UNDERGRADUATE COUNCIL MEETING
February 24, 2010
Room 440, Lillis Hall

Present:
Susan Anderson, Andrew Bonamici, Eric Carlson, Jordynn Didlick, Sue Eveland, Dave Hubin, Jennifer Joslin, Ian McNeely, Ron Severson, Josh Snodgrass, Caleb Southworth, Karen Sprague, Drew Terhune, Jim Tice, Matt Villeneuve, and Morgan Williamson

Absent:
Kathie Carpenter, Paul Engelking, Amy Goeser Kolb, Dean Livelybrooks, Karen McLaughlin, Caleb Owen, Josh Roering (on leave), Kiwako Sakamoto, Tom Wheeler (on leave), and Elizabeth Reis

Guests:
Ron Bramhall, Instructor, Lundquist College of Business
Students from BA 352
Lori Manson, Assistant Director, Office of Academic Advising
Luke Norman, Office Assistant, Office of Academic Advising

The Chair opened the meeting with a welcome to the guests attending the meeting.

He called for comments and/or changes to the minutes of the previous meeting. None were made.

Minutes:

The motion was made to accept the minutes from the February 10, 2010 meeting.

Moved: Caleb Southworth
Seconded: Eric Carlson

The motion to accept the minutes passed unanimously.

Announcement:
David Hubin announced that UO is now on an annual accreditation review schedule (recently voted on by NWCU Accreditation region).

Agenda
Tasks and Timelines for Grade Culture Campus Discussions
The Chair briefly outlined a timeline for the steps to be taken by the Council to prepare for general campus discussions on Grade Culture. The Council needs to initiate campus discussions via:
-Faculty and/or student blogs
-Consultation with Student Senate and student leadership
-Town Hall Meetings
-Possible public media

We want to be open to everyone, but at the same time careful to maintain a productive discussion. We should also be prepared for and anticipate questions people may have.

Tasks to do:
1. Before March 10:
   Blog site(-s) to be set up for students and faculty to provide input – access issues will be decided by the committee:
   Ian McNeely, Andrew Bonamici, Jordynn Didlick, Jim Tice, and Drew Terhune

   Town Hall meetings to be arranged: Karen Sprague

Karen advised that the blogs open before the upcoming Spring break, based on her NSSE experience. Blogs will be advertised through mass e-mails. After they’re open, further attention will be drawn to them through media coverage and the Town Hall meetings.

General Education
Ron Bramhall, Instructor in the Lundquist College of Business, presented a brief outline of the work done by his students in BA 352, Leadership and Communication. As a central part of the class, six teams of students in each of the three previous terms have explored the topic of General Education at UO through surveys. He noted that the students have found more questions than answers, but the general theme of their findings on General Education can be summed up in one word: disconnection:
   - disconnection between UO goals and student goals in General Education;
   - disconnection around communication of the goals; students are not aware of what General Education is or if their courses are part of General Education;
   - disconnection among the courses in the General Education curriculum; they are just something to get through; seem like a checklist;
   - disconnection between the nature and the structure/style of General Education courses and the goals of General Education; for example, do large lecture classes address the goals of General Education?
   - disconnection between instructors and General Education; for example, some instructors seem unaware that they are teaching General Education courses.
   - the university has an institution-centered approach to education rather than a student-centered approach.

Ron noted that he has become aware of a Student Affairs Committee that is exploring student engagement on many levels. The Committee is focusing on how to be more intentional and purposeful about learning outside the classroom: how can Student Affairs
as a unit better guide students in that kind of learning? It would be great if the Student Affairs effort and the UGC effort were aligned. With a student-centered approach, those efforts would be aligned.

Ron explained that the survey conducted by the BA 352 students was constructed around four questions:

- What are the stated goals of General Education?
- Are these the right goals?
- Are these goals being met?
- Why or why not?

The project was to develop a proposal for a pilot program that would be addressed to the Undergraduate Council.

