UNDERGRADUATE COUNCIL MEETING
November 16, 2010
Rowe Conference Room, Knight Library

Present:
Susan Anderson, Andrew Bonamici, Sue Eveland, Dave Hubin, Jennifer Joslin, Dean Livelybrooks, Karen McLaughlin, Ian McNeely, Ron Severson, Karen Sprague, Matt Villeneuve, Paul Engelking, and Judith Baskin

Absent:
Eric Carlson, Kathie Carpenter, Jordynn Didlick, Amy Goeser Kolb, Josh Snodgrass, Drew Terhune, Jim Tice, Tom Wheeler (on leave), and Julie Hessler

Agenda
1. Minutes from October 19 and November 2, 2010 meetings
2. Update on grade culture discussions with other campus committees
3. Discussion: When is it appropriate to change a grade? (Sue Eveland)
4. Next steps on General Education (time permitting)

1. Minutes:
Minutes for the October 19 and November 2 meetings were reviewed. The Chair called for any emendations. None were made.

The motion was made to accept the minutes from the October 19, 2010 and November 2, 2010 meetings.

Moved: Dean Livelybrooks
Seconded: Karen McLaughlin
The motion to accept the minutes passed unanimously.

2a. Grade Culture discussion updates
[See: Fall 2009 Grade Change Data]
The Chair reported that the Scholastic Review Committee and the Academic Review Committee had discussed the June 7, 2010 UGC Report on Grade Culture at UO and had relayed several comments in response to the report:

SRC: (This committee reviews problematic transcripts)
- Proposals 1, 2, and 4 (publicly posted grading practices, comparative grading statistics, and better training for instructors) will help stimulate conversation on campus.
- It would be a good thing for faculty to know that their grading is in line with everyone else.
- There is concern that generating proposal 3 (statistical context information for grades on transcripts) could be too time-consuming. It would put a burden on the Registrar’s Office. In addition, there is concern about privacy issues. This information is not seen as being helpful to addressing grade inflation.

ARC: (This committee reviews petitions for exceptions to academic rules, e.g. deadlines for withdrawals)
- There was in general strong support for proposals 1, 2, and 4.
- ARC members had useful suggestions regarding proposal 2 (comparative statistics), pointing out in particular that courses in different subject codes within the same department are often graded using different types of criteria.
- The UGC Report does not conclusively identify the causes of grade inflation. How do we know it’s real, and that higher grades are not due to increased student performance?
- There are specific concerns re. the appropriateness of the practice of extra credit and giving grades for attendance.
- There is some concern about contextual information on transcripts. As an alternative, would it be feasible or appropriate to include class rank as a contextual parameter? Some people are more comfortable with percent As than with class rank as context information. Some people are not comfortable with using either one.

The Chair noted that the Faculty Advisory Council will be discussing the report in January 2011. It will not be necessary to meet with the newly formed Academic Council since there is overlap with the membership of the SRC, the ARC, and the FAC.

The UGC discussed the committee feedback as well as other issues connected with its Grade Culture recommendations:

- **Discussion**
  - Grade distribution reports have been available online in the past, but the General Counsel required them to be removed. There are still some general reports available upon request from the Registrar’s Office or through Blackboard for people with appropriate access to data. There is limited access to grade distributions through Duckweb for faculty who want to view their own grading. However, grading data cannot be shared among faculty on a public web page without redacting a lot of it. The UGC needs to figure out what kind of data faculty would like to have and then figure out the most appropriate way to deliver the data. In general, faculty are interested in their own courses and there’s a
difference of opinion about what comparative information about other courses would be useful.

- Criticisms of the original 2006 UO Grade Trends report from the UGC frequently come from people who don’t think that SAT scores are a valid metric outside of math and verbal ability, and thus are not a reliable indicator that student quality has remained the same over the period when grades have risen (the definition of grade inflation). Others suggest that college grades are not inflated, but have gone up because we are getting better at teaching.

- The fact that grades have gone up is indisputable.

- Is the Council doing a disservice to its own proposals by emphasizing “grade inflation”? This seems to cause people to focus on certain arguments and neglect key ideas in the proposal. It could be said that the Undergraduate Council has done a “grade distribution study,” not a “grade inflation study.” In fact, the original title was: “Trends in Undergraduate Grades Awarded at the University of Oregon, 1992-2004.”

- An important argument that action is needed is that outstanding students are not being differentiated very well. The student who makes the extra effort gets the same A as a student who is really lower in the view of the professor. This is a consequence of grade compression. You’re doing a disservice to the excellent students. Even if students are getting better, we have to be able to distinguish among them.

2b. Relationship of UGC to the newly formed Academic Council:
The first task of the AC is to weigh in on the academic impact of the New Partnership Proposal put forward by President Lariviere to the state legislature. An important part of this impact is the development of accountability metrics for state-level evaluation. These metrics should be congruent with those used for accreditation and congruent with the Academic Plan benchmarks.

The AC consists principally of the chairs of other academic committees (the Graduate Council, the Undergraduate Council, the Course Curriculum Committee, etc.) The UGC is more broadly representative of the academic community than is the AC, and provides a broader platform for information exchange. The Academic Council provides advice to the Provost, who can use it as a sounding board for how things are going. The AC also serves as a facilitator for moving academic business through the University Senate. It is important that the UGC be apprised of important issues that might be considered by the AC, such as a clear focus on students’ transition from first-to-second year (retention) and a clear focus on 4-year graduation rates.

3. Grade changes: What is UO policy?
[See: Online Grade Change "Rules"]
Sue Eveland, University Registrar, summarized the history of grade changes and the policy governing them at the UO. The UO adopted online grading in Fall 2001, and it
works well. Most grades are turned in on time (typically, 99.6% of grades are in by the
time the Registrar’s Office is ready to calculate academic standing the following day).
This facilitates timely distribution of financial aid, veterans benefits, academic standing
reports, etc.

