Meeting Minutes

University Senate Academic Policies Committee
Volume 51, Number 11
March 17, 2015

Members Present: Bica, Ducksworth-Lawton, Dunham, Gannon, Hoepner, Lapp, Mowry, Nowlan, Pratt, Wical


Chair Pratt called the meeting to order at 2:05 PM.

1.0 Meeting Minutes
   - Members approved the meeting minutes for 3.10.15 as distributed.

2.0 Biology Program Review
   Biology chair W. Taylor discussed the following points with the APC.
   - The Department is extremely concerned about the loss of 3.5 positions, with possible additional losses due to retirements and/or relocations.
   - The Department has now established a long-range planning committee.
   - Suspension of their MS degree resulted in additional faculty time for work with undergraduate students, a change that was positively perceived by all.
   - Academic advising is in need of improvement. Biology tried group advising sessions led by a single faculty member, but some Department members did not agree with the approach and student attendance at the sessions was sparse. The Department offered an advising-based Biology 291 class for the first time during fall semester 2014. Even with two of the most effective faculty members serving as instructors, course evaluations were disastrous. They will not offer the class during fall semester 2015 due to staffing issues; however, the instructors will consider course redesign based on student feedback. The Department has considered establishing a lead advisor position and/or might experiment with some alternative approaches to advising next year (e.g., use of real-time chats, Skype).
   - Efforts to recruit and retain historically underserved students will be a major part of the Department’s long-term future planning efforts. The Department has funding available for enhancing the excellence of the program and could devote some of this funding to this effort (e.g., expanding high impact practices such as student-faculty collaborative research). The APC recommends consulting Admissions and the Office of Multicultural Affairs for recruitment/retention strategies.
   - Certain faculty members make the choice to prepare components of their laboratory courses themselves; this is not mandated and is not a workload issue. Biology made some initial inquiries into the possibility of charging lab fees only to be discouraged by what seems to be a Byzantine set of requirements. The APC recommends that our campus consider new strategies/flexibilities regarding lab fee policies and procedures.
   - Students are dissatisfied with the 3-course sequence; therefore, this will be a focus for the long-term planning committee.
   - Biology faculty will need some assistance in understanding how to implement an outcome-based Liberal Education program that relies on experiences rather than credits.
   - Biology has not had any faculty at the assistant professor rank for 2 years now, a demographic that carries serious concerns for the future.
   - The APC concurs with reviewers in recommending that Biology contribute systematically to the Honors Program, such as one designated lab section each semester.
- The APC recognizes this department is significantly understaffed and under-resourced. Even in the face of extreme challenge, Biology is a truly exceptional department.

3.0 Proposal to Remove the General Education (GE) Subcategory Requirements

- The Arts & Sciences chairs propose this change because 1) removing subcategory requirements will provide more flexibility in staffing at this time of significant budget cuts, and 2) the change is consistent with the new Liberal Education core.

- If approved, this change will apply to the 2015-16 catalogue, as well as all previous catalogue years. Given the timing of this proposal, it would be premature to ask academic advisors to notify students during the fall semester registration period. If the proposal progresses in a timely manner, the Registrar’s Office can have revisions to the degree audit in place by fall semester.

- Intentions of the Colleges to retain or remove subcategory requirements are not known at this time. The effect of this change on student patterns of enrollment is also unknown.

- A con of this proposal is the possibility that students will no longer explore a variety of academic areas, with small programs being particular at risk. The APC recognizes the importance of encouraging breadth of coursework during advising sessions and hopes this change will result in more students making choices based on interests/exploration rather than “counting credits.” We note that limitation of 10 credits per prefix remains in place.

- A motion was made to remove the GE subcategory requirements from the University graduation requirements for students in the 2015-16 catalogue, as well as all earlier catalogues. This motion passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 2:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted
Lori Bica, secretary for the meeting