

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

The Faculty Council on Instructional Quality met Friday, March 7, 2003, at 10:30 a.m. in 36 Gerberding Hall. Chair Jan Carline presided.

PRESENT: *Professors* Carline, Coutu, Greenwald, Nichter, Wenderroth
Ex officio Conquest, Jacobson, Lewis, Lowell, Susan Clark, Trudeau
ABSENT: *Professors* Copland, Devasia, Hoffer, Kyes, McGovern, Mulligan, Reinhall
Ex officio Bridges, Croft, Bowen, Pitre, Brooks, Judi Clark

Guests: Tim Washburn, Deborah Wiegand, Debra Friedman

Carline called the meeting to order at 10:33 a.m.

Synopsis

1. Approve minutes
2. Results of Senate Executive Committee meeting (quick review)
3. New Course Applications and Student Learning Objectives
Outcomes Project

Agenda

The agenda was approved.

Minutes

The minutes of the February meeting were approved.

Senate Executive Committee (SEC) meeting

Carline reported that there was a report, but little discussion, about the pending business of reorganizing the Faculty Councils. The proposal on the table is to further shared governance by developing joint University Councils with equal numbers of faculty and administration members, and with all members having the vote.

The SEC-appointed Special Committee on Faculty Senate Council Organization (SCFSCO, chaired by Steve Buck) met to discover how this proposal might be implemented, and decided to use the Faculty Council on Research and the Advisory Council on Accountability as test cases. Research Council members subsequently identified many representatives who might be included on a joint University Council on Research, but such a council would be quite large and some FCR members feel it might be unwieldy.

Carline said that the Faculty Council on Academic Standards (chaired by Carolyn Plumb) and the Faculty Council on Educational Outreach (chaired by Steve Buck) have explored a merger and discovered that the resultant council would be much too large and probably unworkable. During the SEC meeting, Steve Buck reported on the progress of the proposal before SCFSCO. "Oddly, there was no discussion of the report," said Carline. "It just sat there, to use an old Frank Zappa term, like a salt pancake on the land." Carline concluded that the lack of response from SEC members stemmed from the fact that the SCFSCO report did not include recommendations.

The Advisory Committee on Accountability (ACA), co-chaired by Nana Lowell and Barry Witham, is a new version of the Advisory Board on Accountability that was chaired by Debra Friedman. This committee oversees the University's compliance with the Washington State Accountability Requirements, so it seemed like a good candidate for a joint council. ACA has met and is moving forward, Lowell reported.

Carline also reported that the chairs of FCAS, FCIQ, and one other Faculty Council were made members of the Undergraduate Advisory Committee, which advises George Bridges.

During the SEC meeting, Carline said, the Recommendations for the Use of Student Evaluations developed by FCIQ this year were extensively discussed. Significant comments included:

- Item 1 -- Faculty wanted it emphasized to the point of overstatement that student ratings are not enough to use when rating faculty.
- Item 5 -- Some of the branch campuses were concerned about the establishment of a University standard for evaluations, because some faculty members report being told by the Provost that any student rating under 4.0 is cause for serious concern.

Carline has revised these and other minor wording issues, and has emailed SEC members the changes, but has not received any comments. SEC tabled the FCIQ recommendations until the next regular meeting. Lowell volunteered to accompany Carline to the next SEC meeting to answer any technical questions that arise about the methods of the Office of Educational Assessment.

Course Applications

Debbie Wiegand, Mary Pat Wenderroth and Nana Lowell formed a subcommittee to discuss Course Applications. Wenderroth reported that the subcommittee looked at the course application to determine how it might be changed to introduce Student Learning Objectives into courses.

The subcommittee concluded that this would be most effectively done by starting slowly with new courses, rather than by trying to revise old courses. The change might come in the syllabus section of the form, which could be revised to include "expected learning outcomes" -- i.e., what do you want your students to be able to do at the end of the class, what will you do in class to enable students to accomplish the objective, and how will you know the objective has been accomplished?

