1. At the APC’s meeting of November 17th, two program proposals were reviewed: (1) Coastal and Ocean Administration, Science and Technology Professional Science Master’s Track (COAST) in the University of Massachusetts School of Marine Science (SMS) non-thesis option MS Degree and (2) an online Certificate of Strategic Communication and Public Information. Several questions were raised about each proposal and individuals submitting the proposals were invited to attend the APC meeting of December 8th for a discussion of their proposal and to respond to the APC’s questions.

Bob Gamache, intercampus Dean of Marine Science, Paul Fisette, Dept. Head, and Francis Juanes, faculty member in NRC, attended this December 8th meeting to respond to the Council’s questions. Prior to the meeting, they also provided some initial written feedback in response to the Council’s questions.

The discussion began with the Council asking for a clarification on the requirements of the program and the number of credits required. In the initial proposal, the requirements were not clear and the credits associated with the requirements didn’t add up to 34 program credits. Clarification was provided and it was agreed that the proposal would be revised to indicate that:

(a) one policy course is required for the new MS option (just as it is for the current MS non-thesis option) and that this policy course would satisfy 3 of the 9 credits of “Plus Courses” required.

(b) An additional requirement line would be added to clarify that 2 additional 3 credit courses are required and that those courses could be “Science Electives” or “Plus Courses” and

(c) One credit will be awarded for the required internship.

The Council also indicated that the listing of “Science Electives” and “Plus Courses” should be revised and clarified for students so that they understand which are offered regularly and which are offered periodically. Courses may be on the books even when offered infrequently or not at all anymore. The initiators of the proposal need to verify the offerings with each campus so that the list is a reflection of the courses offered regularly and frequently. In the paragraph preceding the course list, the authors indicated that “The selection of Plus courses for this track (Appendix A) was made by choosing courses that are routinely offered every semester or every year.” This is not the case (based on the knowledge of Council members) and the statement should be modified in light of the updated information gained by the initiators of the proposal.
Questions were asked about the status of the program, expected demand for the program, and the number of degrees awarded by the program. The intercampus graduate program in Marine Science was given the authority to grant degrees in 2002. Faculty and students reside on the Amherst, Boston, Dartmouth, and Lowell campuses. There are currently 84 students in the program with 4 on the Amherst Campus. To date, 29 degrees have been awarded, 4 Ph.D.’s and 25 M.S. degrees. Bob Gamache indicated that nationally, the demand for professional science master’s degrees is increasing. He expects the demand for this master’s program to increase as well.

The goal of the program is to provide science professionals in the Marine Sciences a well-rounded education that includes knowledge of their area in addition to management, communications, and problem-solving skills. The Federal Government has provided funding ($15 million) for the creation and expansion of Professional Science Master’s programs in the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act. This, in part, is why this program is viewed as an academic priority. In addition, revenue generated by the degree remains on the respective campus and the hope is that this revenue will increase over time.

Questions were raised about how students at the various campuses fulfill the course requirements and how they are serviced. Core requirements are taken in distance learning facilities. Students tend to take most of their courses at their home campus, but many of the courses from which they can choose are offered online. Students work with advisors on their home campus in selecting their courses. A staff member develops and manages internship opportunities for students.

In terms of funding for the program, the UMass system has made a commitment for a full-time staff person to oversee the program, coordinate internships, and monitor students’ progress. They envision bringing in an additional part-time person to coordinate internships and monitor students, and that this position would be funded from the SMS budget with no additional resources needed from UMass.

_The Academic Priorities Council did not support the proposal as currently written and indicated that it should be revised to reflect the changes required for approval by the Council (as provided in the discussion) and resubmitted._

2. Norman Sims addressed the Council’s questions on the Journalism department’s proposal for an online _Certificate of Strategic Communication and Public Information_. The first question addressed the process in place to formalize courses in the proposal since many of the courses listed did not have course numbers. Professor Sims indicated that Journalism has always had seminars and special topics courses over the years and that only 35% of spring courses had regular numbers. Someone in the department is working on formalizing the courses and he expects this to be done by the end of spring.

The Council asked if Professor Sims had an assurance from Associate Dean Carol Barr that the Marketing 301 course (the Fundamentals of Marketing course required in the program) would be offered consistently online and would be able to accommodate the expected demand from those pursuing the certificate program. The proposal indicated a 15% increase in demand each year.
He did not have this assurance yet but said that the course is offered consistently and was told that additional space was available in the sections offered.

The Council expressed a concern about the qualifications needed on the part of students pursuing the certificate. The certificate is open to all matriculated and non-matriculated students who have at least a high school diploma. Students are recruited from non-profit and governmental sectors, including military families. Some of these individuals will never have taken a college course and will initially be taking 300-level courses in the certificate program. The Council asked if the department has identified qualifications needed on the part of the students who have only a high school degree and if the department has considered admissions criteria beyond a high school diploma. Professor Sims said that on-campus and online students are treated the same. In the field of journalism, anyone can be a journalist given the technological environment in which we live. Most of the students in the program are non-matriculated students and the vast majority of students are prepared. Many of the matriculated students are getting a UWW degree. Students in the program tend to be 35-55 years old, with a college degree or advanced degree and do not want to be in class with undergraduates. About 12½% of students actually complete the certificate. Professionals and retired faculty will teach online in the program. Students are actively engaged and responses to discussion questions online are 10 times that of students in traditional classes.

The Council suggested that Professor Sims think about having a defined 200- or 300-level writing course (Journalism 300 used to be Journalism 200). It would be best to determine what writing course these students need and call it that (like Journalism 200).

Lastly, Professor Sims was asked about advising for the program, particularly as it grows. Currently, he is the advisor for about 1,000 students. He indicated that he is able to handle this load. Students notify him when they have completed the certificate. He verifies their status with the Registrar and mails their certificate.

*The Academic Priorities Council voted to support the online Certificate of Strategic Communication and Public Information.*