University Curriculum Committee
Minutes
January 22, 2016

Members Present: Brighouse (left at 10:25), Brown, Green, Howard, Ingham, Smith, Wiegmann

Members Absent: Kapust, Moser

The meeting began at: 9:04 am

I. Consent item – Minutes of the January 8, 2016 meeting
Motion by Ingham to approve, unanimously approved.

II. Discussion

Prior to delving into the topics on the agenda, the committee had a brief discussion of the role of the UCC, the school/college and departmental curriculum committees in the proposal review process.

A. Graduate Course Attribute

The committee recognizes the inherent difficulties in designing a course that is appropriate for both undergraduate and graduate students and has noted problems and inconsistencies in the course proposals submitted in the last several months where the graduate course attribute has been requested. In the interest of providing clear and comprehensive information to course proposers the graduate course attribute guidelines are being reviewed by the committee to see if there are areas where they could be clarified or provide more explicit information.

The graduate course attribute can be a way of meeting external standards as well as internal standards of the quality that we expect. It is important to note that the Graduate School policy states that just 50% of coursework taken for a graduate program needs to have the graduate attribute. All courses numbered 700 or higher have the attribute automatically. It would be ideal if all courses taken by graduate students could be numbered 700+. A number of smaller graduate programs rely on mixed (undergrad/grad) courses in order to sustain their programs. With few rules governing the use of course numbers there is a great deal of variation in how courses are numbered across campus. At this point it would be difficult to make major or sweeping changes to the policy that governs this requirement but the committee will consider smaller changes.

It is difficult to determine what “graduate level” means across the entire university, but perhaps the committee can look for common benchmarks while leaving some of the
judgement to the departments and school/colleges. Review of numerous course proposals, both new and course change over the past several months has provided examples of both well designed courses and not so well designed courses that have the graduate course attribute. The committee members agree that courses that are designed specifically for undergraduate or graduate students are fairly straightforward and the need for improvement exists in the middle area where graduate and undergraduate students are taking the same course.

It is not the intention of the UCC to develop a situation where it must police everything, the goal is to create guidelines that are broad, easy to interpret and can be used across campus. To a great extent, the guidelines that are in place currently include the points that the committee feels are important but it is possible that eliciting the information in a different way might be more effective. Rather than wordsmithing the document, it might be better to ask specific questions on the course proposal form and have the answers reflected on the syllabus. For example could the proposal ask questions along the lines of:
- How is the content graduate level?
- How is the assessment graduate level?

In the construction of the syllabus proposers should think about the learning goals, content and assessment. It might also be useful for proposers to think about how instruction would be delivered differently to graduate students. There could be a different instructional component where the graduate students would be mentored or instructed in a different way. If the same content is delivered to undergraduate and graduate students how can different assessment of learning be made? While it is fine to have different grading scales for undergraduate and graduate students this is not sufficient; the differences need to be substantive and reflect the differences in undergraduate and graduate education.

Some of the responsibility for determining whether standards have been met is up to the department as they are the ones who are closest to the discipline. They will play an important role in determining whether learning goals, assessment, methods and content have been considered in a way that is in line with standards in their discipline and whether the standards of the graduate course attribute have been met.

It would be helpful if the committee could provide some discipline-neutral examples or describe what is not ok (it is not sufficient to have a higher point requirement for graduate students).

- Intellectually challenging.
- Additional work that requires critical and independent thinking.
- Participate in a way that encourages production rather than just use of the knowledge.
- Everyone reads the novel; the graduate student reads secondary sources that relate to that novel.
- Evidence that the students are being trained in the discipline.
- Assessment will use a different rubric to assess graduate students.
- Articulate how the graduate assessment of in-depth knowledge, synthesis or higher order thinking. How are you going to instruct graduate students differently that will reflect the critical and independent thinking?
- This could include additional meetings, more assignments, or different readings.
- Have separate sets of learning outcomes. These outcomes should be reflected in the assessment, content, expectations etc.
- It isn’t enough to simply require longer papers or adjust the final grading scale so that an A for a graduate student is 93 or above and for an undergraduate it is 90 or above etc.

Committee members will review the existing guidelines and bring recommendations for changes to the course proposal form and/or the graduate course attribute guidelines to the February 12th meeting.

**B. Explanation of grading on sample syllabus**

While reviewing course proposals over the past several months, the committee has noticed that in a number of instances course proposers will indicate on the proposal that the course is using the A-F grading scale but in the sample syllabus will not include the full range of grades that are included in the UW-Madison A-F grading scale (A, AB, B, BC, C, D and F) and even occasionally, will include grades that are not part of that scale (ex. C/D). It is unclear whether the intention is to not use some of the grades or whether they have been omitted accidentally.

In the interest of wanting to be as clear as possible, the syllabus guidelines for the course proposal process will be updated to indicate that proposers should include on the sample syllabus, all grades on the grading scale and if they do not plan to use all grades (ex. the AB and BC) this should be explicitly noted.

During course proposal review the committee has also seen a number of proposals where the grading for assignments, exams and other elements that make up the final grade do not correspond with the criteria for the final grade (ex. numeric ranges on assignments and exams but the final grading scale is described qualitatively. Discussion on this topic was cut short due to lack of time and will be taken up again at the next meeting.

**C. Ongoing discussion about credit hours for distance and other non-classroom based courses**

Tabled due to lack of time.

**III. New Business**

Meeting adjourned at 11:00 am.