Office of the Faculty Senate, University of Massachusetts Amherst

Secretary's Notes
5 April 2016

The 757th meeting of the Faculty Senate will feature a presentation, then move into Committee of the Whole for a discussion, and then resume the regular meeting for the announcements and question period plus several items of new and old business.

Presentation on the Campus Access Policy

Research Council Chair Eliot Moss will provide a brief summary of the Open Access Policy and answer questions. As members are aware, the Libraries have been providing various communications on this including a series of open forums. The policy has been developed with considerable faculty input and been agreed by the administration and the MSP.

Committee of the Whole

Robert’s Rules permit any assembly to establish itself as a Committee of the Whole temporarily to discuss a pending matter without having a particular motion before it. This is one way to have a discussion early in the development of some idea for a policy and seems particularly appropriate for the question of addressing the question clarifying campus practice on cancellation of courses offered on campus. See the appendix for some notes I developed in consultation with the Rules Committee and for a statement of the administration’s current thinking provided for circulation by Vice Provost Barr.

The discussion is limited to approximately 20 minutes, so speakers should be concise. Those unable to speak at the meeting are invited to send their comments to the Secretary (secretary@senate.umass.edu), who will post them on the Faculty Senate website (http://www.umass.edu/senate/) in the section on News and Updates from the Secretary of the Senate.

Annual Report: Ombuds Office

The Ombuds Office will provide its report for the year 1 July 2014 through 30 June 2015. Assistant Ombudsperson Martha Patrick will be present.

New Business: Courses

All but one of the courses being presented to the full Faculty Senate for approval are coming from the Academic Matters Council. Since the other is coming from the Graduate Council, we return to the more usual practice of consolidating the course motions into a consent agenda. Any Senator may request that a course be separated out for individual
discussion and consideration. It would be helpful if anyone desiring separate discussion of a particular course notifies the Senate Office before the meeting, but this is not required.

New Business: Resolution Opposing Hate Speech at the University of Massachusetts Amherst

This Resolution, offered by the Rules Committee in response to widely-shared sentiment, is clear in what it asks the Senate to condemn and to support.

New Business: Policy for Open Access to Faculty Publications

Though the Senate normally receives reports, it is being asked to endorse the Open Access Policy. The Policy, which is the product of long consultations involving considerable faculty participation through the Research Council, has been accepted by the Administration and the MSP as is appropriate for a measure with significant implications for faculty work activity. Senate endorsement is sought as an additional expression of the shared determination to contribute to the wider movement for increasing access to scientific publications.

New Business: Creation of a Localized Long Distance Learning Program in Collaboration with Shorelight Education

The Academic Priorities, Graduate, Information and Communication Technology, International Studies, Program and Budget, and Student Affairs and University Life Councils are jointly recommending approval of this program, under which the campus would collaborate with Shorelight Education to offer Master’s Degree programs in which groups of students living in or near particular cities in other countries would begin their program with an 8-week period of study on campus during the summer followed by completion of their work primarily online from their home cities. This is a new venture in combining face-to-face and distance learning for international students not only for the collaborators but in the wider world of higher education.

New Business: Creation of a Shorelight Program Advisory Committee

The Rules Committee and the Administration are together proposing creation of this joint ad hoc committee to maintain a continuing forum for monitoring the progress of and addressing any concerns arising as the Shorelight Program begins operation.

Old Business: Concentration in the Master in Business Administration, focusing on Business Analytics

This proposal was tabled at the last meeting. The answer to the question inspiring the decision to table is that there will be good control over faculty selection from two directions. First, any person teaching in the program will need appointment to the Graduate Faculty, providing the Graduate Dean with oversight. Second, the Isenberg School's disciplinary accreditors, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business
(AACSB), is selective in its accreditation and has clear standards regarding faculty qualifications.

MJ Peterson
Secretary

[The Appendix begins on the next page]
APPENDIX: MATERIALS FOR COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE DISCUSSION

1. Secretary’s Memorandum

Course Cancellation Discussion Guidance 5 April 2016

The Board of Trustees, particularly its Efficiency and Effectiveness Task Force, has frequently asked for data showing the enrollment in each course on campus. More recently, it has been requesting information about campus policies on course cancellation when enrollments fail to reach a minimum enrollment requirement. While the Boston, Dartmouth, and Lowell campuses have written documents summarizing their cancellation guidelines, this campus does not have such guidelines.

Requests for an articulation of the guidelines used to determine whether courses in which some students have already enrolled should be cancelled give us an opportunity to understand and reflect on our practices.

Any effort to produce written guidelines must address certain basic questions including the following six. The first four seem particularly appropriate for our discussion during the April 7 Faculty Senate meeting. The fifth and sixth are simply reminders about related considerations.

