averages reported in the 2004 report were distributed. The data show grade changes at the level of individual courses, and allowed Council members to evaluate the validity of the “migration” hypothesis.
Discussion

Council members discussed the data and the current proposals::

- The Council agreed that the data in the 2004 report support the existence of grade inflation beyond the phenomenon of migration. Karen will tweak “talking points”, moving away from a focus on the national data that show changes in overall GPAs, which are subject to migration effects. Instead, she will focus on Mark Thoma’s UO data, explaining more clearly that it looks at the proportion of As and Bs in individual courses over time.

- The Council wants to move the discussion to an overarching issue of grading culture, beyond the specific issues of grade inflation, grade depression, assessment, migration, etc.

- Members discussed the possibility of having a public, open conference to discuss the issue of Grade Culture, and to present and explain proposed changes to students and faculty.

Such a gathering should recognize and address fears of the campus. What are these fears?

- Effect on enrollment in courses/majors/programs – Fear of enrollment drop could be an issue.

- Do these proposals affect faculty governance? Extreme departmental autonomy could be a problem, but it’s important to keep in mind that the proposals are coming from faculty (UGC members). This is faculty governance. It is important to have broad support from faculty, and also from deans.

Student UG Council members agreed to work together to create a “Frequently Asked Questions” list, addressing possible student concerns that might arise as a result of the proposals.

The Council agreed that it was ready to go ahead and take its Grade Culture proposals to the campus at large.

General Education Reform

The Council reviewed prior discussion of the idea of institutes and a revision of the General Education curriculum. Ideas that emerged can be grouped by several broad themes:

1. Combining writing courses with subject-area (aka “group-satisfying”) courses

   - Idea of connecting writing courses with teaching institutes continues to be appealing.
• Other departments could potentially teach specialized versions of the Writing class, but that might divert funding from the English department.

2. Creating subject-area courses that have broad appeal to students

• There could be incentives for departments to create wide interest classes. With the new budget model, this may be a possibility.

• The new budget model is enrollment driven, not driven by the number of majors. This may spark interest in developing courses that are more attractive to non-majors looking for general education courses.

• To encourage innovation, the Council may want to discuss a relaxation of the requirements for what it takes to be a general education course for the departments.

• There could be an expansion in the coordination of general education classes by setting up courses that bridge one another, in a FIG type model. These courses could be taken in tandem and registered for in tandem.

• UO has applied for a Howard Hughes (HHMI) grant to create multidisciplinary general education science courses. The Sciences are a tough field to appeal to a broad student base, and it is hoped that these courses will spark interest.

• There might be interest in students being able to choose what general education requirement a particular course fulfills, due to many classes being multidisciplinary.

• There should be something for beginners, such as “Epistemology 101 – Where am I being led?”

• Capstone seminars might be a good idea, as a way to connect many General Education courses into a thesis. The Humanities program already requires an explanation from students in the department as to why each class they select in their program was taken, and how each class fits into their overall education.

3. Conveying the significance and delight of General Education to students

• There is some concern that current culture surrounding general education courses is negative because they are functioning as part of a student “checklist” rather than a chance to explore. Council proposals should be sure to work towards making general education a meaningful part of the overall education experience.

• Would there be a possibility of adding a section of Writing 121 to discuss the importance of General Education?
• There is current discussion among higher administration of hiring a professional to create a collection of informative course descriptions online (building from the “Course Connector” pilot).

• There should be a statement on the syllabi of general education satisfying courses showing how the class specifically fits into the larger picture of an education at the UO.

The Council decided that it was not ready to make specific proposals on general education reform, but will continue brainstorming possible recommendations.

The meeting was adjourned.

The next Undergraduate Council meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, January 27, in the Rowe Conference of the Knight Library.