

Faculty Council
Meeting Minutes
March 8, 2007

Present: Julio de Paula, Dean of the College; Jane Hunter, Associate Dean; Cliff Bekar, Associate Professor of Economics; Dinah Dodds, Professor of German; Deborah Heath, Associate Professor of Anthropology; Elizabeth Safran, Associate Professor of Geological Sciences; Mervyn Brockett, Assistant to the President; and Terri Banasek, Executive Assistant and recorder.

Guests: Diane Crabtree, Registrar; Tom Olsen, Associate Professor of Physics and chair, Committee on the Curriculum; Carl Vance, Vice President for Business and Finance and Treasurer; and Elliott Young, Associate Professor of History and chair, Budget Advisory Committee.

The meeting was called to order at 3:35 p.m. The first hour of the meeting was given over to a discussion regarding charging tuition for course overloads. Dean de Paula had previewed the issue in a letter to Faculty Council and the guests. He noted that there are two parts to the discussion: 1) Financial – the letter outlines some of the financial consequences of the College's policy of not charging for course overloads; and 2) Academic – the academic part is less well developed. We can always find money in the budget to do things that are academically sound. Dean de Paula believes not charging for overloads to have a negative financial impact on the College. He suggested starting the discussion with the academic dimension.

The number of students who are taking fewer than 16 credits is significantly greater than the number of students taking more. Our four-year graduation rate is not impressive – it ranges from 52 to 60 percent. We have a five-year graduation rate of 65 to 67 percent. Students who take fewer than 16 credits, unless they have significant AP credits and are allowed to take an overload, will not graduate in four years. The financial question is very complicated. Most of these students are very highly aided; and, if we charge, they may not take the overload. The financial impact is not the foregone revenue, it is how many finish in seven rather than eight semesters. Dean de Paula responded that the financial argument is not to make more money, but not to lose money. The academic question is, are we doing our students a service or a disservice by having a strategy that allows for a course overload to be relatively easy to obtain? Does it make any sense to incentivize an overload in the context of an academic program? On the faculty side, do these course overloads result in a strain on resources? What is the effect on the quality of instruction at the College?

Regarding the burden on faculty, is a significant portion of the overloads related to independent studies? If so, that is an extra burden on faculty. So many of our students are taking leaves of absence and are counted as five-year graduates. We don't count the number of semesters in which they are actually in residence. Ms. Crabtree offered to provide data on how many students graduate in seven semesters because of an overload. Dr. Heath noted that she is unsure anecdotally if students she signs off on for overloads are doing it to catch up and how many of them are doing it because they are highly motivated students. Her inclination is to support the highly motivated student who has intellectual passions and wants to pursue them. Ms. Crabtree

has kept all of the overload cards since spring 2001. The most common answers given for requesting an overload are variants on catching up in order to graduate on time. Overloads also are common in theatre and music for performance classes. There is a split between those who want to graduate early or are playing catch-up and those who do it for other reasons.

Dr. Brockett noted that four-year graduation rates have to be reported and don't take into account the fact that students aren't here the whole time. There is a big problem with students taking 12 and 13 credits. Dr. Young asked if we solve that problem, would we then be losing even more money? Wouldn't that be a strain on the budget if students take 16 credits instead? Dr. Olsen noted that the College could very well lose those students in the fifth year, or they could leave early. Regarding the question of impact on faculty teaching if there are overloads, if students graduated in seven semesters, they are very close to the minimum number of credits to graduate. If we have them all four years, they will be an increased burden on the faculty. Course overloads make it easier for our more motivated students to pursue double majors and many minors. There is a little too much pursuing accolades (majors, minors listed on transcripts) than an excellent education. Some students take one more course just to get a minor on the diploma. Dr. Olsen is very concerned about encouraging students who have fallen behind. On the financial side, Dr. Olsen's guess is that the highest annual giving is from Whitman. Happiness of alumni has to factor into things. Dean de Paula noted that he has begun to see that institutions with endowments significantly larger than ours tend not to charge for overloads.

Ms. Crabtree pointed out that with many students, the number of credits they take goes up and down depending on the courses they are taking. It is relevant to those taking fewer than 16 credits that nationally there are trends of students being able to go to college with learning disabilities. Often the recommendation to these students is to take a lighter load, and Ms. Crabtree predicts the College will see more of this. There are programs to help these students. Dr. Hunter noted that we want to encourage students spend eight semesters here. If there is some way of encouraging and regularizing that, it is highly advantageous for our students. It is important that they have a capstone experience and leave with their cohort. She is concerned about penalizing students who are intellectually curious or are changing majors.

Dr. Dodds asked how many of the motivated students are graduating early? Some are just taking more courses because they are interested. Dr. Brockett pointed out that 10 to 16 students graduating in seven semesters is the measure of lost revenue. Dr. Bekar added that for some students, this is a form of financial aid. Dr. Brockett responded that we can assume students on high levels of institutional aid will not overload if the additional tuition has to come out of pocket (depending on what the overload charge is). We have been losing \$6,000 per student for those graduating in seven semesters – about \$100,000. Dr. Dodds noted that there are two ways to look at money lost. In an extreme version, it is not only how much we lose per semester. It is the per-credit charge lost each semester as well.

