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Undergraduate Council Meeting: 2014: 09 : 24

Undergraduate Council

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Undergraduate Council Meeting Minutes
24 September 2014, 2:00 p.m., Piano Man Building

Members Present: Tom Ainscough (chair, COB), Bonnie Braun (COE), Linda Crossman (Registrar), Joan Eldridge (Academic Advising), Kevin Wang (CAS), Jim Schnur (LIB)

Regrets: None

Guests: None

Meeting: Called to order at 2:05 p.m. with quorum present by Tom

Minutes: N/A

New Business

Membership for 2014-2015 Academic Year

Those in attendance reaffirmed that they the duly appointed representatives of their colleges or academic unit. The official membership of Undergraduate Council for 2014-2015 consists of

College of Arts and Sciences: Kevin Wang  Term: entering 3rd year of service to UGC
Kate Tiedemann College of Business: Tom Ainscough  Term: entering 3rd year of service to UGC
College of Education: Bonnie Braun  Term: reappointed, new term of 2014-2016
Academic Advising: Joan Eldridge  Term: reappointed, open term
Registrar (ex-officio) Linda Crossman  Term: a member due to position held

Assignments of Duty

Selection of Chair: Tom has agreed to continue his service as chair. His self-nomination was affirmed by the membership.

Selection of Recording Secretary/Scribe: Jim has agreed to continue his service as recording secretary/scribe. His self-nomination was affirmed by the membership.

Announcements

Change in Credit Hours for “Chemistry for Today” (CHM2023). This course has transitioned from 4 credit hours to 3 credit hours. Some students may have a 1 credit hour discrepancy in the major requirements because of this. The change has already occurred in the fall class schedules across the USF System, so our focus should be on making sure students are not penalized by the reduction in hours.

Curricular Materials on the USFSP Digital Archive. During the summer, Linda and Jim worked on a project to add undergraduate academic program proposal and course proposal forms to the USFSP Digital Archive. Linda provided the documents in PDF format, Jim performed quality control and optical character recognition and they have been added to the following collections:

Academic Program Proposal Forms: http://dspace.nelson.usf.edu/xmlui/handle/10806/10064
Course Proposal Forms: http://dspace.nelson.usf.edu/xmlui/handle/10806/10020

During the discussion, Jim also shared helpful links to other collections in the USFSP Digital Archive, including the following:
Closing of Summer 2014 Grades and Academic Activities: Linda announced that grades and degree progress for Summer 2014 were locked and diplomas were mailed.

Discussions

Summary of Changes. On September 22, Linda distributed via email a summary of changes to the 2014-2015 undergraduate catalog. Members reviewed them before the meeting. Jim will post them to the USFSP Digital Archive.

Developing Consistent Thesis Standards. Discussion ensued about the need for the institution to develop consistent thesis standards. This is both an institutional issue in that the thesis is considered a culminating document by the University and a faculty governance issue in that faculty may be unaware of expectations if they are not standardized and promulgated. Graduate theses at USFSP have a more formal process with clearly outlined expectations, including a form in which the student affirms understanding that the final thesis will become a part of the institutional record in the USFSP Digital Archive, either upon graduation or after an embargo of up to one year.

Undergraduate students in the USFSP Honors Program also complete theses. Unlike the refined processes in the Graduate School, a lack of guidelines and standard practices for honors theses mean that both formatting and procedural steps are not consistent. Linda and Jim made it clear that they were not talking about the font used or the citation style employed; those may be flexible and may respond to established practices within the academic discipline. Instead, they focused on concerns at a different level: This has the prospect of becoming a faculty governance or administrative issue if a thesis is later challenged for plagiarism or intellectual theft or on other bases, or if no clear evidence exists that the student was aware that the thesis would be shared and the student later wishes to keep their work private or restrict public access.

Jim mentioned that these are serious concerns at many institutions. If a thesis includes misattributions or plagiarism, faculty may be at peril—and, at the very minimum—will look sloppy in their oversight, if this is discovered down the road. Similarly, a lack of standards may give faculty the wrong impression that the thesis may remain closed to public access indefinitely or in perpetuity, similar to other course assignments, when, in effect, access must occur by the nature of the purpose of a thesis. Without policies in place, the institution increases its exposure to litigation if anyone attempts to rescind a degree or convert thesis hours to an unsatisfactory or failing grade if a student alleges that plagiarism detection was the institution’s responsibility and no clear guidelines exist.

After some discussion, Jim said he would be willing to reach out to Graduate Council to see if an ad hoc committee involving our councils and perhaps a Faculty Senate representative could start discussions and move towards consistent and best practices.

Developing Consistent Standards for Incomplete “I” Grades: According to our established practices, all students receiving "I" grades are supposed to have a contract in place that sets a maximum timeframe for completion of the coursework. The only substantive difference between students in undergraduate and graduate programs is the length: Undergraduates get two terms and graduates get one term. In practice, fewer than half of the current incompletes have a contract of any kind associated with them. While all in attendance understood that there are sometimes extenuating circumstances that make it difficult to get a contract in place before an "I" grade is submitted (such as an online student who is ill during final exam week), we need to follow our stated guidelines.
Similar to the thesis conversation, those in attendance saw this as a concern that is broader than Undergraduate Council. After discussion, there was consensus that we should explore a possible ad hoc committee, similar to the one we discussed regarding theses, that could address this issue and decide whether our guidelines required revision, we needed to build in additional provisions for extenuating circumstances, or some other alternative.

**Invitation to Dr. Han Reichgelt:** Discussion also focused on extending an invitation to the new Regional Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs to join us at the beginning of one of our meetings so we could discuss our roles and duties in the context of undergraduate education.

Having no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:15 p.m. The next scheduled meeting is Wednesday, October 29, at 3:00 p.m. in the PNM Conference Room.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jim Schnur
University Librarian