2010-2011 Faculty Committee on Academic Planning

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Year-End Report

I. Curricular Review

As part of our normal course of business, the Academic Planning Committee review proposals for changes to majors or proposals for new majors.

Proposals are sent from the Faculty Curriculum Committee, which in the past few years has shared proposals electronically rather than sending them to APC (or Budget or General Education) after Curriculum has passed them. We also use a common timeframe for all 3 committees’ review of proposals so as to shorten the time between submitting the proposal to Curriculum (and possibly modifying it in response to each committee’s review) and getting it before the Senate for a final vote.

We reviewed new majors in exercise science, dance, and public health (also a proposed major in African American Studies, but this proposal was pulled before we had time to discuss it.)

All review of new programs came to a halt in February with the provost’s moratorium on new program proposals.

In addition, several departments substantially revised their existing majors (COMM), added a BA option to their existing BS degree (PSYC and MATH). APC reviewed these proposals carefully and discussed them with representatives from these departments.

The APC were strong supporters of all of this year’s proposals. But we think there are several ways the review process could be improved and lead to better planning and sharing of information. Next year’s committee will be working with Associate Provost Lynne Ford to improve the process:

--The CHE approval process is different from our Senate schedule. As the Provost explained to the Senate earlier this year, the approval process has many steps that require about a year, at best. If a proposals is approved by the Senate in the late Spring, it can be two years before the program gets into the catalog, whose deadline is early April. APC, Budget, and FCC could revise their schedule of meetings and deadlines for proposals, to make it easier to process things early in fall, and/or could agree to review proposals between April and August, so the proposals could come up for a vote very early in Fall Semester.

--Curriculum forms currently do not match the forms being requested by CHE or by the Graduate School. They don’t ask how the major develops students’ skills and knowledge through a beginning, middle, and end, although according to the Curriculum Committee’s website, this is taken into consideration when the proposals are reviewed. These forms should be updated to reflect the information that will be needed for approval outside the College, and to reflect the factors that Curriculum, APC and Budget will actually be looking for when they review proposals.

--It would also be helpful for the Curriculum Committee or the Senate to supply models of successful proposals, and would probably be a good idea to devise a portal that could be accessed at the same time by all the committees who’ll review the same proposals. This whole process should then be made clear to all faculty on the Senate website.
APC, like Budget, has functioned as **liaisons to the Faculty Senate** this year: the Speaker regularly invited APC & Budget chairs to speak to the Senate about new program proposals, before general Senate discussion of that proposal began. Sometimes our position has not been just approval but enthusiastic support, and in the absence of clearer information on proposal forms (see above), we have been able to clarify for the Senate how a new program will, in fact, help carry out the College’s academic mission. If the Speaker plans to continue to request “official” reports from APC & Budget before the Senate discusses curricular proposals, perhaps the item should be noted on the Senate agenda. Our reports to the Senate could also be occasions for APC and Budget to supply greater context for these proposed programs, noting College plans that we have become aware of because we have been sitting on planning committees. This “big picture” perspective also makes the APC (and Budget) potential resources for departments who are beginning to craft a proposal. In 2009-10 we did more advisory work with departments before a completed proposal came to Curriculum, but we have not done as much of that in 2010-11.

**II. Changed bylaws**

At the request of the Speaker, we crafted additional language for the bylaws description of the APC’s duties, which now explicitly state that our charge includes review of any proposals for the termination of programs that are brought to the committee by the Provost.

**III. Study of online education**

Our year-long study of online education at the College has culminated in a report to the Senate describing the conditions under which online education can be of high quality and thus can support the College’s academic mission. The report also recommended that a faculty committee be given permanent charge for oversight. Committee on Educational Technology, Academic Planning, Academic Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment are all committees that could conceivably be asked to keep an eye on developments in online education at the College. This kind of teaching is highly dependent on excellent infrastructure and technological support, so it’s critical that a faculty committee keep an eye on whether or not the College is supporting online education enough to maintain quality.

**IV. Planning Committees with both faculty and administrators**

Presently, members of Budget and of APC sit on the Planning and Priorities Committee, a group that also includes the Academic Council (provost & associate provosts, academic VPs, deans), and present and past Faculty Speakers. Other ad hoc committees have also made use of PPC faculty reps who’ve been present for and contributed to discussions about all facets of the academic mission of the College. Discussions included such topics as plans for classroom construction, state legislative reaction to tuition increases, and reports on the shifting landscape of the “yield rate” (number of accepted students who actually choose the College).

These PPC meetings began in 2009 and were held at the same time slot as Academic Council, Wednesdays from 10-12. For various reasons, in 2010-2011, many of the PPC meetings were cancelled. Faculty have not been able to participate in as many discussions as last year, and the meetings have been so irregular that I have not managed to deputize any other APC member to begin attending for the sake of continuity with next year’s committee.
Faculty serving on PPC and other planning committees are, in our view, an underutilized resource, both for the Senate and for the Office of Academic Affairs. We hope for a return to a more regular schedule of long-range planning meetings at which faculty and administrators are not just listening to reports, but also discussing ways to implement the strategic plan, giving feedback on problems on the horizon that we may be able to help solve, and getting current information on the distribution of resources across campus. If no faculty senators are able to hear discussions about where new lines go, or how many student credit hours are generated in various schools, for example, we will not have a realistic picture of the resources that are “in play” and can make little meaningful contribution when we do our ordinary work of reviewing new programs.

Since 10-12 on Wednesday is prime teaching time, except for department chairs and others in higher administrative positions, it is difficult for faculty to arrange or change their schedule to accommodate this time slot. If faculty are to continue to serve on the PPC, APC and Budget should be notified of the meeting schedule for the semester in time for them to arrange their teaching obligations accordingly. Committee members besides the chairs need some experience with these meetings to assure continuity from year to year; with enough advance notice, they can find a way to attend at least one or two of these meetings. Since so many of the PPC meetings this year were cancelled, we have not really been able to provide that level of continuity for next year’s committee.

IV. Collaboration with Budget Committee
At the suggestion of the Budget chair, APC tried meeting jointly with Budget this year, and concluded that this seems to be a good idea at least some of the time; the joint discussion enabled APC to get clarification on budgetary issues, and allowed APC to share with Budget our ideas on why a proposal was or was not in keeping with the College’s academic mission.

Next year’s APC should consider scheduling some of its meetings jointly with Budget. It’s not entirely clear why the two committees should remain divided, since Budget’s oversight is not very technical or detailed, but often consists of “eyeballing” the budgetary impact of a proposal and rendering a more holistic than technical opinion on whether it’s a good use of College resources. Certainly it would be more convenient for departments who are proposing a new program to meet jointly with Budget/APC rather than attending two separate meetings. One disadvantage to combining the committees would be that fewer faculty would be sitting on planning and ad hoc committees, since both Budget and APC are currently able to send reps to PPC meetings. If the two committees were combined, there should still be robust faculty representation on PPC meetings; at least one faculty member attending the PPC meetings should have some knowledge of the institution’s budget, and at least one faculty member should have experience on curricular matters & the College’s academic mission.