Ms. Crabtree pointed out that she has learned on the registrar's listserv that the primary reason for charging for overloads was to discourage the practice. Dr. Heath asked if Ms. Crabtree had any information on GPAs for students who tend to overload. Ms. Crabtree replied that students need a 3.0 to overload. If the GPA is under 3.0, the request needs to go to Petitions and Waivers. It was noted that that shows that even the bottom layer is a group of good students. Do they keep

the high GPA after taking an overload? It was pointed out that it is important to the vitality of interdisciplinary programs that the College not incentivize overloads. Ms. Crabtree noted that the College is obligated to give students a major but not two.

Dean de Paula summarized by saying that one academic reason for allowing overloads is to keep our motivated students motivated and let them realize their vision. Even if we are to follow the Willamette model, students could take overloads up to 18 credits without paying extra. The overload cost would kick in at 19 credits, and even that number can be tweaked. It is the people trying to get six courses in that would be the issue. There is a rationale for not making it too arduous to pursue overloads. He went on to say that arguments for not providing incentives for overloads at no charge would be that we want people to think twice and get better academic advice having to do with the catching-up issue and others.

Dr. Bekar asked if it would be fair to say that Lewis & Clark tends to attract more students who are likely to take leaves of absence and need to catch up. If that is true, and it is, and the students find themselves having to take another semester at full price, what happens to retention? It is one of our major vulnerabilities. The retention rate might well fall if we charge for overloads relative to our peer and aspirant schools because of the type of students we draw.

Dr. Young noted that advisors need to be sure students are applying for an overload for the right reasons, not just for the money. We want to support academically motivated students but should do it through an advising model. Dr. Hunter added that she does not encourage students to graduate in December; there are intellectual and personal reasons to keep people around for the entire senior year.

It was noted that a single course overload would cost \$6,000, based on full-time tuition divided by 20. Dr. Hunter pointed out that if there is any chance this will hurt our retention figures, that is a significant price to pay. Dr. Young added this charge on top of a 7 percent tuition increase will not be viewed favorably by the students. At this moment, it might be a problem politically.

Dean de Paula stated that he takes to heart the issue of retention but is also struggling to figure out how we could predict that effect in a way that is relatively simple. Ms. Crabtree noted that much of retention data is related to the graduation rate. Our graduation rates are lower than our peers because we attract students who take time off. That affects retention – would that affect our retention more if we were charging? Perhaps not. Our graduation rate is significantly lower than that of our competitors. Dean de Paula asked if there is research available about the effect of tinkering with the price structure on retention; Ms. Crabtree will investigate. Dr. Safran also asked Ms. Crabtree to provide data on students who take overloads and then stay for eight semesters. Most of them do. The last thing we want to do is discourage our best students.

Dr. Young asked if there is no effect, is there consensus now not to charge for overloads – that it's not worth it? Dr. Bekar asked what the four- and five-year graduation rates are for students who take overloads. How many stay for eight semesters? Ms. Crabtree noted that no matter what decision is made – to charge or not to charge – there are some curricular questions that need to be answered. Should students be allowed to take 21 credits? Advisors aren't always doing what is in the best academic interest of the student.

Ms. Crabtree, Dr. Olsen, Mr. Vance, and Dr. Young left the meeting.

Agenda Items:

1. The minutes of February 23, 2007, were approved.
2. Position requests: Faculty Council approved both AES positions. It was noted that this was a particularly well written position request. Dean de Paula pointed out that both he and President Hochstettler are supportive of the AES program. It contributes to internationalism of the campus in ways that would be very difficult to achieve otherwise.
3. Faculty-Student Summer Research Grants: All applications are approved pending confirmation from Mitch Reyes about his student. Letters will be sent to the faculty members and students.
4. Dr. Hunter distributed the latest version of the review policy for visiting faculty. The underlying principle behind the changes made is that we need one semester of teaching for assessment before hiring again. Faculty Council does not want to mandate a mid-semester process but gives chairs the discretion how to do it. Faculty Council agreed that Dr. Hunter should send the policy out to the cas-faculty listserv along with the document pertaining to good practices. The process will officially start next academic year and will be included in the Faculty Handbook. Contracts for next year should include information about the review policies.
5. Lecturer and senior lecturer positions: It was agreed that an all-chairs meeting should be convened dedicated to discussion of this issue. Faculty Council will engage in an electronic discussion about what the questions are with an eye toward drafting of a mini-proposal.
6. At the next meeting, 30 minutes will be set aside to discuss the mini-proposal regarding lecturers and senior lecturers, with the rest of the time devoted to discussion of position requests. It was agreed that the next meeting should be an extended one, 3:30-6:00 p.m. Ms. Banasek will gather information from our list of peer and aspirant schools regarding how they handle non-tenure-track staffing. How do they design the positions? What kinds of titles do they use? Are there term limits? If so, are they applied?
7. The meeting was adjourned at 5:10 p.m.

Next meeting: Thursday, March 22, 2007, 3:30 p.m.