

UEPC Minutes – September 8, 2008

Members Present:

Paul Zarnoth
Hoang Vu
Norm Bedford
Patrick Downey
Elena Escalera
Asbjorn Moseidjord
Charles Hamaker
Sue Fallis
Sue Birkenseer
Christa Kell
Ed Tywoniak

Steve Bachofer was not present, but sent his comments on the various proposals.

Agenda Item 1

Three proposals sent from the Department of Physics.

- A. Incorporate Physics 20 into Physics 10*
- B. Incorporate Physics 21 into Physics 11*
- C. Change the prerequisite for Physics 10*

These three proposals are available in a separate document.

Mari-Anne Rosario was present as a representative of the Physics Department, and she began by describing the proposal and its background.

In response to questions, she verified that the course would require six hours per week for the students, in class and lab. She also noted that the change would have no impact on the teaching credit for the instructor.

Steve Bachofer noted (by e-mail) that these changes would give Biology majors the flexibility to enroll in an activity course without exceeding their 9.5 course load for a given year.

A concern was raised by Charles Hamaker regarding the impact of the third proposal on other departments and programs. Would requiring a prerequisite of Math 27 (rather than Math 28) prompt Biology and Health Sciences to eliminate Math 28 from their list of required lower-division courses? This could thereby effect enrollment in Math 28.

Outcome of UEPC deliberation to be forwarded to the Faculty Senate:

Recommended that Proposal A and Proposal B be approved. (11 in favor, 0 opposed)

Proposal C: Voted (10, 1 oppose) to postpone a vote on the proposal until information could be gathered from Biology and Health Sciences, as well as reaction from Math in the event that Biology and/or Health Sciences might indicate that they would drop Math 28 from their list of required courses.

Agenda Item 2

Proposal from the Committee on Teaching and Scholarship to change to the Course Evaluation Form for TUG courses.

The proposed changes are included in a separate document.

Hoang Vu was present as a representative of the Committee on Teaching and Scholarship, and he began by describing the proposal and its background.

When it became clear that many members of the UEPC were interested in retaining items dropped by the Committee on Teaching and Scholarship or adding completely new items, Hoang Vu reminded the committee that one important goal is to keep the Evaluation Form relatively short (one page of close-ended, Likert scale items and one page of open-ended items).

A number of members of the UEPC stated that they were strongly in favor of certain changes to the TUG course evaluation form that were made by the Committee on Teaching and Scholarship. For example, members of the UEPC reported that they liked the increased emphasis on items related to issues of diversity. In addition, others reported that they were happy with the increased use of open-ended items.

Several concerns and suggested revisions to the proposal were raised by various members of the committee. Most of the suggested revisions were supported by a majority of committee members and are included the UEPC's recommendation to the Faculty Senate.

Three proposed revisions that were rescinded or voted down include the following:

1. Paul Zarnoth suggested retaining item 2.15 in the course evaluation form. It read, "The instructor presented the material in an engaging manner." Charles Hamaker pointed out that item 3.3 "My interest in the subject matter of this course increased" does a better job of assessing the relevant aspect of teaching effectiveness. Zarnoth concurred, and the revision was dropped from consideration.

2. Steve Bachofer suggested (by e-mail) to include an open-ended item which would ask, “What particular skills were necessary to succeed in this course that reflects what you may have learned in a lower-division course?” This suggested revision was unanimously rejected by those members present.
3. Patrick Downey suggested dropping open-ended item 5.2 (“How effectively did the instructor help you achieve the stated learning outcomes for this course?”) on the grounds that many students may not understand what a learning outcome is. This suggested revision was rejected with a vote of 4-7.

The UEPC entered into a discussion of how the course evaluation forms are used. Sue Fallis, Elena Escalera, and others expressed concern about how much weight the forms appear to have within the R&T process at the expense of other measures of teaching effectiveness. In addition, some worried that R&T will sometimes focus on one, two, or three negative written comments within a set of course evaluation forms rather than making a judgment on the basis of what the majority of the students had to say. The perceived (or actual) attention that is given to course evaluations in the R&T process led many to comment on the importance of developing the best instrument possible.

Outcome of UEPC deliberation to be forwarded to the Faculty Senate:

The UEPC voted to forward the proposed revision to the Faculty Senate with several recommendations and proposed changes.

The UEPC held a separate vote on each of the recommendations and proposed changes to the proposal from the Committee on Teaching and Scholarship.

The recommendations and proposed changes (and the associated votes) include the following:

- A. Retain a variation of item 2.17. The new item would read, “The instructor provided prompt feedback on assignments and exams.” UEPC members believed that this item provided constructive feedback on a relatively objective aspect of course management that impacts student learning. (Vote: 11 – 0)
- B. Retain the current description of response alternatives (defining the endpoints as strongly agree and strongly disagree) rather than changing the form to define each of the five possible responses. There were a variety of arguments in favor of this suggestion – mostly from Sue Fallis. The arguments were developed from measurement theory and the theory of instrument design. (Vote: 11 – 0)

- C. Drop new item 2.22 (“The instructor contributed to an open and respectful learning environment.”). This idea was supported on the basis that the item added little that wasn’t already assessed by items 2.16 and 2.23. (Vote: 9-1-1)
- D. Revise item 2.9 by adding the word “academic.” The new version of the item would read “The instructor set high academic standards for students. The change was suggested in order to prevent students from believing the item to be referring to some other kind of standard (e.g., standards of conduct). (Vote: 10-1)
- E. Revise the new open-ended item 5.1 by dropping the wording about learning outcomes. The new version would read, “What particular skills, knowledge and perspectives did you gain from this course?” Committee members felt that the change would make the item more easily understood. (Vote: 10 – 1)
- F. The UEPC recommends that no change be made to the Course Evaluation Form until some committee – perhaps the Committee on Teaching and Scholarship – first carry out focus groups of SMC students. The purpose of the focus groups should be to determine how the students interpret (or possibly misinterpret) the items on the form. The UEPC also agreed that authorization to convene focus groups should come from the Faculty Senate or Provost, because cooperation will be needed from several individuals to accumulate a random selection of students to participate in the focus groups. (Vote: 9 - 1 - 1.)
- G. The UEPC recommends that the Faculty Senate investigate the use of course evaluations in the assessment of teaching at Saint Mary’s College, particularly in respect to the Rank and Tenure process. (Vote: 10-1 abstain – 0 oppose)
- H. The UEPC recommends that no changes be made to the Course Evaluation Form until after a brief written statement is provided to the Faculty Senate as a supplement to the revised course evaluation form. The statement should explain the purpose or need for revising the form. Hoang Vu suggests that Dean Frank Murray might be best aware of the rationale for the changes and best prepared to submit a written summary. (Vote: 6-5)

Agenda Item 3

Discussion of changes recommended by the Provost to the document entitled, “Procedures for Discontinuance of an Academic Department or Program not Mandated by General Financial Exigency”

The meeting was running long, and discussion of this proposal was postponed until another meeting.

Agenda Item 4

Sabbatical proposals were distributed and instructions for evaluating them were discussed in preparation for the joint meeting with the GPSEPC on September 22.