

UNDERGRADUATE COUNCIL MEETING

May 11, 2005

Johnson Hall Conference Room

Present:

Deborah Baumgold, Colleen Bell, Herb Chereck, Deborah Exton, Hilary Gerdes, Anne Laskaya, Martha Pitts, Tyler Neely, Julie Newton, Kathy Roberts, Ron Severson, Karen Sprague, Mark Thoma, Laura Vandenburgh, Amalia Gladhart, Paul Engelking, Shelly Kerr

Absent:

Emily Gilkey, Peter Gilkey, Dave Hubin, Steven Pologe

Agenda:

ATLAS

Karen Sprague presented the Powerpoint demonstration used to inform state legislators and others of the proposed Articulation Transfer Linked Audit System (ATLAS). ATLAS is part of the revised content of the former “Common Course Numbering Bill” (SB 342), sponsored by Senator Kurt Schrader. An ATLAS-like system is already in use at Portland State University where it connects PSU with some of the Portland-area community colleges. The demonstration allows anyone to go into a mock student account at PSU and navigate the system as an actual student would (see “ATLAS in Action at PSU” handout). Karen explained that the goal was to find a simple method for communicating course articulation information without resorting to statewide common course numbering and homogenization of course content. Atlas is a computerized system that would link campus-based degree audit systems throughout the state. There is a lot of enthusiasm in Salem for the revised version of SB 342 with the ATLAS component.

An ATLAS committee now has worked out budgetary and staffing logistics. For a little over \$700k, all seven of the public universities can be interconnected *via* ATLAS during the first phase, the 2005-2007 biennium. For another ~\$80,000, the community colleges that are ready (probably three) could also be connected.

- **Discussion**

The UGC asked if the articulation information provided by ATLAS would be 100% accurate. It was pointed out that any inaccuracies could result in negative reactions from users that would counter the positive effects of the program. Karen acknowledged that users do find mistakes in articulation data, but that ATLAS-like systems tend to promote effective and cooperative communication among institutions rather than induce negative reaction to the system itself. This is the experience at PSU and its partner community colleges. The PSU system carries a disclaimer for the accuracy of articulation information, and a statewide ATLAS would do so, as well. One of the advantages of ATLAS is that it uses off-the-shelf software that was developed by the same people who designed DARS and that has the same excellent track record.

Prior Business: Grade Inflation

As a follow-up to previous discussion of UO inflation, Herb Chereck distributed a handout showing grade distributions by department from Fall 2000 to the present. He explained that Fall Term grade distributions are shown yearly in the grade profile report which his office compiles each winter. Since GPAs were not calculated by the Registrar until 1990, records of GPAs prior to 1990 are not available.

- **Discussion**

While reviewing the new data, the UGC noted an unexpectedly large proportion of “A+” grades. While discussing this observation, as well as other aspects of the data, the UGC raised several questions:

- Is there any way to acquire data on grade distribution by course?
- In what level classes (lower division or upper division) is grade inflation most severe?
- Should independent studies / practicums be graded? Are disproportionately high grades in courses of this kind contributing to grade inflation?
- Should grades on transcripts be normalized with respect to grade distributions in individual courses?

The UGC felt that it should not set specific quotas on all grades, but perhaps something should be done regarding the unusually high occurrence of “A+”s. It was suggested that a sub-committee be formed to examine the distribution of “A+” grades. Specifically, is the rising proportion of “A+” grades a general phenomenon across many courses, or do a few courses dominate these averages?

It was also suggested that the UGC recommend that schools and colleges develop guidelines for grades. It was felt that having such guidelines would assist in communicating grading expectations to new faculty. At present, most faculty have little or no guidance as to what a grade of “A”, “B”, “C”, etc. should mean, or the grade distributions expected in different kinds of classes.

By consensus, the UGC agreed that drafting a recommendation to address the issue of grade inflation should be a major order of business for the future.

Grading Options in Group Satisfying Courses:

(See: [Group-Satisfying Courses to have “Graded” and “Pass/No Pass” Option](#))

Herb Chereck asked the UGC to provide guidance on the appropriate grading option for Group-Satisfying courses. Most Group-Satisfying courses can be taken either “Graded” or “Pass/No Pass”. There are a few Group-Satisfying courses, however, that do not allow the “Pass/No Pass” option.

It was felt that this restriction could deter students who might be interested in exploring an unfamiliar area of study without the pressure of a letter grade. On the other hand, those same courses might also serve as foundation courses for pre-major students in that area of study. For those students, a letter grade would be required for the course, and taking it “Pass/No Pass” before choosing the major could cause a problem later.

After discussion of both of these arguments, the UGC reaffirmed the importance of encouraging intellectual exploration by offering all Group-Satisfying courses with both the “Graded” and “Pass/No Pass” options. Such courses should carry the clear stipulation that pre-major students must use the “Graded” option to apply the course to their major. In contrast, exploratory students may choose the “Pass/No Pass” option.

The recommendation was moved by Deborah Exton and seconded by Mark Thoma.

The recommendation was passed by the UGC unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned by the Chair.

The next UGC meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, May 25, 2005 at Johnson Hall Conference Room.