Present:
Susan Anderson, Andrew Bonamici, Eric Carlson, Jordynn Didlick, Dave Hubin, Jennifer Joslin, Karen McLaughlin, Ian McNeely, Caleb Owen, Ron Severson, Caleb Southworth, Karen Sprague, Jim Tice, and Matt Villeneuve,

Absent:
Kathie Carpenter, Paul Engelking, Sue Eveland, Amy Goeser Kolb, Dean Livelybrooks, Josh Roering (on leave), Kiwako Sakamoto, Josh Snodgrass, Drew Terhune, Tom Wheeler (on leave), Morgan Williamson, and Elizabeth Reis

Minutes:
The Council reviewed the minutes of the previous meeting. A phrasing change was requested for one sentence.

The motion was made to accept the minutes from the January 27, 2010 meeting, as emended.

Moved: Karen McLaughlin
Seconded: Jim Tice
The motion to accept the minutes passed unanimously.

Agenda

Academic Advising Survey

[See Multi-Institutional Survey on Academic Advising]

Jennifer Joslin, Director of the Office of Academic Advising, informed the Council about a Multi-Institutional Survey of Student & Faculty Perspectives on Academic Advising in which the University of Oregon will be participating. The survey was designed by two PSU faculty members and is being administered at public and private college/university campuses throughout the state of Oregon. Each survey consists of questions about twelve advising functions identified by Smith and Allen (2006) as essential to quality academic advising:

Integration (Holistic Advising)
1. Advising that helps students connect their academic, career, and life goals
2. Advising that helps students choose among courses in the major that connect their academic, career, and life goals
3. Advising that assists students with choosing among the various General Education options that connect their academic, career, and life goals
4. Advising that assists students with deciding what kind of degree to pursue in order to connect their academic, career, and life goals
5. Advising that assists students with choosing out-of-class activities that connect their academic, career, and life goals

**Referral**
6. When students need it, referral to campus resources that address academic problems
7. When students need it, referral to campus resources that address non-academic problems

**Information**
8. Assisting students with understanding how things work at this university
9. Providing students accurate information about degree requirements

**Individuation**
10. Taking into account students’ skills, abilities, and interests in helping them choose courses
11. Knowing the student as an individual

**Shared Responsibility**
12. Encouraging students to assume responsibility for their education by helping them develop planning, problem-solving, and decision-making skills

The research has two phases:

1. The survey itself will be administered in a few weeks (during Spring term registration) to students, faculty, and advisers.

2. A longitudinal analysis of student retention will be made after four years. Demographic information will be gathered annually on the particular students who took the survey. The question is whether attitudes about academic advising serve as predictors for retention or completion of undergraduate education.

The survey is also directed at Faculty, measuring their sense of the importance of, satisfaction with, and responsibility for these same 12 aspects of academic advising. In pilot surveys, a majority of faculty felt that ALL 12 functions were very important, but there was significant variation in which ones they felt the responsibility to provide. They felt that some of the functions were directly related to their departmental advising, whereas other functions should be provided elsewhere.

Jennifer noted that one survey question should be of particular interest to the Council, namely
“[Should Academic] Advising …assist students with choosing among the various General Education options that connect their academic, career, and life goals?” The pilot revealed heterogeneity with respect to whether faculty felt a primary responsibility for advising on General Education.

The Council agreed that the survey will be very useful for future discussions on General Education.

General Education Discussion (continued)
The Chair reported a conversation with Ron Bramhall, Instructor in the Lundquist College of Business.

Ron Bramhall teaches BA 352, a Project Management course, in which students are given the option to survey and hypothetically restructure General Education. Ron will visit the Undergraduate Council at its next meeting and discuss some of his students’ findings. During his discussion with the Chair, Ron emphasized a disconnect between the university’s stated General Education goals and the way students see those goals in terms of requirements and teaching. He noted a lack of engagement on the part of students with the philosophy undergirding General Education. Students see General Education as a maze of courses they must get through and don’t automatically understand why the courses are necessary. Ron also noted that the curriculum is designed around the structure of the institution rather than the philosophy of General Education; the distinctions in the areas of General Education (social sciences, science, humanities) reflect the disciplinary divisions in CAS, not necessarily any deep intellectual commitment to that way of dividing the world.

During the conversation, Ron urged that the Council not consider incremental change, but radical change, or at least have a discussion about what our fundamentals are. It is not a matter of simply tweaking the system we’ve got, but asking fundamental questions about what we want students coming out of General Education to be able to do. Then we should redesign the requirements to make sure that graduates indeed can do those things.

Ron did like the concepts of a Capstone, eportfolio, etc…to integrate the General Education experience. He was enthusiastic about a thematic or problem-based approach to General Education. That’s what gets students involved. The Teaching Institutes, in particular, might be a way of going about that.

