Academic Planning Committee
2011-2012 Activity Summary

Committee Members:
Burton Callicott, Karen Chandler, Lynne Ford (ex officio), Alex Kasman (chair), Nancy Nenno, Bob Perkins, Moore Quinn, Jeffrey Yost

Review of New Programs
We read and discussed all new program proposals and modifications to existing degree programs. In most cases, we simply approved of the proposals as written. In a few cases, we communicated with other committees or the authors of the proposal and (we hope) had a positive influence on the results. Most notably, we had many discussions regarding the program that came to be known as the Bachelor of Professional Studies, a degree completion program to be offered on the North Campus. Also notable was the proposal from Health and Human Performance that came to us in October because one committee member noted that the proposal listed more hours than were allowed by a “rule” in the catalog, sparking a discussion that became our major activity of the year (see next item).

Major Size
For as many years as we were able to check, the course catalog contained remarks indicating that no major required more than a certain number of hours (most recently it said 54 hours, but prior to 2006 it read 43 hours) and that every department offered a major of 36 hours or less. There was widespread disagreement about what this meant (e.g. Were they rules or mere statements of fact? How were the hours required to be counted?) as well as widespread resentment regarding apparent uneven enforcement. Moreover, the offices of the registrar and institutional effectiveness assured us that the College was putting itself in jeopardy for reaccreditation by virtue of the fact that the sizes of majors as reported in the catalog were inconsistent and misleading.

As a consequence, our committee sought to create a rule that would provide a consistent and informative measure for the size of the major, and then to determine what should happen to the statements in the catalog regarding major sizes. We eventually concluded that (in order to avoid being misleading) major size should take into account all courses that are required either explicitly or through prerequisites regardless of discipline or department (with the possible exception of those that can be avoided through placement without accruing credits). In order to capture the options that exist within majors, we decided that the size should be reported as a range of values, from a minimum to a maximum value. We also revised the rules so as to continue to encourage departments to offer small majors without requiring it. These proposals were brought before the senate. However, in the process of getting them approved by the senate
(and over the course of several months), they were further modified. In the end, the size of a major as measured in credit hours was indeed specified to include prerequisites and all required courses regardless of discipline or department, but only the minimum (and no maximum) value needs to be reported. Moreover, there are no explicit rules regarding how large a major can or should be, though proposals to senate committees for new majors or that change major sizes need to specify the size and offer a justification for it.

**One Catalog Rule / Royalties for Faculty**

Lynne Ford brought us a proposal for changing the policy regarding the way a student may select a catalog for use in degree audits. In particular, the proposal would allow separate catalogs to be used for each major and for the general education requirements, but restricted the years that were available for selection. In particular, the proposal would set the catalog year for a major initially as the year in which the major was declared and would allow it to be updated only to a later and never an earlier year. Our committee offered opinions and critiques, expressing particular concern about not allowing a student to choose a catalog year for a major during which they were in attendance at the College but prior to their declaration. We also discussed a proposal from Academic Affairs relating to the potential conflict of interest in faculty authors requiring students to purchase books for which they might earn royalties. Of course, our primary focus was on how such a policy might affect academic quality of courses and made a corresponding recommendation to Bev Diamond, who was drafting the proposal.

**Credit Overlap**

Our committee was asked to look into the possibility of putting a restriction on the number of hours that can be shared between majors. Currently, there is a rather strong restriction preventing the sharing of any required courses between minors, concentrations, tracks or cognates, and also strong restrictions in the case of sharing between a BS and a BA, but no restriction at all on the sharing of courses between majors offering the same type of degree. The registrar argued that this allows students to occasionally obtain a double major without taking many additional courses, and that this weakens the value of the diploma. It was proposed that we should adopt a policy, like those apparently in force at many other institutions, saying something like “at least 50% of the credits used to meet the requirements of a degree must be distinct from those credits used to meet other major/minor requirements”.

Several factors left our committee disinclined to act on this proposal, including: (a) we were offered few examples of situations in which this was a problem (and some of the examples that were provided at first turned out not to be problems after all) (b) in general, faculty seem less concerned about this than the administration and tend to think “if they met all of the requirements of the major, why not give them the degree?” (c) some math majors were told that they could not earn a minor in certain disciplines that would arguably make good pairings with this major (e.g. computer science, physics, etc.) due to the existing rules regarding minors and most importantly (d) since the registrar’s office and DegreeWorks could not handle such a rule themselves, the only way to implement it would be for every advisor of a student with a double
A letter should be sent to each program head explaining that there is a problem on campus with students earning two degrees with a significant amount of overlap in credit hours. The letter should explain both that this weakens the College (making our degrees look less rigorous) and that other institutions have rules prohibiting such overlap. The letter should then request a list of majors and minors which allow such a large amount of overlap with their own programs that a rule should be made preventing students from obtaining both degrees. (As a suggestion, any degree for which more than half of the degree requirements could be met by shared courses should be listed.) We foresee that there would be some disagreement about which combinations of programs should be prohibited. (For example, the heads of two such programs might not agree with each other. In addition, some programs may choose to be more restrictive than others.) It is hoped that the involvement of deans and the provost could help everyone to reach a consensus. At that point, the list of prohibited combinations would be brought to the senate for approval. The current rule restricting courses shared by minors/concentrations/tracks etc. would be replaced with this new list of specific prohibitions. It would be implemented by making it the responsibility of a program, at the point that they sign up a student, to ensure that they do not already have a declared major/minor that would violate the rules. Of course, next year’s committee is free to reconsider any of these decisions. Yet, it was our belief, at the time of this meeting, that this solution was the closest to ideal: being most clear to students, the least amount of work for faculty and the registrar’s office, sufficiently loosening the restrictions on minor/concentration combinations to allow reasonable ones, but also adding reasonable restrictions on double majors that are not currently in place. (Note: The future APC should be sure to keep the registrar, the curriculum committee and the standards committee informed of progress on this topic.)

Distance Education
We had some discussions about Distance Education and the need for oversight from a faculty committee, but these never progressed very far. It was determined that the report on this subject made by the previous year’s APC to the senate was still valid and timely. So, there was no need for us to offer a new report or proposal, but that we still hoped some committee would undertake the task of supervising trends in DE at the College.

Changing Role of the Committee
This year, our committee spent more time discussing rules that would apply to all majors than we did on reviewing individual proposals. In discussions with the Speaker of the Faculty and the
chair of the Curriculum Committee, it was agreed that this would be the role of the APC in the future. In particular, we proposed that the Curriculum Committee would spend less time worrying about the paperwork involved in the proposals it considers (with the Registrar’s Office doing more of that aspect) so that they could concentrate on the academic merits of the proposals, and that the APC would therefore need to worry less about individual proposals and instead would concentrate on all academic aspects of College-wide trends and policies. It is hoped that the system by which proposals are submitted and approved can be streamlined, making greater use of a Web interface for both aspects, and would help to formalize these different committee roles.

In addition, since registrar Cathy Boyd was a frequent and extremely helpful guest at our meetings during which we considered these College-wide policy changes, it has been proposed that a representative of the registrar’s office be made an ex officio member of the APC, as is a representative from Academic Affairs. Next year’s APC may consider making such an official change to the committee’s charge, and in any case is encouraged to at least invite Cathy Boyd to the committee meetings.

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April 2012