

Minutes

Council for Retention and Graduation Steering Committee

October 20, 2005 UC 3171

1:00-2:30

Presiding: Scott Evenbeck

Present: Mary Fisher, Kathy Johnson, Becky Porter, Catherine Souch, Michelle Verduzco, Gayle Williams.

1. Minutes of the October 13 Council meeting were reviewed without correction.
2. Souch went over the report by Cathy Burton that was distributed at the full Council concerning 300 and 400 level courses with high failure or repeats. The report was generated to look at data on problems with persistence to identify differences between high graduating schools and low graduating schools, where problems are happening, and what can be done to intervene. The report looked at two basic criteria:
 - A) 300 and 400 level classes with high non-pass rates, as calculated by computing the percentage of enrolled students whose final grade was C- and below, I, R, NY, F, or W. Courses with a two-year (2003-2005) weighted average of 22% or higher were identified as high non-pass rate. Any course higher than 22% at least 2 out of 5 years also made the list.
 - B) 300 and 400 level courses for which 10% or more of students enrolled for spring 2005 or fall 2005 were repeating the course.

Souch cautioned that some classes had a very small N ; consequently a single student could make the difference between inclusion and exclusion from the report. Williams asked if the report screened for topics courses. The report does screen for it but Souch admits that closer scrutiny should be paid to identify the most troubling problem areas. The goal is to get the report out to make informed decisions. Dean Plater has already offered the report to the Deans and to Faculty Council. The initial response of the faculty has been reactive and defensive when they see their course on the report. The defensiveness is premature and unwarranted as interventions will vary and the point of the report is to stimulate discussion on how best to reverse the trends.

Porter indicated that it is good that IUPUI doesn't do the grade indexing that the Bloomington campus does. Williams asked if students are aware of the grades that these courses generate. Souch made the point that the role of prerequisites and looking at how advisors are steering the students into these courses could be functional intervention measures.

Johnson asked how much the data changed if the grade of C- was taken out of the calculation citing that many students would be quite happy with a C-, particularly in the school of science where C- is still a passing grade or if the course were being

taken by a non-major. Souch felt it was unfortunate that the report has already been distributed since there is still some clean-up that could be done. It was decided that the Council should distribute the report to the chairs, with copies to the deans, accompanied by a cover letter indicating that more clean-up is necessary and to ask the chairs to aid in the interpretation of the data.

Evenbeck asked what effect ethnicity plays, referencing a similar report from Baltimore College in Maryland which indicated that there were certain courses that were dead-ends for African Americans and once the spotlight was shown on the problem they were able to address the problem. We should look at the effect of some classes that adversely affect African Americans.

It was also pointed out that many of the classes are on-line only, an important consideration in determining interventions.

Evenbeck stressed that this should be looked at as a preliminary report and that the Council is looking for help in correction from faculty. Porter wanted to find out which classes are exclusively on-line and whether or not the course has a prerequisite. Williams wanted to know if there was some way of informing students that, for example, 50% of the students who take this class but didn't take some prior class failed the class. Porter countered that if it is truly a prerequisite issue the class can be blocked from enrollment until the prerequisite is taken.

Evenbeck considered another example of analysis might be to ensure that the student population is majors and not just students obtaining 300-400 level credits. Another question for the chairs is whether the course is a required course for their major and a bottleneck to graduation as Cathy Buyarski has observed the senior capstone course impede students to graduation.

Porter raised the observation that as a faculty member she would have a hard time accepting a 40% fail rate in her class. Discussion followed that there exists a culture among faculty members who feel smart when surrounded by smart students and take pride in instructing "weed-out" course. By raising academic standards it raises faculty self-perception.

Evenbeck reiterated the importance of defining the student population: Are they majors? African American? University College students unable to get into their desired schools? Souch cautioned that once we separate out the subgroups we will get to smaller and smaller N values, so it is necessary to get faculty feedback regarding what is happening in the individual classes with the high DFW rates.

