

2010-2011 Annual Report from the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee
May 31, 2011
Chair: Bradley Seebach

This academic year was a “calendar year” preceding the publication of a new undergraduate catalog. As such, it was a very busy year for the Committee. Our meetings during the Spring Semester were especially busy. I commend my fellow committee members for their willingness to consider the business before them carefully even when meetings ran to two hours of duration. In this report, I will address the charge that we were given from the previous academic year, and I will lay out what we believe to be the major ongoing concerns for the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee (UCC) that should be of interest to the university faculty as a whole.

Our charge from the Faculty Senate this year had to do with the failure of the UCC to meet quorum several times during the 2009-2010 academic year. This committee operates with twelve members, nine of whom are faculty members and three of whom are students who are appointed by the Student Senate. In 2009-2010, student member attendance was poor, and in combination with imperfect attendance by faculty, there were times when the committee failed to meet quorum. After significant deliberation, we determined that this problem stemmed from a combination of two factors: (1) the use of an incorrect definition of ‘quorum’ (a simple majority is required but the working definition in 2009-2010 was two-thirds of membership), and (2) too little commitment on the part of members for an essential committee of the university. Our agreed-upon actions were therefore to make it clear to all members (student and faculty alike) that we strongly needed to have them present and active in deliberation, and that we would enforce the attendance policies of the committee. Happily, we exceeded quorum requirements at all of our meetings this year.

There are two concerns with respect to continuing business of the UCC for the upcoming years. The first has to do with the administrative decision to not publish and distribute paper copies of the Undergraduate Catalog. This is part of a general movement towards cost reduction via electronic record-keeping, but it also means that the contractual agreement between the university and its students that is represented in our catalogs may be subject to incremental change during a calendar year. There may be a need to designate an “official” catalog associated with each academic year or period of time, in addition to having an updated catalog that includes ongoing changes made during the period between official catalogs. This is a significant concern to the Chair and several members of the Committee, and may have broad implications for students, faculty, and administration.

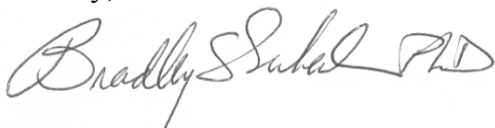
The second major concern, voiced at a number of meetings this year, has to do with the purview of the committee with respect to cooperative degree and certificate programs taught in part by UWL faculty and staff and in part by instructors from other campuses. We reviewed several programs this year in which some or most courses are taught at other campuses. This is a growing trend, especially as programs that use primarily “online” methods of instruction increase in number. UCC members are charged with determining whether courses and programs are of consistently high quality, and yet the off-campus courses in these programs are not subject to the normal review processes that UWL would apply through its own departments and colleges, and the programs themselves may not be under the administrative control of UWL. In some cases,

we may graduate students with a degree that is formally from UWL but from a program in which UWL has only a minority stake in terms of courses and faculty. The UCC has determined that the primary oversight that we are currently able to offer is for those courses taught by UWL faculty and using UWL resources. We have attempted to assess the quality of courses taught on other campuses as part of our deliberations, but we do not have resources to bring faculty from those campuses to La Crosse to take part in our meetings, nor do we have a clear ability to require revisions. To claim oversight of the full curriculum for cooperative programs would imply that such oversight would be managed jointly by curriculum committees and program review committees from several universities, and would effectively block the participation of UWL in such programs.

The Faculty Senate may wish to consider how effective oversight might work for cooperative programs. It is, at least, imperative that the UCC develop some guidelines for its actions in considering such cases. This also bears on the charge of the Academic Planning Committee and on academic program review at several levels of faculty and administrative organization. One suggestion might be to require that programs always have a 'home campus' with a formal review process that includes all program elements. Would this require that UWL give up elements of review for some of its own courses? There have been thorny, parallel discussions on our own campus with regard to courses that do not have a 'home department' such as UWL 100 or SAH 105.

In summary, we feel that this was a very successful year for the UCC. The move towards the use of electronic records was relatively successful, though we have some concerns (noted above) about the changeable nature of these records. We reviewed a large number of proposals from within the university, and also several proposals for new programs and courses that were cooperative agreements between elements of UWL and other campuses. We are concerned about how UWL can be assured that quality review processes will take place for these cooperative programs. These concerns can be part of a charge for next year's UCC, but we believe they will require broader deliberation from the Faculty Senate as well.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bradley Seebach PhD". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Bradley Seebach

Department of Biology

2010-2011 Chair of the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee of UW-La Crosse