Getting faculty to complete a new learning objectives section could be tricky. There should be some way to make certain that this portion of the course application is considered and completed – enforcement by the governing bodies may be needed. Wenderroth talked to Paul LePore, Director of Undergraduate Program Development for Arts and Sciences, and learned that he is definitely in favor of the learning objectives and would like to see them used across campus. However, LePore cautioned that faculty need to be supported in that effort. Wenderroth directed him to the CIDR Website where there is a great deal of help available, but LePore said there might need to be more help than that for the faculty. Arts and Sciences is making a big push in the next few months for learning objectives to be stated not just for new courses, but for all courses. Wenderroth said this may be a bigger task than FCIQ would want to attempt.

Carline said FCIQ should consider what recommendations the Council wants to make to the campus community about course applications, bearing in mind that there are some other things going on in this same general arena:

- Student Learning Objectives (Debra Friedman). These are very high level objectives that are not very specific to courses, but which some departments have adapted to fit specific courses.
- Curriculum Compass (LePore and Rick Roth, Geography). This project was intended to identify key words and themes for all courses, particularly in Arts and Sciences, and make this available on the Web. Students could then search for patterns of ideas in courses, or for conjoined skills, so they could better understand what courses they might want to take in the future.
- Geography Department Website on Assessment (Roth). Roth put together this Website on assessment, which is still in use and is worth looking at.

Debbie Wiegand reported that the Curriculum Review Committee (CRC) was basically favorable to the change being considered by FCIQ, but there was concern about how learning outcomes could be evaluated. There would be

differences in the skill levels encountered in writing the outcomes, and possibly very wide variations among disciplines. Arts and Sciences covers many disciplines – would CRC be able to effectively evaluate them all?

Wiegand reported that that CRC does attempt to discover how student performance in a course will be assessed, by comparing the form and the syllabus. But this is very bare bones – there is usually not much information to indicate how the course is being assessed.

In the end, CRC did not make a recommendation as to whether the changes should be made on the form or included in the syllabus, Wiegand said.

Tim Washburn added that budget impacts are also a concern for CRC – increased workloads, fewer people to do the work, and fewer dollars to pay them. It is important that any changes be more useful than just adding information to a form that is then filed away. But if the information could be included in a database that is publicly available, it can be more widely used.

Perhaps the bigger question, said Washburn, is whether to try to do something now, or wait? Everyone on CRC felt that faculty need more information about what a good syllabus looks like – what the elements are. We might gain more by defining what a good syllabus includes, and providing examples on the Web. The syllabus is a powerful tool because it goes to the students, whereas the course form does not.

Michelle Trudeau commented that the Council had discussed building an online template for a syllabus generator. Washburn was supportive of this idea and offered to put a template up on the Web if the Council would provide the essential elements of the template. CRC supports FCIQ in this effort, said Washburn, but they don't want to see the result end up in a file in the Registrar's Office. He wondered if the idea couldn't be integrated into the library keyword system, which could then bring up available courses as well as books.

Wenderroth suggested that the Instructor Class Description (ICD) system might be a useful place for keywords to be used, but Wiegand said she didn't think ICD is searchable. Nana Lowell will contact Computing and Communications to clarify what ICD connects to. It would be good if this turned out to be keyword searchable – perhaps by Google? It would be important to identify what to put into the course description so can be effectively searched.

Washburn said the paper catalogue may not be published next biennium – if the only catalogue is online, it would make sense to expand the online course descriptions. This would allow CRC to incorporate materials that are now in different places, though it would not solve the problem of different individuals teaching the same course.

In the Catalyst tools for building a Web page, Carline said, there is a format for a course description/syllabus that already has space for learning objectives. Soon, students will be able to download Student Learning Objectives from the courses they are taking, and accumulate them on a Web page that will show their personal progress toward completing their own learning objectives. This would also be a help to advisers. Tracking yourself as a student, Wenderroth commented, is becoming almost as complex as going through school.

