

**Minutes of the University Council on Teaching
Friday, March 14, 2008**

Waul House

Present: Sue Barrett, Chris Hepburn (chair), Jackie Lerner, Bill Petri, Virginia Reinburg, Danny Willis. Also attending: Vice Provost Pat DeLeeuw, Vice Provost Don Hafner. Provost Garza attended part of the meeting.

Minutes taken by Virginia Reinburg.

The minutes of the February 11 meeting were approved.

The two agenda items were the UCT's letter to Provost Garza about changing to a credit-based graduation requirement and the online teaching evaluations.

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Credit-Based Graduation Requirement

Chris Hepburn had circulated his draft of the letter. Pat DeLeeuw said the Provost's office wanted to share the UCT's letter with the Provost's Advisory Council at their April meeting. We discussed suggested revisions to the letter.

Don Hafner suggested adding a sentence indicating that a credit-based system would allow more flexibility in capstone, cornerstone, and other courses related to student formation (i.e. these courses could be 1-credit or 2-credit courses instead of 3-credit.)

We discussed whether the University Core Development Committee would review the Core courses for numbers of credits assigned, rather than leaving it up to departments.

We briefly discussed the transition from a course-based to credit-based system. It was suggested that perhaps there could be a two-year transition period: an announcement would be made that the system would change two years hence, and all students would be switched to the new system at that time. We also discussed the number of credits that would be required--114 or a higher number. That discussion will be continued at a future meeting.

When he arrived, Bert Garza also noted that he would like the UCT to discuss further the transition, and the number of credits to be required (which he suggested perhaps should be greater than 114).

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Teaching Evaluations

We reviewed the UCT's proposed version of a new instrument (written last year, with input from about fifty faculty members, some administrators, and some students). The plan is to have the Provost's Advisory Council look at this proposed version.

The bias issue: The Provost's Advisory Council discussed this. Gilda Morelli reviewed the literature on bias in teaching evaluations for the Council; the literature is inconclusive, and Pat DeLeeuw indicated that the Council seemed satisfied for the moment.

The Provost's Advisory Council was also concerned about the students relying on PEPs, which have obvious problems, and releasing the results of the evaluations would be a remedy for student reliance on the PEPs in choosing their courses.

Don Hafner reported on what he heard from the students who sit on the Provost's Advisory Council. They suggested that junior faculty not have their results published for the first few years (there was some discussion of this in our meeting). They were also interested in the summaries from the evaluations, not the students' individual comments. (And Sue Barrett reminded us that students want to know how hard the courses are, as well as how interesting the professors are.) The students are aware of the problems associated with the PEPs, and favor releasing the results of the evaluations to the students.

It was suggested that the Provost's office organize a meeting or panel discussion for faculty at which the new plans for the evaluations--both the new form, "releasing" or "publishing" the results, and the bias issue--would be discussed.

We discussed the 5-point scale in the instrument. Jackie Lerner suggested labeling the two end points rather than each of the five points; the LSOE has studied this issue and this seems like the best approach. She also suggested adding an option labeled something like "no basis for judgment." Those present seemed inclined to accept both suggestions.

Pat DeLeeuw will consult an outside expert (Walt Haney or one of his students) about the new instrument and the bias issue.

We agreed that there should be further discussion about a set of guidelines for releasing the results of the evaluations (whose would be released, whether only Part A would be released, etc.). Bert Garza indicated that the plan was to release them to the BC community only (password protected).

The meeting was adjourned.

**University Council on Teaching
Report on a Credit-based Undergraduate Graduation
System for Boston College
March 2008**

Introduction

At the request of the Provost, the University Council on Teaching (UCT) has investigated the pros and cons of a potential credit-based undergraduate graduation requirement to replace the current course-based system. After lengthy discussions the UCT, by unanimous consensus at its February 2008 meeting, recommends a credit-based system to the Provost.

Considerations of the UCT

- The principal advantages of a credit-based system are flexibility and fairness. Currently, only 3-credit courses count toward graduation. Thus, for instance, courses such as freshman one-credit advising seminars and science laboratories do not count toward graduation. This discourages students from enrolling in courses of fewer than three credits and science students have long lobbied to have laboratories count toward graduation. Allowing courses of variable credit levels to count toward graduation would open up an exciting spectrum of potential courses for students. Informal discussions with faculty from many disciplines indicated they were excited by the prospect of offering some courses differing from the traditional, 3-credit mode. Some 1 or 2 credit courses might, for instance, entail more focused or practical inquiry, while others could involve groups meeting with faculty members to discuss a favorite author once a week. Capstone and Cornerstone courses of fewer than 3 credits can easily be envisioned, as can courses dealing with topics such as Student Formation or Ethics and Values. The opportunities are limitless. Independent study and research courses would be easier to design and would be more flexible if they did not need to be 3 credits, but allowed for the credit to be set by the nature of the topic and the student effort involved. This would be particularly valuable if we wished to expand research courses for freshman and sophomores. Likewise, summer programs would be easier to devise and give credit for if they could be given other than 3 credits. Three-credit courses would still be the norm at Boston College, but we believe that if a credit-based graduation system were to be emplaced, most departments would rapidly initiate a spectrum of courses of varying credit.
- The UCT sees no reason why changing to a credit-based graduation system would have any negative effect on a Boston College undergraduate education or the liberal arts nature of this education. While, for instance, students in more laboratory intensive majors such as the sciences might take one or two fewer 3-credit courses, course diversity would likely be maintained by the addition of other 1 and 2 credit courses.