Discussion
The Chair invited the Council to continue its discussion of General Education and respond to Ron Bramhall’s observations. The Council raised a number of ideas:
-Teaching Institutes would be effective approaches to General Education, but they should not be made a requirement, since any universal requirement will seem like a hurdle to students.

-The relationship of General Education to the major needs to be articulated. If General Education is focused on particular problems or questions, it can become an entrée to higher specialization, in effect putting the general education into the service of the major. A different approach would be to assert that no course related to the major can count for General Education, because the goal of General Education is exploration. Is General Education meant to be exploratory or to provide opportunities to synthesize concepts?

-Are students being pushed into majors too early? Perhaps the way we are presenting the university and the various departments is detrimental to exploration. Once a student declares a major, everything else seems like extra work. Should the declaration of a major be restricted to the second half of a student’s academic career (Jr year or later)? There are merits to this, but it is also true that there are some majors that require students to decide early (the Sciences and Math, for example).

-The General Education program tries to include both breadth and depth, but who is qualified to dispense breadth? Each instructor is obviously a specialized professional, but we leave the finding of breadth to the students. However, we (professors) can’t rely on students to put together something that we ourselves can’t put together. Do we need to be broken out of our disciplinary paradigms? Can we find some way to reconfigure the system? This is something that perhaps Teaching Institutes could help with.

-Anecdotal experience of General Education that was both broad and deep: a three-block class on Renaissance Culture, taught by 6 people across multiple disciplines. It was very successful. The institutes, if they are carefully constructed, have the ability to provide the breadth and depth desired in General Education.

-Perhaps there is too much concern about details and distributional perfection as the institutes are considered. What principles should guide their design? 1) General Education should be something more than preparation for the major; 2) the goal is for students to have some sort of intellectually rewarding experience beyond the major.

The institutes should not be highly formalized. It would be better if they formed “on their own,” as faculty interest is piqued. They should form like FIGs. There are faculty who are interested in this kind of exchange of ideas and interest and, as a university, we should support this.

-Where are we failing, now, in General Education? If we have excellent General Education classes, and we have appropriate goals, where are we disconnected? (Ron Bramhall will be speaking to this point at the next meeting.)

-Some students currently resent the General Education requirement because they feel like hoops, and students don’t see their purpose.

-The problem is that even when trying to come at it with a fresh perspective, as the students in the BA 352 course do, it is difficult to think of a General Education design that’s radically different from the one they’ve been exposed to.

-The answers from advisers to “How do I graduate” are often mechanical. For example, the philosophical answer is: “You learn to read, write, and think critically,
deeply, and broadly,” but it becomes: “Take writing 121, do your General Education, and choose a major.”

-Students do receive a “big picture” at the time of their initial first-year orientation, but that is the only time they are required to see advisers. If there were more consistent opportunities for advising, perhaps the “big picture” could be reinforced over time.

-What if students were treated more as peers? Instead of thinking “We are students, and have been for the last 16 years,” perhaps they could think of themselves as “junior fellows” at the university. That might change their connection to the university and to the Teaching Institutes.

-Perhaps students could design their own General Education curriculum, organized around a broad underlying question they want to answer or a theme they want to explore. This could turn the “General Education requirement” into a thematic minor, and would put the education experience more in the student’s hands. The benefit of this idea is that it uses the pre-existing structure, and can be opted out of. It would be like independent study General Education.

-There still needs to be some way of comparing the structured General Education with independent study General Education.

-Perhaps we should have a mission statement for undergraduate General Education. See the Brown University mission statement, for example.

-Recommendation: we can begin setting up Teaching Institutes tomorrow, even if just through links on the web.

-Breaking away from the “checklist” mindset for General Education has to start at the advising level.

-Suggestion: incorporate student assistants in institutes, similar to FIG model, to serve as peer advisers for students.

It was suggested the Council form a subcommittee of interested members who would flesh out ideas for later discussion. Members were not named to this subcommittee at this time.

Grade Culture
The Chair reported that Emma Kallaway, ASUO President, is fully behind the Council’s proposals for addressing Grade Culture. Mostly positive feedback came from the CAS dept heads’ meeting. There was some discussion of providing class rank information in addition to letter grades. The Council may also want to look at differential grade inflation across departments. Ian will type up and circulate notes from the CAS meeting to Council members.

There will be a faculty blog for feedback on the proposals, in addition to the one already planned for students.

A Grade Culture statement will be developed by Jennifer Joslin and Karen Sprague for publication in the new Student Handbook.

The meeting was adjourned.
The next UGC meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, February 24, 2010, 12:30pm at Lillis 440.