Over the past three terms, the BA 352 students noted the following:

- The way students choose classes or engage in General Education doesn’t seem to be intentional;
- Goals in General Education, admissions and all that is communicated to students are not always clear;
- How does advising fit into this picture? Could advising provide a place to at least start better communication and guidance for students?
- Course content and how much we emphasize content versus some of these metacognitive skills (critical thinking, thinking and reasoning, and communication skills). What’s the balance there? What is the importance of memorization of information versus learning how to think?
- Course structure in terms of large class size came up a lot, but there are creative ways to do large classes in a way that engages students; how are courses structured so that students engage each other, engage with the material?
- Evaluation: how do we evaluate? How do we know, other than students get through it? We know they are passing the courses, but we’re not evaluating specifically the achievement of our stated general goals.

More needs to be done in further analysis of the problem. Some preliminary solutions students arrived at include:

- Presenting more connected sequences of General Education courses so students get a depth of inquiry in a certain line, in a certain discipline, in a certain way of looking at a discipline;
- Establishing portfolio evaluation of General Education work;
- Developing a curriculum that is less discipline-oriented and more problem-oriented, or reframing bigger questions and looking at how the disciplines come to bear on those questions;
- Making advising more connected;
- Instituting mandatory freshman lecture courses that orient students to the concept of General Education;
- More team-based learning;
Faculty to make more connection between their course and the General Education goals.
- General Education should include an instructional methods requirement.

At the conclusion of Ron’s comments, students from the BA 352 class added their own comments:
- Student engagement in education should be “number one”;
- General Education goals are always changing since what students and employers need is always changing; employers are always looking for new things
- “[Students] want to learn, but they want to learn only what they have to learn, and they want to learn it in a style that is best for them,” [quote from Richard Sweeney, Virginia Tech Librarian];
- Students are customers and employers are customers, too;
- General Education should be taught in active learning environments or with team-taught classes; large lecture classes are a problematic environment and students don’t use discussion groups;
- 40% of students took on-line courses in 2009 and 80% are expected to take some or all of their classes [on-line] in 2014. That leaves the university with a question: what does the university have that the internet doesn’t have?
- Lectures are not an active learning mode;
- The University can utilize on-line lectures; live lecture process can interfere with the pursuit of a thought; on-line lectures can be stopped and replayed; this helps students ponder and process what they hear more carefully instead of having to keep up with the lecturer; they are also beneficial to ESL students;
- New buildings can be built so people can communicate;
- Embrace the competition and the consumer;
- Students don’t choose their General Education classes in an intentional manner. 25% of UO students take classes according to time of day the class is offered [but see correction in follow-up email below].
- Classes should be connected and everyone should take the same thing. If we link all the classes together and make them sequential, it will make the connections between disciplines, such as 3 disciplines into one period of time. An example is the grammar people working with students on writing a paper and getting their writing requirement out of the way. Linking that up to the Humanities part of the thing so you’re mixing it all together and seeing the connections between the different disciplines. Just kind of throwing everything together and stretching it out. Everybody’s kind of like doing the same thing. Everybody’s talking about it and the buzz on the campus grows.
- Move lectures into the living room more:
- Lecture slides are posted – why go to class?
- General Education should be problem-oriented.
- The one-time, one-day orientation to General Education that occurs in Introduction is inadequate. New students need more guidance than just getting a Duckweb list. They should be interested in courses.
The Chair thanked Ron Bramhall and his BA 352 class for their observations and and Council members (both faculty and students) responded as follows:

- **Discussion**
  - The Council was unsure whether BA 352 was critiquing General Education or university education in general.
  - The Council noted that there is university wisdom about things students don’t know they need to know. The University has a responsibility to present that knowledge to students.
  - It is important to recognize different learning styles and to pay attention to how people teach.
  - How was the survey conducted? Ron responded that the survey by his class was not developed according to standard social science survey methods. It was more about raising questions and answering them. Tools used included on-line research, Survey Monkey, visiting classes, and talking with individuals (e.g., outside the EMU).
  - It seems the BA 352 students are concerned that institutional structures (such as large classes) get in the way of learning.
  - The Council pointed out that education is not a business. The idea that students are consumers of a product is not a helpful analogy. Professors are not selling anything and students are not “buyers”. For education to take place, students must contribute something (their full attention) and participate in a 2-way exchange with the professor; education is not a transactional exercise.
  - The availability of online information is not an advantage. There is too much of it and it is unfiltered. Simple access to information isn’t what is needed.
  - The value that is added by a physical campus presence is the possibility of community—an important component of effective education.
  - A number of solutions have been proposed, but what constraints are associated with each of them? In any problem analysis, it is important to evaluate the constraints.
  - Some “checklist” elements are inescapable because the institution must keep track of students’ work toward degrees. The administrative structure that does this (Registrar, Academic Advising) supports faculty effort to help students meet the broader philosophical objectives of the curriculum.
  - We need to keep reconnecting the content of education to the philosophy of education and vice versa; we need to look at who has the responsibility for those connections and reconnections (between the major, General Education, the electives, etc.)
  - It is not realistic to judge discussion groups based upon beginning students’ expectations. Developmentally, freshmen don’t know how to take advantage of discussion sections attached to large lecture classes as
opportunities for learning. They need to be educated on the differences between the high school experience and the college experience.