Student Learning Objectives (Friedman)

From the Accreditation homepage: "The purpose of the Student Learning Objectives (SLO) initiative is to better understand the characteristics of the learning experiences that UW faculty offer to undergraduate students. Each learning experience will be encoded, using University-level learning objectives, as well as departmental learning objectives, if desired. When compiled for a department, program, or major, for a set of students (e.g., all seniors), or for UW graduates as a whole, this information will add considerably to the portfolio of the assessment of student learning at the UW. While there is a great deal of information about student learning at the course level, and, in some cases, even by program, there is much less understanding about the learning experiences of students as a whole. While these data will form the basis of the analysis to address NWASC, Commission on Colleges and Universities, they will also become available to all units on an on-going basis for their own purposes. In time, students will also be able to use learning objectives to help fashion their educational goals."

Meeting notes:

Student Learning Objectives have the potential to answer what's going on in courses at the meta- level, Debra Friedman told FCIQ.

A good example of the use of SLOs is in the Writing Committee that was convened to discover how students write and how they ought to write. To assess this, the committee looked into where writing was occurring. They discovered that more than 1300 of the 5000 courses at the UW rate writing at 25% or more of the course objectives. Nine hundred of these courses are in the College of Arts and Sciences. We can, therefore, test our assumptions about where on the UW campus writing is taught and valued as an objective.

This is important for accreditation purposes, said Friedman, but it is also important to return this information to faculty members so they will know that writing is being taught and valued, even if their own courses do not focus on teaching writing.

All disciplines value critical thinking, said Friedman, but critical thinking may have different meanings in Biology and in Sociology. It is important that UW faculty are free to assign their own interpretations of critical thinking instead of having it imposed upon them or trying to teach externally-defined concepts.

Wenderroth commented that it is important to define skills versus SLO concepts. For example, it is imperative that her students learn what blood pressure is, but should they also understand that knowing this skill is part of analytical thinking? Friedman said it is not so important that any two people have the same definition of analytical thinking.

Carline observed that the biggest disjuncture is how students are being assessed. Faculty can say they are teaching analytical thinking but their assessment modes are totally recall, and students will report what they experience. FCIQ could shape the feedback that goes back to units, said Friedman, and that could be added and returned to departments.

Lowell mentioned that Rick Roth is doing good reporting on evaluations for ABET, using the back of the OEA evaluation form This is an automatic system that can provide departments with a degree of match between what students saw and what faculty taught. Reports from those evaluations could be directed to the Deans, Directors and Chairs, if this would not be too political.

Wenderroth said she would be glad to see such a report – it would help her know whether students actually know when they're learning, for example, analytical thinking. Sometimes they don't know what analytical thinking is, unless you say "This is analytical thinking," Wenderroth added. It would be interesting to see what the match is, or how far off it is. Lowell said the capability for this kind of reporting does exist, and faculty can always take advantage of it.

Tom Lewis said that the ICD system could be expanded to include the SLOs, and keyword functionality could be added. This would result in a fairly robust set of things for students to search on, and would be relatively easy to do. Carline and Wenderroth would like FCIQ to have a meeting with a laptop and LCD projector, so Lewis could

demonstrate where the various pieces are and how they might connect to increase information about courses for both faculty and students.

Lowell said the kind of system Lewis described would facilitate the discussions her office needs to have in order to fulfill their student assessment requirements.

Tony Greenwald asked how many databases are involved - he is aware of Student Learning Objectives, syllabi, OEA, ICD and the course catalogue. Is this all the same information in different forms? Lewis said these databases do not contain duplicate information - these are all different pieces of information. Greenwald asked whether all these pieces of information can be connected. Carline is certain that, with the proper vision, it can be done. As a Council, FCIQ can explore an information design and make recommendations for ways it can be implemented.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:04. *Minutes by Linda Fullerton, Recorder.*