REVISED PROPOSAL for Faculty-based Curriculum Management and Process

At the UNI Faculty Senate meeting of 27 August 2012, the formation of “an ad hoc committee to recommend changes in curricular policies and the handbook to insure faculty control” was announced. Establishment of this committee had been identified at an earlier Faculty Senate retreat as one of four major initiatives for 2012-2013. The resulting Curriculum Management Committee was charged with review of processes for curricular change and evaluation, with an eye to development of an improved and effective process featuring extensive faculty involvement in decision-making. Following its initial review of curricular process here at UNI, the Curriculum Management Committee developed a set of recommendations to address potential improvements. Those recommendations were shared with a number of faculty groups over the course of the following year:

Undergraduate Curriculum Committee
Graduate College Curriculum Committee
College of Business Administration Senate
College of Education Senate
College of Humanities, Arts, and Sciences Senate
College of Social and Behavioral Sciences Senate
Elementary Teacher Education Senate
Secondary Teacher Education Senate

The committee’s recommendations and reactions from the faculty groups listed above are summarized below.

**1. Create a centralized faculty committee to monitor the health of all academic programs.**

In all meetings with faculty groups, this idea was strongly supported. However, a number of specific concerns surfaced repeatedly during those meetings. The issues fell into four categories.

 a. Frequency of review. The faculty groups concurred with the committee’s view that a single in-depth
 review every seven years (the current structure of academic program review, mandated by the
 Board of Regents) leaves too long an interval between evaluations. Small difficulties left unattended
 for five or six years could become much larger and possibly irreversible. Our committee proposed a
 process through which programs would be reviewed each year, relying mainly on data that
 currently is collected each year. Citing the large workload that would attend such frequent reviews,
 for both the reporting programs and the committee receiving those reports, faculty members
 expressed concern about yearly reviews. Faculty were more supportive of a mid-cycle review,
 probably in the third year after a regularly-scheduled academic program review.

 b. Depth of review. In the initial proposal for yearly review, the committee envisioned a focus
 on a few key criteria, including (but not limited to) class sizes, number of majors, and other
 numerical indicators. For many faculty, this model appeared to revisit the process that led to
 program cuts in Spring 2012, which were widely interpreted as overly reliant on program size.
 Faculty also voiced concerns that reviews based solely on numbers would eventually lead to a
 formulaic process that would focus on short-term judgments rather than long-term trends. The
 committee was urged to consider a broader review that includes criteria associated with program
 quality, centrality to UNI’s mission, and uniqueness, all of which all are currently considered during
 the seven-year in-depth academic program reviews. The combination of an expanded list of criteria
 and yearly review was widely dismissed as too labor-intensive, but moderate depth in a single mid-
 cycle review was deemed more reasonable.

 Faculty hoped that program evaluators would be especially attentive to potential problems. The
 committee’s original proposal did call for a mechanism through which faculty in programs with
 nascent difficulties could be advised by faculty in other programs who had wrestled with similar
 problems.

 c. Financial considerations. In two or three of the meetings with faculty groups, the shortage of
 financial information available to faculty was noted. Since financial pressures played a key role in
 program eliminations in 2012, many faculty felt that program reviews should include both curricular
 and financial considerations. For example, full enrollments in classes taught by program faculty
 are indicators of program health, even in the face of small numbers of majors or graduates. Of
 course, this will require greater transparency about program costs at the department and college
 levels.

 d. Faculty service. The most common reservation voiced at meetings with faculty groups was the
 additional work associated with the new review process. The emergence of the mid-cycle review as
 an alternative to yearly reviews did not alleviate this concern. In most meetings, continued
 discussion persuaded faculty members that increased faculty participation in curricular review could
 not be achieved without more work, and that the issue was more about assigning the new tasks and
 then recruiting faculty to do them. Originally, the committee proposed a wholly new committee,
 reporting to the Faculty Senate, but many faculty thought that modifying the charge of an existing
 committee would be more effective. The two most likely candidates were the Undergraduate
 Curriculum Committee and the Committee on Academic Program Review. Not surprisingly, those
 two groups were reluctant to volunteer for the added workload.

Unfortunately, the proposed increase in monitoring of programs does not safeguard faculty control of the curriculum. The disconnection between the faculty’s responsibility for the curriculum and the administration’s decision-making responsibilities, particularly with regard to program closures, remains. AAUP guidelines (recently revised to include a composite index of financial distress) provide for emergency program closures by administrators in response to financial exigency. Economic shortfalls were cited as justification for the Spring 2012 program closures, but financial data supporting those decisions were not shared with faculty. Program closure is not addressed specifically in the Curriculum Review Process Information Handbook, which notes on Page 4 that “[f]aculty members within academic departments are primarily responsible for initiating curriculum proposals. In addition, several other groups may forward curriculum proposals to the appropriate curriculum review bodies, *e.g*. the Council on Teacher Education, the Liberal Arts Core Committee, etc.”. The only other body specifically charged with initiating proposals, “with appropriate departmental consultation” (page 5), is the Council on Teacher Education. Completion of Form B-2 for program closure (page 23), formerly Form F, is included among forms prepared by departments. These directions suggest that the administration cannot initiate program closures, but rather must bring such proposals to the faculty. The committee believes that administrators will have to be persuaded that the faculty has the wisdom and will to terminate programs. We note that faculty initiated closure of 97 programs (24 majors, 30 emphases within majors, 29 minors, 12 certificates, and 2 combined bachelor’s/master’s programs) between 2000 and 2012, clear evidence that faculty are willing to eliminate declining and unneeded programs.

**2. Amend the curricular process to allow proposals each year, rather than alternate years.**

Our Committee believes that the current two-year curricular cycle, which was strongly linked to the two-year catalog publication cycle, is now outdated. We therefore recommended replacement of the fixed two-year timeline with a rolling two-year timeline, in which proposals could be initiated in any year.

Faculty support for this recommendation was nearly unanimous. Several faculty groups pointed out that this would increase committee workloads in the currently-defined “off-cycle” years, with some functions needed every year instead of every other year. The committee recognized this consequence but predicted that the extra effort would be offset in part by the decreased workload in the currently-defined “on-cycle” years. It is our understanding that this modification will be implemented in the next curricular cycle.

**3. Divide the curricular process, with distinct and different tracks for more substantive and less substantive changes.**

Our Committee favored separate consideration of “substantive” and “nonsubstantive” curricular proposals, allowing curriculum committees to focus their attention on changes with broad impact and/or resource implications. This recommendation garnered widespread support, although some faculty preferred terminology like “broad” and “localized”. Most of the discussion centered on process, with College Senates preferred as the point of separation. “Localized” changes (course description revisions, for example) could be summarized and forwarded to the University Curriculum Committee and Graduate College Curriculum Committee as consent agendas, while “broad” changes (new and restated majors, for example) would continue to proceed through the current multi-level review.

**4. Consider, at the Faculty Senate, the curricular implications of expansions, divisions, and mergers of colleges, departments, schools, and programs.**

The restructuring of academic divisions is not specifically linked to the curricular review process, but the committee saw a role for the Faculty Senate in reviewing these changes. For example, governance of interdisciplinary programs and composition of curricular committees could be affected. Faculty groups had little comment on this recommendation.

In summary, the Committee’s recommendations mandate greater faculty participation in the curricular process. Faculty groups were strongly supportive of the proposed changes, with the reservations noted above. The Committee urges the Senate to adopt these recommendations, with particular attention to the logistical concerns that were identified.

Respectfully submitted by the Ad Hoc Curricular Management Committee
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