UNDERGRADUATE COUNCIL MEETING
March 16, 2012
Collaboration Room, Knight Library

PRESENT
Susan Anderson, Andrew Bonamici, Ron Bramhall, Karen McLaughlin, Ian McNeely, Ben Smood, Karen Sprague, Michael Sugar, and Li-Shan Chou

ABSENT
Ashley Buchholz, Kathie Carpenter, Sue Eveland, Dave Hubin, Jennifer Joslin, Loren Kajikawa, Dean Livelybrooks, Josh Snodgrass, Zachary Taylor, Tom Wheeler, and Paul Engelking

AGENDA
I. Approval of minutes from February 17, 2012 meeting
II. Discussion of the sale of class notes online (Guest: John McCole, History)
III. Discussion of the balance of quality control and flexibility/innovation in the UO curriculum

MINUTES
I. MINUTES FROM FEBRUARY 17, 2012 MEETING
The Chair called for amendments to the minutes of the previous meeting on February 17. (The meeting scheduled for March 2 was canceled.)

There were minor corrections on pp. 2 and 3:

– p.2
“Currently, only a change in a course number...” was changed to “Even a change in a course number...”

– p.3
“...and 120 hrs outside work/study will be expected.” was corrected to read “…and 120 hrs total work/study will be expected.”
The motion was made to accept the minutes from the February 17, 2012 meeting, with emendments.

Moved: Ron Bramhall
Seconded: Karen McLaughlin

The motion to accept the minutes as emended passed unanimously.

II. SELLING OF CLASS NOTES
The Chair introduced John McCole, Chair of the CAS History Department. John presented the concern among some faculty about the prevalence of buying and selling class notes online among students. He noted that he became aware of the practice when a History faculty member was included on a mass Blackboard email advertising that notes from the faculty member’s class were for sale. How widespread is this practice? John cited a Businessweek magazine article on the success of NoteHall, “an online marketplace for college students who want to buy and sell class notes.” The UC Berkeley website has a university-sanctioned notetaking service. While the UO academic community supports “collaborative learning,” where is the line between this type of learning and selling notes for profit?

Four major questions have been raised by faculty re. the selling of notes:

1. Is this a matter of academic misconduct? Plagiarism?
2. Is this an infringement of intellectual property rights?
3. Does this involve a misuse of state funds or state-owned property (selling via Blackboard)?
4. Is this symptomatic of the degradation of academic culture?
   - Is the classroom just a conduit for information? If so, purchased notes may appear to be an adequate substitute for coming to class.
   - Does this practice undermine the development of good listening and note-taking skills?

DISCUSSION
Members of the Council discussed these questions with Professor McCole. These points emerged:

– Commercial notetaking is not new: Cliff notes have been around since the 1960s;
– Faculty could use the issue of selling notes as a “teachable moment” with students, pointing out that someone else’s notes have no guarantee of accuracy. Faculty can also point out that the exercise of taking one’s own notes requires students to distill a mass of information
into a few core ideas in students’ own words; practicing that skill is one of the most valuable pedagogical aspects of the traditional lecture class, and should be defended. One faculty member is going to start issuing a disclaimer that Notehall notes are not sanctioned and may not be relevant to the class;

– Many faculty members post their lecture notes online and want to keep intellectual control of their posted property;

– Use of any UO resource (including Blackboard) for commercial purposes is illegal;

– Students point out that professors may not be able to control the issues of students not going to class or using others’ notes to cram for tests. They point out that study guides, which pose big questions or prompt synthesis, are helpful (and appreciated), and show that mastery requires more than acquiring the information in class notes. Professors can reinforce this by asking exam questions that require written explanations or essays, not just multiple choice.

The Council concurred that exhorting students against buying (or selling) notes will not be effective, but getting the word out to faculty that the practice exists would be helpful. The following responses were suggested:

– Faculty could include warnings about the dubiousness of buying notes in their syllabi;

– Faculty could proactively discuss the practice of note-buying with their students, pointing out the disadvantages of relying on commercially acquired notes for their particular classes;

– The Academic Panels that are now part of New Student Orientation could address the practice with incoming freshmen;

– Blackboard newsfeed and Inside Oregon could remind everyone of the legal restrictions connected with selling notes; and

– The deans-and-department heads listserv might be used to make the faculty aware of this practice.

III. BALANCING QUALITY CONTROL, FLEXIBILITY/INNOVATION IN THE UO CURRICULUM: CURRICULUM REVIEW/COURSE APPROVAL PROCESSES

The Chair highlighted ongoing progress in streamlining the process for reviewing new courses. Based on the form discussed by the Council on November 4, 2011:

– We are working on a new course review form that will include all of the information necessary for review at the departmental, school/college, and university levels.
- There are nuanced differences among these levels and the new form will retain distinctions while eliminating redundancies.
- A committee has reviewed a promising software program called CourseLeaf that tracks reviews and revisions of course proposals, including relationships between courses, such as pre- or co-requisites.

The CAS Curriculum Committee and the Committee on Courses are still considering whether course proposals should include the newly-developed Course Prospectus or the syllabus for the course, or perhaps both.

One aspect of the course approval process that still needs to be addressed is experimental courses. There is no review of courses offered under the 410, 399, or 199 numbers. In principle, such courses must be reviewed if they are to be offered regularly, but in practice, they can run indefinitely under experimental numbers without review.

The Chair proposed that this discussion will be continued in the Spring term agenda.

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The next UGC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 12, 2012, 2–3:30pm in the Collaboration of the Knight Library.