Minutes for February 7, 2013 EPC Meeting

In attendance: Clare Dunsford (A&S), David Quigley (A&S), Michael Martin (A&S), Tim Duket (Honors), Michael Moore (Psychology), William Petri (A&S), Tom McGuinness (Counseling), Greg Kalscheur, S.J. (A&S), Kathy Dunn (Biology), Luke Jorgensen (Theatre), Franziska Seraphim (History), David Vanderhooft (Theology), Stefan Hoderlein (Economics), Rudolph Hon (Earth and Environmental Sciences), C-K Cheung (Mathematics), Kara Naccarelli (UGBC), Siobhan Kelly (UGBC), and Nicholas Reposa (UGBC)

Meeting comes to order at 4:00 p.m.

David Quigley opens meeting. He talks about online education initiative. The December minutes approval is skipped, because minutes not yet available. Then he opens discussion on departmental honors programs in Arts and Sciences.

Distribution of departmental results from honors programs questionnaire.

Michael Martin introduces results from subcommittee discussions and questionnaire. He summarizes the findings. Most departments have some honors program. However, there is substantial heterogeneity in the substance. Often, it is only a senior project or thesis. Only 7 departments have additional requirements and courses.

David Quigley inquires about the selection process. Michael Martin reports that there is again substantial heterogeneity, there are no universal GPAs being used, and in some smaller departments more than a third of students are taking these programs, clearly indicating that the standards are not very strict.

Further questions that came up and were discussed were whether

1. There could be University wide distinction. Michael Martin points again to the substantial heterogeneity in requirements.
2. There could be University performance standards. No agreement could be reached on this.
3. There could be homogeneity in starting dates. Michael Martin points to the fact that the requirement are so different also regarding length that in the absence of a comprehensive solution, this is hard to achieve.
4. A student could be in several honors programs. Given the low standards in some department this was deemed easy in some cases. However, it was agreed that there should be no double recognition of the same thesis.
5. Should there be recognition on transcript? It was not clear whether this is important, and given the heterogeneity it is questionable. Students point to lack of importance in applications.
6. Is the heterogeneity across departments desirable? Positions were favorable, because of mutual learning/competition, but also skeptical, because of lack of uniformity of standards.
7. Should all departments have honors? Michael Martin points to the (too small) size of some departments.

David Quigley summarizes the main desirable feature as providing a positive and rich senior year experience for suitably able students, and expresses the view that some University wide standards are desirable, but also does not want to impose on independence of departments.

A related discussion that followed was whether AP students should place into honors programs in departments that have such programs. The sense of AP classes was discussed, in particular a widely held view was that many AP classes are only poor substitutes for the BC classes they replace. In that sense honors programs were seen as good outlets for students that heard AP classes before. However, the objection was raised that when a certain track looks like an elite track, then there will be an overcrowding of such classes.

Finally, in the wake of the scandal at Harvard, the discussion turns to academic integrity. A stricter control of in particular homework and take-home exams was suggested, and an update of the corresponding ICS guidelines.

Meeting ends at 5.30pm.

Stefan Hoderlein, Economics.