UNDERGRADUATE COUNCIL MEETING
December 2, 2011
Collaboration Room, Knight Library

PRESENT
Susan Anderson, Andrew Bonamici, Kathie Carpenter, Jennifer Joslin, Karen McLaughlin, Ian McNeely, Ben Smood, Josh Snodgrass, Karen Sprague, Michael Sugar, Zachary Taylor, Tom Wheeler, and Paul Engelking,

ABSENT
Ron Bramhall, Ashley Buchholz, Sue Eveland, Dave Hubin, Loren Kajikawa, Dean Livelybrooks, Li-Shan Chou, Stephen Frost, and Elizabeth Reis

AGENDA
I. Discussion of “H” designation for courses

II. Discussion of impact of on UGC mission in light of current campus climate

MINUTES

I. CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATING COURSES WITH “H”
Paul Engelking, on behalf of the University Committee on Courses (CoC), distributed a handout of questions for the Undergraduate Council’s consideration as it reviews 2001 criteria for adding an “H” (honors) suffix to a course number. The four criteria currently are:

1. Students enrolling should have a cumulative GPA of at least 3.30 in their major.

2. The content of the class, and the level of analysis, should be significantly deeper than for non-honors classes.

3. Class size should be small enough to promote intensive student participation.

4. The faculty member(s) teaching the course should be available for close advising outside of class.

Paul explained that the Committee on Courses has received a request to change a fundamentals course series to an honors series. During the course of the review, the CoC was challenged in the way the criteria for an “H” suffix should be interpreted:
– What does “small class” mean?
– Should a GPA be used as a pre-requisite or as a design value for the course?
– If an “H” course is required as a pre-requisite to another course, should there be a parallel non-honors course covering the same content available to students?

Paul provided a brief history of the development of the honors course criteria that were first published in 2001.

In the interest of full disclosure, Karen Sprague noted that the questions raised by the Committee on Courses were related to her application for the Biology Foundation courses to be designated as “honors” courses.

The Council considered each of the criteria individually:

1. GPA
The GPA should be included as a design value for the course. The purpose is that it provides evidence of significant academic achievement in relevant courses related to the field of the honors course. Moreover, the GPA helps to prevent the inadvertent enrollment of students who are not sufficiently prepared for the rigors of the honors course. Departments determine the GPA for their honors courses and also determine whether the GPA is a pre-requisite or a design value. This seems to vary from department to department. The Committee wants to see the use of the GPA clearly spelled out in course proposals. This may need to be clarified in the proposal form instructions.

2. Course Content
The Council feels that there should be a clear way of distinguishing the content and rigor of an honors course from a non-honors course covering the same content area. The current phrase “significantly deeper” needs to be fleshed out. The CoC should flesh out what it wants in course proposals to demonstrate the rigor of the honors course. The work expectation in the honors course should also be described clearly for students.

Paul indicated that the CoC does feel that if a proposed honors course is currently a pre-requisite for a course in a different major; an alternate satisfying non-honors course should be available.

3. Class Size
The CoC has historically interpreted a small class size to be 12 or 15 students. However, Council members felt that class size is a qualitative element of the course design and can vary from department to department. It is suggested that this criterion should be based on a staffing ratio sufficient to promote student-faculty interaction. This allows the development of many engagement possibilities in the course and avoids a one-size-fits-all metric. In addition to interaction of faculty with students, it can also be useful to promote interaction among
students or with more advanced students. Council members noted the pedagogical value of guided peer participation. The honors course should be developed to promote student engagement and the size of the class should be considered in the context of the entire proposal.

4. Faculty Advising
   The CoC had no questions on this criterion.

The Council will continue the discussion on the criteria for the “H” designation via email over the long holiday period. Paul will use the Council’s suggestions to work on rewording of the criteria. During the Winter term, he will return to the Council for a review of the revisions.

II. Discussion: Impact of UGC Mission in Current Campus Climate
Discussion turned to the events and campus climate surrounding the Lariviere termination and the remainder of the meeting time was designated “off record.”

The next UGC meeting is scheduled for Friday, January 20, 2012, 2:30pm at the Collaboration Room of the Knight Library.