

Minutes of the University Council on Teaching
Monday, October 27, 2008
Waul House

Present: Sue Barrett, Chris Hepburn (chair), Rita Olivieri, Virginia Reinburg, Akua Sarr, Lad Tobin, Pete Wilson, Fred Yen.

Also attending: Don Hafner (Vice Provost).

Minutes taken by Virginia Reinburg.

Minutes of the September 29 meeting were approved.

The topic of the meeting was grade inflation.

A table of "Graduation with Latin Honors" and median GPAs at graduation was distributed (dated 5/16/08, Student Services). Median grade at graduation last year was 3.4.

Don Hafner showed us another table of grades of A granted in fall 2007, by department and school. There was quite a bit of discussion about differences among departments in numbers of A(s) granted.

Two issues were identified concerning grade inflation: equity of grades within BC, and equity outside BC (i.e. BC students in relation to graduates of other colleges and universities). Discussion focused mainly on equity within BC, and ways to address grade inflation that BC can control. We can't control what grades other schools grant, so what do we want to do at BC?

We need to consider the consequences for our undergraduates if we lower our grades to control grade inflation. After graduation they will be applying to law/graduate/professional schools, and competing with students from other universities. There was discussion of the possibility of putting the median grade for a course on a student's transcript, to show the relation of student's grade to other BC students. It was also suggested that BC put out information about BC's grading policies, with students' transcripts.

Fred Yen discussed how the Law School has handled grade inflation. The faculty determined a range for the mean grade in courses (large enrollment courses, and smaller courses). Faculty members whose mean grades fall outside that range have to justify their grade to the associate dean. This has improved the situation.

We discussed whether departments try to guide grading policies. English trains adjuncts and part time faculty by having contextualized conversations about grades. Average or mean grades are provided to faculty, and they are discussed as part of pedagogy. Nursing has guidelines for grades in their courses. Chris Hepburn noted that BC faculty used to receive information about grades after turning in grades: they received

information about the average grades in their department, in their school, and the GPA of students in their course. (This is no longer done.)

There was considerable discussion about how to explain to our students the differences among departments in granting A(s). We discussed how these discrepancies among departments might be explained, and agreed we probably needed more information about it. It was suggested that the UCT, or the dean, or the Provost might point out the discrepancies to student and faculty, and explain them to us. So it should be part of a conversation about grading and grade inflation. Could the deans or UCT come up with target average grades? Would that be feasible?

Are grades an incentive to students, or an evaluation of students' work? Various points of view were expressed. Don Hafner noted that, in a recent survey, only 48% of our seniors reported that faculty "frequently" provided them with intellectual challenge and stimulation. How is this related to grade inflation, if at all?

Chris Hepburn asked what recommendations we could suggest. Could departments be asked to come up with standards for grading within departments? And then discrepancies among departments could be addressed after that.