

Minutes of the Educational Policy Committee March 10, 2010

Approved 3-31-10

Educational Policy Committee

March 10, 2010 (Meeting #11)

Present: Geoff Bell, Pat Dennis, David Gore, John Hamlin, Carmen Latterell, Jonathan Lundberg, Molly Minkkinen, Mike Mullins, Pauline Nuhring, Maureen O'Brien, Megan Perry-Spears, Ken Risdon, Andrea Schokker, Gary Shute, Bilin Tsai, Nigel Wattrus

Excused: Gail Bier, Fay Maas, Vince Magnuson

Absent: Victor de Meireles, Jena Levelius, Jon Noyes

The minutes of the 2-24-10 meeting were approved.

2010 Census

The Office of Civic Engagement and MPIRG have put together a campaign to help students participate in the 2010 census. It is important to our campus that all students are counted as census information is used to determine grant and loans programs, transportation issues, legislative representation, etc. Students are often unsure if their parents are counting them at home. Dependents living away from home are not counted as part of their parent's household. International students, even if they are not a citizen but are living in the U.S. on April 1st, are counted in the U.S. census. Bilin will send a list of FAQs to the committee.

Uniform Syllabus policy

The EPC executive committee (EPC EC) discussed this policy at length and drafted a revised version based on the feedback from the last EPC meeting. The previous version listed specific required syllabus items. The current version now lists these items as "strongly recommended." The current draft includes an opening paragraph and five bullets that outline the general types of information that a syllabus must contain. It was suggested that after the opening paragraph, instead of listing recommended items, that a line be included to read something along the lines of "syllabus elements as described in X" with a link to a separate document that could be updated more easily. Others were not in favor of adding another layer and argued that referencing a separate document is cumbersome. Changes to this policy are not difficult to make and should be made by this committee. It was suggested that keeping this policy less specific is a better way to go. A list of syllabus items could be endless, and no matter how detailed you make this list, there will be exceptions. A faculty member noted that an issue was recently brought to her attention that there is a federal law that requires faculty to include the price of the textbook on their syllabi. Bilin recently investigated this issue and found that it is not required, but recommended. A member noted that the central component of this policy is the language "to best support student learning." The intention of a syllabus is to provide students with the information they need to be optimally successful. A motion was made and seconded to move this policy forward for wider feedback. The motion was approved.

Final Exam policy

The EPC EC discussion on the final exam policy revealed the complexity and wide range of opinion on this topic. Instead of drafting a policy, it was decided to hold a more general discussion on final exams at this EPC meeting. Our current policy is silent on the purpose of final exams, i.e. the educational justification(s). It was suggested that we need to look at final exams in relation to assessment. Using course goals as the focus, how can final exams best be utilized as an assessment of student learning? It was suggested that if we are really trying to assess student learning, every type of final should be cumulative. A faculty member noted that over the years there has been a real change in testing procedures. It used to be common for a course to only have two exams - a midterm and a final. Over time we have moved to a more high school model of testing, with more frequent exams, grading opportunities, papers, quizzes, etc. There is real value in a comprehensive final to see if students have retained the information and can tie the material together from across the whole semester.

Our current policy is written with the assumption that traditional tests are the only types of exams given during finals week. Finals are now much broader than standard written exams. Many disciplines require performances, projects, presentations, etc which are often comprehensive and culminating assignments. The current finals schedule is built on an older model of testing. The traditional one-size-fits-all final exam expected to accommodate everybody seems to be something that might be getting outdated. The exemptions to our current policy are many, which would indicate that our policy is not working. We need to look at what our needs are and build from there. One suggestion was that the final exam policy be grounded in Bloom's taxonomy, with different types of finals being recommended for different levels of learning. Another member noted that this assumes that all freshmen enter at an introductory level, which is not always the case. It was recommended that the policy be very general to allow for individual flexibility.

Some students and some faculty might argue that final exam week is optional. Some faculty members have their final exam or project due the last week of class, thereby getting an extra week off. When many final exams or projects are due the last week of class, students can end up with a tremendous workload and no extra time to prepare for it. A faculty member stated that students frequently say to her that she is the only one of their instructor giving a final exam during finals week. Several other faculty members said that they have experienced this as well. It was mentioned that in recent years, students can go from a class on one day to a final the very next day. What type of message does this send to students about the importance of finals? It was suggested that a study day be built in to our current schedule. One member noted an increasing problem with faculty who refuse to honor the "3 exams in a day" rule. This puts students in a difficult situation and needs to be rigorously enforced to protect students. In relation to this discussion it was suggested that we explore the issue of faculty only having three days to complete grading. Our policies should support great learning, not fast grading. Reading essays and evaluating cumulative projects can easily take more than three days. Others spoke in favor of the three day grading requirement. It is important for students, particularly those who are applying to graduate schools to provide proof that they have graduated. The 3-day rule is also important for students in that they are required to show satisfactory academic progress for financial aid purposes. Not having grades turned in on time can result in delays in financial aid for students. The EPC executive committee will take the issues discussed here and work to develop a draft to bring to our next meeting for discussion.

Undergraduate Degree Requirements

This is the first time this issue has been presented to this committee and a draft policy was sent to the committee along with the agenda. The draft policy states that a minimum GPA of 2.0 is required in all UMD undergraduate majors and that no academic unit may impose additional grade point standards to graduate. This does not mean that programs can't have higher GPA requirements for admission into a program. The draft policy states that only University of Minnesota coursework is included in the GPA. One member noted that this is doing a disservice to our transfer students, whom we are supposedly trying to welcome and encourage. Other members spoke in support of using only the U of M system GPA, as grading scales at other institutions can be very different. The draft policy states that 20 of the last 30 degree credits before graduation must be taken at UMD. What about credits that seniors take studying abroad? This is counter-intuitive if we are trying to encourage students studying abroad. Although there are many University of Minnesota study abroad programs with courses that transfer in, the language in the policy says the courses must be taken "at UMD", not through UMD. It was recommended that this language be more inclusive. The intention of that language is to prevent people from taking the lion's share of degree credits at another university, then taking a handful of courses from UMD and graduating with a UMD degree. The EPC executive committee will review the information from this discussion and prepare a revised draft for our next meeting.

Meeting adjourned 4:30 p.m.