Souch indicated that the core of this report is not new: departments already receive a grade matrix showing the grades given for every course each semester. Where this report is different is that it looks at grades over a five year period and that it will be more widely disseminated so that the bigger picture can be seen. By showing the trends over five years it is less easily dismissed. Further, the report needs to be

framed in such a way that the faculty is less defensive about having their course on the report. The report will be submitted to deans and chairs by the end of October with feedback in December.

3. Verduzco distributed a handout entitled, "Senior Year Experience/Students in Transition", which enumerates themes or objectives that have emerged as senior needs and recommended campus strategies for meeting these needs. Verduzco feels there is value in dedicating a group to investigate the "Senior Year Experience" as a means of increasing graduation rates just as focus on the "First-Year Experience" is a means of increasing retention. Evenbeck asked how the steering committee felt about expanding the seniors group to investigate these strategies. Johnson commented that all departments offer some senior capstone course and that many of the capstone courses are on Souch's DFW report.

Verduzco asked whether there were common learning objectives across departments that could be scrutinized. Johnson replied that in an analysis of 88 syllabi from senior courses only 27% referenced the Principles of Undergraduate Education. Evenbeck felt that part of the success of the first year seminar has been the template that can be adjusted by department for promoting best practices and was alarmed at the lack of PUL's in upper-class courses.

Porter indicated the need for additional data. If we look at the number of majors brought into a school we should be able to determine what percent are graduating. A question for consideration is how long does it take from the onset of senior status to graduation? That is the information that needs to be discussed by schools or departments that are way out of line with the institution as a whole. To prevent data overload, a sequential plan of analysis would be beneficial.

Johnson questioned whether there is a means to incentivize the schools to increase discussion on these issues. Evenbeck agreed that this could be a good idea. Possible incentives would be to give ½ credit hour monies to schools for repeated courses or to offer incentives to students for graduation.

Evenbeck agrees that this needs attention and the Council needs to determine whether the work will be from an expansion of the senior group or if a different group should be spun off analogous to the gateway group. Porter indicated that it will ultimately be the same players and will be connected to the Council. Johnson countered that we need a different group of players that includes faculty in a greater role. Evenbeck agreed that we should work towards assembling a group and that the leadership needs to come from the schools. Porter added that other players might include Alumni Association/Career Center personnel as well as representatives from OPD, Center for Teaching and Learning and perhaps representatives from the graduate level.

4. Disseminating NSSE Data-
Evenbeck introduced the Hansen report on the NSSE results and asked how we should best disseminate the information. The quiz given by Hansen on the report is a

great way for people to engage the material. Williams indicated that Buyarski is going to administer the PowerPoint presentation to advising. Evenbeck stressed that much of this information is just as important to people on the service side and that staff as well as faculty should have exposure to the data to spur discussion. Porter recommended the presentation be given to the Council of Academic Deans.

Porter remarked that the report lets faculty know, relative to their peers, what skills are being promulgated across the schools and departments and allows them to ask if there are other things they should be doing with regard to writing papers or assigning problems for students.

Williams remarked that the discrepancies between student and faculty perceptions were interesting grounds for discussion.

Evenbeck stressed the need to know who are student population is and to look at student flow. Evenbeck said he would invite Kathy Burton and Michele Hansen to the next meeting to consider these items and for the group to consider questions that we should be asking to get a better handle on the issues.

Evenbeck said that one thing we haven't done is look at the cohort of full-time, first-time fall beginners. With 2,139 students in that group, a 5% increase in retention is only 100 students out of 30,000. Further, we haven't done anything like an exit interview for the campus. Buyarski has conducted exit surveys in advising and is currently looking at them to discover changes over time. Since this is an important group to everyone we should target data acquisition and interventions at that level.

Souch said that the fall, FT/FT beginners is not an important demographic to the schools. Evenbeck countered it drives graduation numbers. Currently 62% of graduates are transfer students, however it is important that the beginners stay in and navigate their way to graduation.

Evenbeck reiterated the invitation to Hansen and Burton to try and get a better handle on how to interpret the data on who are students are.

5. Meeting Adjourned.