

University of Washington
Faculty Council on Instructional Quality
Thursday, April 14, 2005

Synopsis:

1. Announcements, minutes, update on Faculty Conversation proposal
2. Pick-A-Prof discussion
 - a) Look at copies of web site
 - b) Review copies of grade reports currently sent to department chairs
 - c) Discussion of contextual information required for faculty and students
 - d) Review student comments on the site
3. SOTL update

Chair Jan Carline called the meeting to order at 9:03 a.m. The minutes were not approved, due to lack of quorum.

Announcements, minutes, update on SOTL, update on Faculty Conversation proposal

The SOTL arrangements are proceeding apace. Wayne Jacobson is seeing to lots of details (who will MC introductions, etc.) and has advised the participants to set up in Mary Gates Hall after 1:00 p.m. Wayne brought extra flyers and asked FCIQ members to take them for posting in their home departments and elsewhere. There has been a banner advertising SOTL on the UWin page. Nana Lowell will ask the new Information Specialist in her office to come and take photos. The Provost will be attending and will speak. Susan Jeffords will invite any other deans or dignitaries FCIQ wishes. For next year, the Tacoma and Bothell campuses (who are doing some interesting and innovative things) should be encouraged to participate.

The Office of Minority Affairs received 41 proposals for grants to be funded from the President's Diversity Fund, all at top dollar. They will select 15 or 16 proposals, and look for more money to fund as many more as they can. Carline said the FCIQ proposal is still in the running for funding.

Pick-A-Prof discussion

During the March 29 meeting, Susan Jeffords asked FCIQ to assess a commercial Website called Pick-A-Prof.com that contains grades awarded by UW professors and obtained under a Public Information request. Jeffords would like FCIQ to come up with strategies for mitigating the effects of having raw UW grades posted on this or any Website. Also at issue is whether the UW should and will continue to supply the grade information, and whether there is value in the UW getting involved with some kind of portal that could clarify the information on the Pick-a-Prof site.

FCIQ members were asked to visit the Website and report on their impressions of it. Carline reported that if you register as faculty you cannot access all information on the site because some of it is for "students only," but there is a place where faculty members can sign up and can get comments about themselves from students. This is free for faculty from participating schools.

Students can get student reviews and grade histories. Carline provided a copy of the grade history info, which uses straight letter grades, with no "half" grades and no decimal grades. There is advertising on the site, and the site contacts students with advertising emails as well.

Mary Pat Wenderoth commented that Pick-A-Prof is redundant, since UW students already have most of this information in a better format, plus course evaluations that Pick-A-Prof does not have. The only difference is the grade information. Maybe the grade distribution and course evaluations should be on the UW instructor's Website.

Jeffords favored having this same kind of information, amplified and clarified, on a UW-developed Web-based database such as the proposed Curriculum Compass, which would allow students not just to pick professors based on the grades they assign, but to "wander through" 4000 classes, 250 different curricular areas, 17 colleges, and 180 different majors. This would allow students, faculty, and administrators to search for factors or characteristics common to any class in any school in the database, not just the professor du jour or the obvious choice. This would also be a great help to advisors - a class-selection feature similar to Amazon's feature "if you like this, you'll like..." that Wenderoth mentioned

Carline said that the Pick-a-Prof Website is slick and nice, but does not put the grades in context nor does it have enough different kinds of information to allow students to intelligently choose among the huge numbers of professors and classes offered at the UW. Wenderoth commented that Pick-a-Prof is market-driven and has been quickly done. The UW needs to stop waiting around and put together something like the Curriculum Compass or students will begin relying on commercial sites and will not have information that is as good as what they could get from the UW.

Part of the problem is the difficulty of capturing students' written verbatim comments on evaluations, though this might be done by scanner. This might be solved by doing the evaluations online, as the Med School does. Carline said that the length of the verbatim written comments by students doubles when they are done electronically. Some institutions require students to complete an evaluation to get their grades, Nana Lowell told the Council. Carline said this requires staff to follow up, and produces incomplete forms from those who don't want to do it but are forced to. Wireless technology may help in getting the evaluations done online, in the classroom.

Jacobson said faculty might like a UW evaluation system better if it included a portal where they could publish student comments of their own choosing. Carline counseled caution in what is published electronically, due to the effects of public information laws.

How do chairs use the published grade reports? Would they be missed if they disappeared? Most faculty present said they don't think chairs use the reports for anything other than local purposes, but there was no consensus as to how the reports are used.

Jeffords asked whether the UW should even respond with a UW version of this information. Would it be a burden on faculty to develop the information? Carline responded that the burden would probably fall on staff, not faculty.

It appears that more information is needed about how the grade reports are used. Lowell volunteered to send out an inquiry to departments with the next report. Carline will also talk to Paul LePore to see what he thinks about the usefulness of the report, and what work is presently being done on the Curriculum Compass.

Pick-A-Prof is a nice Website, FCIQ concluded, but the Council would prefer to see the UW beef up its own student information systems so that students can more meaningful information "at home" and so that faculty can decide whether or not they want to show grade distributions. But the system used at the UW has to be easier to use than what is presently available. Faculty do not have time to do complex Website development work, and learn Web languages, in order to communicate with students.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:30 a.m. *Minutes by Linda Fullerton, Recorder.*

Present: Carline, Coe, Wenderoth, Jacobson, Lowell, Holmes, Brooks, Jeffords

Absent: Kasonic, Kim, Gillis-Bridges, Mai, Greenwald, Kemp, Parks, Lewis, Trudeau