On June 27, 2006, it became possible for faculty to change grades online. Almost
immediately, in November of 2006, OUS Internal Audit did an audit of our online
grading practices and policies, and as a result, asked the university to make several
changes to the way we do online grading. Some grade changes are no longer online as a
result of the audit. Specifically, as a result of the audit, some grade changes cannot be
made online by individual faculty, but must be done on paper showing departmental
approval.

We collect about 350,000 grades and process about 13,000 (3.7%) grade changes per
year. We have always had a lot of grade changes, but since we adopted online grade
change methods and tracking systems, we are much better able to see patterns than we
were previously. As a result, we are in position to consider whether various kinds of
grade changes are adequately covered by academic policy. The grade changes fall into
the following categories:

- 1/3 are Incompletes that are being made up. This is legitimate. There is faculty
  policy about Incompletes: when they should be given, how they are to be
  resolved, and what happens if they are not. It is different at the Graduate and
  Undergraduate level and there is policy for both. In addition, some departments
  have very specific guidelines and policies about when an Incomplete can be
  given.
- 1/3 supply missing or late grades.
- The last 1/3 are changes from one assigned grade to a different one – nearly
  always higher. As an example, in Fall 2009, there were 2770 such grade changes,
  of which 39 were to a lower grade and 2730 to a higher grade. We don’t have any
  faculty policy or guidance on when it’s appropriate to substitute one grade for
  another. The Faculty Manual, archived and last updated online in Fall 2007, has a
  chapter on Classrooms and Classroom Etiquette, and explains grades and marks
  (what an “A” is worth, what a “Y” means, what an “I” means) and when grades
  are due, but there is no mention of grade changes or when it is appropriate to
  make a grade change. We do have some new guidance, thanks to the OUS audit,
  saying that changes to grades that are over a year old must be done on paper and
  have signatures of both the faculty member and the department head. Since the
guideline does not require that a reason be given for the change, we aren’t sure
there is any discussion going on between a faculty member and a department head
when someone wants to change an old grade. There probably should be. A
faculty member who is no longer with the university can not change a grade by
him-/herself, but can do so with the signature of the department head.

Grade changes are not seen until after the fact when they are reviewed in yearly audits by
the Registrar’s Office. Most changes are probably legitimate (correction of grading
errors), but occasionally, there is cause for concern. Some examples are:
1) One faculty member retroactively raised the grades of students who took a subsequent course from him. That’s not happening anymore, based on a principle articulated by an associate dean in CAS:
“I do not like interjecting myself into something I believe to be sacred, i.e. a professor’s right to determine a quality of performance in a class and the related grades. But these changes could not possibly have been associated with the work conducted in the course at the time, and I believe they violate the competing right of every student to have an equal opportunity in the course.”

2) A memo that accompanied a request to change an old grade:
“I believe [because of] her sincere e-mail and her performance in current classes that this was an honest oversight on her part and her grade should be changed from an “F” to a “Y.”

The Registrar does not think this is an appropriate change of grade, but has no official policy to fall back on. A number of AAU institutions have policies restricting grade changes to correction of computational errors. That strictly limits the number of grade changes allowable. Without a policy, inappropriate grade changes contribute to grade inflation.

SRC and ARC do uncover grading mistakes so it is good to allow grade changes. Sometimes there are students who receive grades (including As) for classes they did not attend.

The Council discussed the matter of grade changes, raising several points:
- Grade change patterns should be reported by the Registrar to department heads.
- “College Connection” courses have a noticeable number of students not attending the course but receiving P grades; this is being discussed with the program director.
- Faculty occasionally make technical errors in entering grades, e.g. skipping a name and thus being off for a whole column of grades. The Registrar makes the necessary corrections.
- The “Y” mark means “no basis for grade.” There is confusion at the graduate level and most should probably be “I” for incomplete dissertations. “N” means “No Pass.” “N” and “Y” stay permanently on the student record. Only “I” can be changed.
- The use of inappropriate marks has significant ripple effects on students. For example, veterans can continue receiving financial support with an “F” in a course, but if a “Y” is given, the student can lose his/her veterans benefits and be required to repay the aid received.
- The overuse of “Y” marks contributes to grade compression. These marks are not really informative or representative of what happens in the class. Every faculty member has a different interpretation of what the “Y” means. The use of the “Y” mark originated in the Vietnam
War era as a way to avoid giving “F” grades and thus helped students avoid the draft. It should not be used that way and is given legitimately only if a student mis-enrolls. Students are responsible for their own enrollment, and the “Y” remains on the record, in addition to the grade in the class for which the student is correctly enrolled.

- “X” means the professor did not fill in the grade. The number of “X” marks has been reduced by conversion to the online grading system.
- How can the UGC help? Remind faculty of existing policies or create new policy?
- Grading should be covered by two principles: 1) Student work being judged is work actually being performed in the course; 2) any extra opportunity to raise a grade needs to be given universally to everyone in the class. A statement of grading practice should incorporate these two principles and be incorporated in the UGC Grade Culture recommendations.
- Faculty occasionally make technical errors in entering grades, e.g. skipping a name and thus being off for a whole column of grades. The Registrar makes the necessary corrections.
- A reminder of principles for grade changes can be folded into the UGC’s first recommendation to improve Grade Culture.
- The Faculty Handbook and the Student Handbook explanation on the meaning of marks should be congruent.

4. **General Education Teaching Institutes**

The Council continued its exploration of enhancing General Education through Teaching Institutes. A “retreat” event for general education faculty could generate interest and excitement.

The meeting was adjourned.

The next UGC meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, November 30, 2010, 11:30am at the Collaboration Room in the Knight Library.