

## **The University of Washington Faculty Council on Instructional Quality**

The Faculty Council on Instructional Quality met Friday, April 18, at 8:30 a.m. in 36 Gerberding Hall. Chair Jan Carline presided.

**PRESENT:** *Professors* Carline, Devasia, Greenwald, Kyes, McGovern, Wenderoth  
*Ex officio* Bowen, Bridges, Conquest, Jacobson, Lewis, Lowell, Brooks

**ABSENT:** *Professors* Copland, Coutu, Hoffer, Mulligan, Nichter, Reinhall  
*Ex officio* Croft, Susan Clark, Pitre, Judi Clark, Trudeau

**Guest:** Jerry Gillmore, Paul LePore, Rich Roth, Bill Shirey

Carline called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

### **Synopsis**

1. Approve minutes
2. Approve agenda
3. Discuss suggestions from Dr. Gillmore re the use of student evaluations.
4. Discuss improvements to ICD, SLO, and other curriculum descriptive systems.

### **Agenda**

The agenda was approved.

### **Minutes**

The minutes of the March meeting were approved.

### **Discussion of the use of student evaluations.**

In response to Regent William Gates' concerns about the level of academic challenge at the UW, the FCIQ has been looking at ways to prove that students are adequately challenged. FCIQ is looking for a way to take the information from course descriptions and combine it with Web page syllabus software, so that faculty can publish course information that can be searched by students, and also by administrators who are looking at the content of the curriculum. This would provide a much richer information set that would reveal the rigorous content that now exists, or draw needed attention to those courses where improvements should be made.

Carline posed three questions for discussion: Is such a system worthwhile? What should it include? How are we going to do it?

Mary Pat Wenderoth commented that the underlying reason for the discussion about evaluations, databases, and course application revisions has been to find ways to help faculty stop and reflect on what they're teaching, and to ensure that the University's commitment to academic challenge is part of every step of course creation and evaluation. Nana Lowell added that the one intent of the solutions that have been discussed is to integrate them into faculty members' normal work, so they do not become just an added burden without meaning.

Wenderoth said that the process of ensuring challenge should arise from a question each faculty member should ask about each course - "What do you want your students to be able to do at the end of this class?" The answer might be "Become a novel problem solver," as opposed to memorizing information.

If the faculty stop and ask themselves this question, and then ask whether the answer is an appropriate challenge at this level of education, challenge can be built in to each class. Changes may have to be made in the classes to achieve the desired level of challenge, and evaluation methods may have to be changed to determine whether the students have met the challenge.

Lowell said this has to do with making course objectives more visible to faculty and students. If objectives are assessed and found to be too low, they can and should be revised. If the level of challenge is high enough, you can move to evaluating whether the students are achieving the challenge.

Developing a database approach would be a help to OEA in doing the high level assessments they are required to do for the State, Lowell said. In the case of Information and Technical Literacy, for example, the database would reveal the courses in which this learning objective is met.

Bill Shirey said there is an Internet Course Description (ICD) database system, which was created four years ago to help students better select their classes and avoid so many dropped classes. More than 1000 course descriptions include what students can expect to learn from the class, the general method of instruction, recommended preparation, general nature of assignments, basis on which grades are assigned, and the capability for a Web page link to more information. This is stored in a database indefinitely, and represents an individual course by a specific professor. When the course is taught, it is linked to the time schedule so it can be selected. The system was developed by Jerry Gillmore and has remained static for about 5 years.

Gillmore said the number one response in his survey of what helped student learning is "having the course materials on the Web." The ICD system is so flexible that it even allows faculty to leave everything blank except the link to their Web page that tells everything about the course. Unfortunately, no one has pushed this system to the faculty so it is not in wide use. Lowell would like to see linkage between the ICD system and the Student Learning Objectives (SLO).

Paul Le Pore described the Curriculum Compass, which allows students to "wander through" 4000 classes, 250 different curricular areas, 17 colleges, and 180 different majors. Even students who are quite sophisticated about the UW are often at a loss as to what's available, but with the addition of appropriate keywords and meta tags, it would be possible to search this database by categories. Each course could be meta tagged with information as "high-level" as the SLO's and could graduate down to any level of minutiae departments and faculty members prefer. This would allow students, faculty, and administrators to search for factors or characteristics common to any class in the database, and would also be a great help to advisors - a feature similar to Amazon's "if you like this, you'll like..."

This database could be automated as new classes come online. Existing classes could be meta tagged for not much money by a cadre of RA's sent to departments to collect syllabi. The I-School has experts at doing this. Students could then go to My UW and make sense of the courses offered in the 17 colleges and 180 majors. Le Pore reported that Arts & Sciences is interested in doing this.

When all the information is meta tagged, Lowell said, faculty members could make changes if they so desired. Carline said that administrators could also get reports that could allow them to compare the levels of challenge in all the courses in their departments. If they're not happy with the level of specificity they see, they can talk about changes and make them. Lowell said the database should

support development from the bottom up as well as from the top down.

Jacobsen commented that this project could tie in with faculty portfolios for promotion and tenure, since it would be easier to describe the intent of the course and the challenges built in to it. The information would be invaluable in interpreting student ratings.

Lowell raised the practical question of whether this project is truly feasible - how difficult would it be to tie all this information together and make it searchable in as many ways as we want? What would it really take?

LePore estimated that it would take \$400,000 and two years to do the job, and it could easily be done. Tom Lewis said there should be more robust connections between the SLO's, the LO's, the ICD's, and meta tags. Shirey responded that this could be done with key words. Carline would like to see Web syllabus software used that could supply these keywords to the database.

Loveday Conquest summed up the wants for this system - one-stop shopping, a simple template, links to the course catalog, a searchable database. Carline asked for a small group to work on the specifics of a proposal. Lowell would like to bring in information from the different constituencies - students, faculty, departments. Lewis agreed in principle, but believes it would be important to go to these constituencies with a proposal and then get reactions, rather than taking a "blue-sky" approach.

Gillmore asked Le Pore what FCIQ can do for the Compass system. LePore replied that it would be important for FCIQ to get support from departments and faculty. Money would also be important. Carline believes that if the will is there to do the project, the money will be found. A small group can rough out what we want, then present it to FCIQ, then to others. George Bridges said he thinks this is a great idea, and gives Paul and Rick a lot of credit for it.

The working group for this project will include Paul LePore, Rich Roth, Bill Shirey, Nana Lowell, Tom Lewis, Mary Pat Wenderoth, and Janice DeCosmo from George Bridges' office. Carline will convene the group. Perhaps the working group could do a prototype that could be scaled up.

### **Recommendations for Student Evaluations - Update**

The Recommendations on Student Evaluations were not presented to SEC, Carline reported to the Council, since Gillmore was concerned about the quality of the writing and had some other concerns. Lowell and Gillmore reworked the language, retaining the sense of the recommendations. Lowell felt the writing had been uneven due to the many drafts it had been through, and should be rewritten in one voice.

Gillmore explained that he rewrote the recommendations in parallel structure and broke item five into two parts. After discussion of the various wording changes, and some minor revisions to Gillmore's work, it was moved, seconded and passed to accept the revised version of the recommendations. Gillmore will make the agreed-upon changes and Carline will get the recommendations on the next SEC agenda.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:00 a.m. *Minutes by Linda Fullerton, Recorder.*