Central Questions

1) What is a “course” for purposes of the guidelines? Besides the familiar distinction between graduate and undergraduate instruction, our course catalogue includes a variety of instructional forms in the course listings: seminars, lecture courses, lecture/laboratory courses, lecture/discussion courses, practicums (internships, other structures and faculty-supervised experiential learning) independent study, graduate level directed reading, capstone projects, senior theses, master’s theses, doctoral dissertations. Though listed as “courses” because they are assigned course numbers, the last five are typically one student working with a sponsoring faculty member rather than a group instruction situation.

2) Should there be a single cutoff at which low enrollment makes a particular offering of a course “too small”? The differences in size between most graduate and undergraduate programs have long been acknowledged. The campus has developed and will continue to apply different practices regarding those graduate and undergraduate courses that involve simultaneous instruction of groups of students.

The various undergraduate programs on campus are also characterized by significant differences in size; some majors count their students in multiple hundreds while others count them in multiples of 10. A poorly-chosen cutoff point could make it close to impossible for the smaller programs to offer enough courses for their students. Yet many of those small programs have good reason to exist, because the discipline provides training in
an important dimension of human knowledge. At least one relatively small program also has designation as a New England Regional Program because the major is not offered at any of the other public universities in the region, suggesting that any actions inhibiting its ability to exist would affect not only this campus but the opportunities provided by public higher education throughout New England.

3) What are or are not reasonable thresholds for regarding the enrollment in a course as too low for it to be offered in a particular semester? While there is probably some variation in threshold among campuses, national practices do suggest that a universally-applied cutoff point of 20 students is unlikely to be regarded as a good general rule. After all, the US News and World Report rankings give colleges and universities extra points for providing students with classes of no more than 19 students. Obviously those rankings assume that other courses will be larger; otherwise, places like Ohio State University (about 45,000 undergraduate students), University of California at Berkeley (about 27,000 undergraduate students), or University of Minnesota (about 31,000 undergraduate students) would not be able to function.

We need to consider whether any choice of either a universal minimum enrollment or a set of minimum enrollments by type of course makes sense or whether there should be flexibility when making such decisions in specific cases based on the facts that apply in those cases. This may be an area where the faculty need to provide persuasive rationales for providing a degree of flexibility to those involved in scheduling decisions at the departmental level instead of tying their hands by a campus-wide policy decree.

4) How can course cancellation guidelines be implemented in ways that do not have significant negative effects on students’ ability to maintain progress in their programs and reach completion in a timely fashion? Course cancellation guidelines must be developed in a way that takes several considerations into account. They cannot be focused solely on efforts to pursue "efficiency" defined in a typical sense of maximizing the amount of "production" provided by each individual employee. A university is not an organization that produces goods or provides highly standardized services; it is an organization engaged in the far more complicated enterprise of fostering students’ progress toward becoming educated citizens capable of continuing their own learning and ready to live in a world characterized by accelerating change.

One practice adopted on many campuses consists of avoiding the cancellation of classes required for either first-year students or students in the last semester or two before their graduation. Maintaining the first-year courses helps students develop momentum and a commitment to continuing their program; maintaining the senior courses assures students who are close to finished that they will not suffer from an unanticipated delay.

Related Considerations

5) What is the effect of course cancellation on students who are already enrolled and on the faculty member scheduled to teach it? Most colleges and universities, this one included, have pre-registration periods and can get a rough idea of how many students are likely to
be taking a course anywhere from 1 to 3 months ahead of time (depending on whether pre-registration is for the spring or the fall semester). Pre-registration numbers are never identical to the final enrollment. Students may fail to enroll in courses because they are unsure of their financial situation, facing family situations that may or may not be resolved, experiencing personal illness which may or may not intensify, or are simply a bit distracted during the pre-registration; conversely later developments may require a student who did preregister to drop courses. If a course has been taught for some time, it is easier to estimate whether students who complete registration later will bring the course beyond the enrollment minimum, yet a period of uncertainty remains and at some time uncertainty must be resolved by deciding whether or not to cancel the course.

Canceling a course requires the students who were enrolled at the time of cancellation, particularly those who need to maintain full-time status to keep their financial aid, to scramble and find another course. Campuses typically have policies mandating that advisors and departments facilitate course substitution in these situations, and practice on this campus is no exception.

Canceling a course also raises the question of how the faculty member’s teaching activity will be adjusted. Deciding precisely what to do raises questions of "workload," which is covered by the MSP contract rather than a matter within Faculty Senate purview of general academic concerns. I mention this topic here simply as a reminder that canceling courses also affects faculty members and that, as covered in the language of Article 15 of the MSP contract, campus practice assigns decisions about how to address such situations to the individual departments.

6) **What is the impact of minimum enrollment guidelines on the broader process of scheduling courses?** Guidelines establish part of the framework within which individual departments and faculty members make decisions about teaching activity. Experience here and elsewhere suggests that some difficulties could be reduced by thinking ahead of time about class offerings and about better communication with students so that they identify the courses they need and register in a timely manner, whether that timely manner be during pre-registration or in the weeks immediately preceding the start of classes.