- The current student computer record keeping system (SIS) can handle a credit-based system. The Law School already uses a credit-based system and the Nursing School used to do so. Director of Student Services Louise Lonabocker told the Committee that she sees no major technical problems in converting all undergraduates to a credit-based auditing/accounting system.
- Converting to a credit-based graduation system would force all undergraduate Departments, Colleges and Schools to re-evaluate and restate their curriculum offerings and requirements. Despite the obvious effort involved in doing this, the UCT generally felt a curriculum review of this nature would be beneficial.
- Since credit hours would now become important, a clear idea of what a credit represents would be needed. The UCT discussed various options, but the most commonly used definition generally relates credit hours to contact hours per week during the semester. Guidelines published by the American Association of College Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) (appended) and given to the group by Louise Lonabocker likely form a good working definition for credit hour assignments. For semester courses, this definition essentially gives a credit for a contact hour of class time and implies two hours of student preparation time for the class. For laboratory or studio classes, one credit hour is given for two hours of class time. For independent study, three hours of work per week are required for each credit.
- The question of who decides how much credit a course is worth was discussed at length. The UCT sees no viable alternative other than having Departments assign course credits. However, to insure consistency with the University standard across Schools and Colleges, the UCT voiced its unanimous recommendation that each School set up a curriculum review and oversight committee to evaluate departmental offerings and the credits awarded for each course. The University Core Development Committee would be responsible for evaluating credits assigned to courses in the University core program and further, this committee might be proactive in seeking to develop core courses in other than a traditional three-credit mode. It is suggested that credit reviews take place on a periodic rotating basis, perhaps reviewing each Department every 3 years.
- The UCT recommends that to initiate a credit-based undergraduate graduation system the University start with the current standard of 114 credits (i.e., 38 three-credit courses). Once credit-based graduation is established, this number of credits could be modified if desired. It might also be acceptable for different Schools to have different credit requirements for graduation. While the UCT spent time discussing alternative models, such as increasing the number of credits needed to graduate to 120, the committee feels that this presents a number of ancillary problems and that it may be preferable to wait until after there is experience with a credit-based system before altering the number of credits needed to graduate.

- The UCT feels that shifting to a credit-based system would have little effect on faculty teaching loads. Since teaching loads are currently determined at the Department and College/School level, this would not change. However, shifting to this system would likely provide Departments a greater flexibility in the use of faculty teaching resources.
- Transition to a credit-based undergraduate graduation system need not be complex if the initial graduation requirement is 114 credits. One suggestion is to simply announce that as of a date two years hence, graduation will be based on 114 credits instead of 38 courses. This would allow time for Departmental, School and College requirements to be evaluated and rewritten and software programs in the Registrar's Office to be modified. At the time of initiation of the credit-based graduation, students above their freshman year might be given the option of graduating with either 114 credits or 38 three-credit courses.

Concluding Remarks

In summary, the UCT sees no negatives in the long-term to adopting a credit-based undergraduate graduation system and a great many positives. The largest positives are the flexibility and fairness of such a system. The only negative might be the time and effort needed to review and modify the graduation requirements of each Department, School and College in the University. However, a thorough review of this type would have obvious benefits for Boston College. For these reasons, the UCT strongly supports the idea of moving to an undergraduate credit-based graduation system at Boston College and recommends that it be considered for adoption in the near future.

University Council on Teaching
March 2008

Statement on Course Credit Assignment

The following statements are extracted from a publication of the American Association of College Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) entitled "Admissions, Academic Records, and Registrar Services: A Handbook of Policies and Procedures" by C. James Quinn and Associates, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, 1979, p.192.

"Credit Ratios. Academic credit is a measure of the total time commitment required of a typical student in a particular course of study. Total time consists of three components: (1) time spent in class; (2) time spent in laboratory, studio, fieldwork, or other scheduled activity; (3) time devoted to reading, studying, problem solving, writing, or preparation. One quarter or semester credit hour is assigned in the following ratio of *component hours per week* devoted to the course of study: (1) lecture courses – one contact hour for each credit hour, (two hours of outside work implied); (2) laboratory or studio course – at least two contact hours for each credit hour, (one hour of outside preparation implied); (3) independent study – at least three hours of work per week for each credit hour.

....The above formulas can also be used to calculate credit ratios for workshops and special sessions of less than term duration."