BA 352 students added further comments on the disconnection between the University’s goals and the student’s goals in the General Education program. They cited two specific areas of concern:

- **Orientation:**
  There is a one-day thing called IntroDucktion where students are given a sheet of paper and introduced to these courses (General Education). What does that do? It basically just gives a check-list. We should change this communication to try and get students interested in courses they will want to take rather than courses that fit into convenient time slots or classes that they think will be easy. A study found that students just checking off a requirement outnumbered students who chose courses because they were interested in them. This is definitely a problem.

  There needs to be more guidance; in high school students had structure and at the University they’re given this Duckweb registration that’s a bunch of credits with no guidance on what they should take or what they are interested in.

- **Freshmen Interest Groups:**
  The problem with FIGs is that they give students the resources available on campus, but don’t necessarily involve them in a curriculum.

  Council response: [It is wrong] to use anecdotal evidence that might be from the lower end of the FIG experience and making it the truth. FIGs do focus on what it means to have an interdisciplinary dialogue and what it means to be at the University where interdisciplinary dialogue is available. Some faculty and some FIG assistants choose only to help acclimate students to the resources on campus, but that isn’t what the program is designed to do and if there is a failure in execution, then so be it, but it is not a problem with the program itself or the program’s philosophy.

  The value of technology (such as e-portfolios and blogs) for connecting General Education courses was discussed.

  The Chair concluded the meeting with a brief recap of the discussion:

  The Council clearly feels that the consumer-driven model is not the ideal model for higher education, but we should nonetheless seek out perspectives and ideas like this because they push our comfort levels. Work needs to be done to make the philosophy behind General Education more clearly articulated and to embed that philosophy in our curriculum.

The meeting was adjourned.

**Addition:**
The following e-mail was sent to the Council on February 25 by one of the BA 352 students. It provides clarification of some information presented in the February 24, 2010 meeting:
Dear Undergraduate Council,
Thanks for listening to me yesterday. I am very interested in the changing climate of education. I have posted a few links to some related areas of inquiry. These have been sifted from hundreds of pages of online material so I thought I would share them with you.

One clarification in the statistics mentioned concerning the manner in which students pick their classes. In an online survey, mainly consisting of freshman history 105 students, team D found that:

61.1 percent choose classes they are interested in.
16.7 percent choose classes because the class best fit their schedule
The remaining 22% choose classes that they feel the class will give them a broad based education. Sorry about the misinformation yesterday.

The relevance of lectures question was a typical bell curve. Most students think lectures are somewhat important to their learning.

In a different survey, 62% of juniors surveyed felt, upon completion of general education at the UO, their writing skills had not improved enough for upper-division coursework.

Please forward this to the four student members of the council
Here are some links that will give further insight to what I think is the problem.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DiO6pEYB6G0
Solution: Add mandatory grammar class to general education. Students simply are not as good at grammar as they would like or may need to be.

This sight has many useful links

Further research: Donald Bligh’s book “What’s the purpose of Lectures” Donald Gibson gives some very interesting lecture improving advice.

“Student Engagement and Information Literacy” Edited by Craig Gibson

You will find the following pdf link on the Educause link above
http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/13/cb/cd.pdf
The next UGC meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, March 10, 2010, 12:30pm at the Rowe Conference Room in the Knight Library.