2. **Administration’s Memorandum**

DRAFT FOR CIRCULATION

**UMass Amherst**

**Course Enrollment Management Guidelines**

UMass Amherst strives to provide a rich curriculum for its students at all levels, which entails a mix of courses for undergraduates ranging from large lecture courses to small seminars, and for graduate students from required courses to specialized topical seminars of importance for advanced training. We aim to do so in ways that make the most positive use of faculty teaching time, ensuring that our colleagues are able to contribute to first-year seminars, large general education lecture courses, classes in the major, and honors
sections, lab sections, graduate seminars, and the like. We recognize our dual responsibility to mount this robust curriculum in all of its variety and to pay attention to the sensible deployment of faculty teaching time. Through the Board of Trustees’ program on “efficiency and effectiveness,” every campus is expected to show how it is ensuring that all of the resources we are given are being used in ways that maximize their value.

The Boston, Lowell, and Dartmouth campuses have created guidelines (summarized in Appendix) for course cancellation at all levels and we can learn from their example while creating a set of guidelines that work for our campus. These guidelines should be deployed by the deans who are the academic leaders closest to the ground and most aware of the nuances of teaching demands. Whatever approach we settle on, it should not be used in a mindless fashion, triggered only by numbers, but pay attention to problems of low enrollment that may become visible over multiple semesters.

Above all, the course cancellation guidelines must prioritize the needs of our undergraduate and graduate students who need to complete the classes we require of them in a timely fashion. Hence a “first, do no harm,” principle must be our touchstone.

Below we list some suggestions as a starting point for discussion with the Faculty Senate.

I. Minimum Enrollment Guidelines

1. Courses are subject to cancellation if enrollment is below:
   - 12 for undergraduate courses (lower and upper division 100-400 level)
   - 6 for graduate courses (described as 500-level and above)

2. These guidelines are applicable to all regularly scheduled, on-load, non-CPE courses of at least three credits. Exceptions to the minimum enrollment guidelines can be requested by the department head/chair with approval by the Dean of the School/College.

3. Because we strive to be planful rather than simply reactive, the Office of Institutional Research will provide Deans and Heads/Chairs with reports on current and past enrollment in courses subject to this policy that fall below the appropriate minimum every semester.
   - If a course consistently falls below the minimum, or if several courses in a single degree program fall below the minimum, the Dean will work with the Head/Chair (who will work with the department curriculum committee or graduate studies committee) to develop a management plan, which will be shared with the Provost.
   - The management plan may include revision of the curriculum, offering courses less frequently, assigning the same faculty to high-enrollment courses as part of their overall teaching load, and other methods of
making the most positive use of faculty teaching time while mounting a robust curriculum that serves our students.

II. Timing and Process

1. Involvement of the Department Heads/Chairs and Deans in the process:

   • Monitoring of course enrollments by department heads/chairs and the relevant Dean’s office should begin immediately after student enrollment takes place keeping in mind course registration time periods for new students (first-year and transfer) and graduate students during the summer and winter months.
   • The instructor of record should be informed about the cancellation prior to 14 calendar days before the start of the semester.
   • Notify the Registrar’s Office of the course cancellation.
   • Notify students enrolled in the course and assist them in finding an alternative course to take. Proactive effort will be required to ensure that no student will be impeded in their progress toward degree completion because of a course cancellation.

2. If a course is cancelled, the department head/chair will consult with the faculty member/instructor of record on their teaching schedule and course assignments.

Appendix:

Guidelines at other UMass campuses:

1) UMLowell: Minimum guidelines of 15 for undergraduate courses, 12 for masters, 8 for doctoral courses. Department Chairs and Deans monitor course enrollments starting 8 weeks before the semester. Exceptions must be approved by the Department Chair and Dean. Faculty notification required 3 weeks before start of semester (Provost agreement with the faculty union). Faculty can be reassigned. Any exception requires review and approval from the Department Chair and the Dean of the College.

2) UMBoston: Minimum guidelines of 12 for undergraduate courses, 8 for graduate courses. The Associate Provost works with the Deans on enrollment within two weeks before the start of the semester. Department Chairs are responsible for course cancellations (in Department Chair handbook) with the Dean responsible for monitoring enrollment and final approval. Tenure-system faculty are reassigned to teach another course, with reassignment potentially triggering a “bumping” situation: TT faculty bump out a NTT who in turn can bump out a NTT who is further down on the priority list.

3) UMDartmouth: Minimum guidelines of 14 for undergraduate courses, 6 for graduate courses. Enrollment is monitored by the deans throughout the registration period. Three to four week notice for faculty considered reasonable. Faculty workload discussions are managed between department chair and the college dean.