

University of Washington
Faculty Council on Instructional Quality
April 5, 2004

Present: Carline, Coe, Cooper, Devasia, Greenwald, Kemp, Conquest, Bowen, Jacobson, Holmes, Trudeau

Absent: Copland, McGovern, Lewis, Lowell, Pitre, Brooks

Synopsis:

1. Room scheduling policy: Departmental experiences under new policy.
2. Status of grade inflation study
3. Status of Curriculum Information System activities
4. Leadership for next year

Chair Jan Carline called the meeting to order at 1:02 p.m.

Room Scheduling Policy: Departmental experiences under new policy

In 2001, a special committee looked into classroom scheduling and wrote a policy that mandated that, by 2004, 20% of undergraduate courses or student credit hours from each department would be scheduled after 1:30. The policy further mandated that courses longer than 50 minutes could not be scheduled between 9:30 and 1:30.

During the discussion of this policy at the February, 2004 meeting, Carline asked Council members to be alert in their departments for comments on how this policy is working, and for complaints that may need to be reviewed. Council members reported no special problems due to this policy. It was the sense of the Council that the scheduling policy is not troublesome at this time, but it is worth considering in the future.

Status of grade inflation study

Tony Greenwald reported that he has been working with Nana Lowell and Jerry Gillmore to develop a new "index of challenge," using data from the UW's IAS (Instructional Assessment System). This new index would be designed to complement the current main summary evaluative index that is based on Items 1-4 on all IAS forms (see Appendix, 1). The raw material for the new index of challenge is in Items 24-29 of the IAS forms (see Appendix, 2).

In collaboration with Gillmore and Deb McGhee of the Office of Educational Assessment, Greenwald plans to conduct analyses of IAS form Items 24-29, to develop an index of challenge that could be validated, in part, by establishing that the index would distinguish UW's Distinguished Teaching Award winners from other faculty (this type of validation has previously been conducted for the adjusted evaluation index). These analyses are expected to yield the basis for a recommendation that will be presented at the May 10 FCIQ meeting.

As background, Greenwald presented data summarized from student evaluations of UW courses for a two-year period (Autumn 2001 to Summer 2003). Among other things, these data revealed the relation between grades and ratings that led to introduction of the adjusted evaluation measures in 1998. The data also revealed a previously observed relationship between grading leniency and reported work done (for Item 28), such that students report doing less work for courses in which they expected relatively high grades.

Greenwald noted that the current work done on developing an index of challenge was initially conceived as an attempt to consider ways of addressing concerns about grade inflation. Grade inflation has been a long-term trend at UW, just as at most other institutions of higher education. If instructors are motivated

to increase their courses' standing on an index of challenge, they are likely to increase course workloads (which should yield numerically higher responses in Items 24–29). Increased workloads are likely to go hand in hand with reduced grading leniency, Greenwald said.

Status of the curriculum information system

In the absence of a report from the CIS subcommittee, Carline reported a development he learned at the Undergraduate Advisory Council meeting. The College of Arts and Sciences Dean has hired people to help specific departments with their objectives. This effort is distinct from the broad Student Learning Objectives – Dean Hodges wants departments to develop their own objectives. This has been in the works for several months, but the departments that are receiving help were just recently identified.

Other Concerns

2004-2005 Chair: Carline advised the Council that, after two years as FCIQ Chair, he is relinquishing the position. He described the position and the time commitment, and asked for volunteers to chair the Council. It's a good way to get to know new people, he told the Council, and to find out more about what's going on at the University.

Limiting access to course evaluations on the Web: At present, student course evaluations are posted on the Web and literally are available for anyone in the world to look at. Some faculty members object to this. It would be possible to password-protect this information and limit access to UW faculty, staff, and students who have NetID. To comply with Public Disclosure laws, the information could still be obtained via a written public disclosure request. Should Web access be limited to UW faculty, staff and students with NetID? This will be a future agenda item for the Council's consideration, so members should be thinking about it.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:10. *Minutes by Linda Fullerton, Recorder.*

Appendix – IAS Form Items

1. Items 1–4 yield ratings, on a scale from 0 (=very poor) to 5 (=excellent) scale, of (1) the course as a whole, (2) the course content, (3) the instructor's contribution to the course, and (4) the instructor's effectiveness in teaching the subject matter. The summary index averaged from Items 1–4 assesses students' liking of the instruction that they receive. This is an evaluative index. Starting in 1998, Items 1–4 individually, and the summary based on their average, have been reported an adjusted form. This adjustment was based on research (by Greenwald and Gillmore) establishing that variations in grading leniency, class size, and students' reasons for enrollment influenced these items in ways that could not justifiably be credited to variations in quality of instruction. The details of the adjustment procedure are described at <http://www.washington.edu/oea/uwrepts.htm> (follow link to “adjusted medians”).
2. Items 24–27 ask students to report a comparison of the course being rated to “other courses you have taken” on a 7-point scale that ranges from 1 (= much lower than average) to 7 (= much higher than average). These items ask for ratings of (24) the intellectual challenge of the course, (25) the amount of effort you put into this course, (26) the amount of effort to succeed in this course, and (27) your involvement in this course (doing assignments, attending classes, etc.). Item 28 requests report of number of “hours per week spent on this course, including attending classes, doing readings, reviewing notes, writing papers, and any other course related work.” Item 29 requests report of the number of hours, “from the total average hours [reported for Item 28]” that students considered to be “valuable in advancing your education.”