

Minutes of the University Council on Teaching
Friday, March 27, 2009
Waul House

Committee members present: Chris Hepburn (chair); Sue Barrett; Rita Olivieri; Virginia Reinburg; Akua Sarr; Lad Tobin; Peter Wilson

Also attending: Don Hafner (Vice Provost); Mary French (Associate Director, Admissions)

Recorder: Lad Tobin

Chris Hepburn announced that minutes from February 16 meeting would soon be distributed for the committee's approval,

The committee focused this meeting on two issues: (1) grade inflation and (2) advanced placement units.

- Discussion on Grade Inflation (11:10-11:25)

The committee discussed the two most recent versions of its "Preliminary Report and recommendations on Grade Inflation/Grade Compression at BC." After suggesting some minor changes in language in the longer version of the report, the committee agreed to approve and to submit that version to the Provost. The committee also agreed to post on the Provost's website earlier university studies on grade inflation, including "The Murphy Report."

Don Hafner reported that a researcher at Stanford studying grade inflation had requested BC's data for his own study. Don asked whether we should make that information available. The committee suggested that BC should make an effort to cooperate with other universities interested in the problem of grade inflation since it is important to highlight that this is a national problem; however, the committee also recommended that our data should only be made available after a researcher provides a written guarantee that BC's data would not be identified or singled out in any subsequent dissemination of the data.

- Discussion on Advanced Placement Units (11:25-12:30)

Mary French, Associate Director of Admissions, provided a detailed presentation on BC's policies and procedures regarding advanced placement units. Mary began her presentation by distributing (1) a summary report of AP scores for the class of 2012; (2) various college statements that have been made available to students and advisors regarding Advanced Placement Units (APUs); and (3) several representative examples of the requests the Admissions Office received from students seeking APUs.

Mary explained the AP classes and exams are the most common but not the only way for students to receive APUs. Many students, for example, request APUs for college courses they took through and while at their high school; for “dual enrollment” courses; or for international courses, such as British A-levels or International Baccalaureate courses. She also explained that BC students could use APUs to place out of a requirement but not to receive BC credit nor to reduce the total number of classes they need to graduate. The only exception is made for students who earn 24+ APUs and who may be eligible for advanced studies and early graduation. Students who wish to pursue that option, however, must wait till after their first semester at BC to petition their Dean for advanced standing.

Mary pointed out that vast majority of BC students apply to the university with at least one APU. The class of 2012, for example, entered BC with 4681 total APUs earned through AP test scores and the Admissions Office received several hundred additional requests for APUs from students who had taken a dual enrollment, college, or international course.

There are many factors that make it difficult for the university to know how and how many students will make use of APUs. Honors students, for example, can only use their APUs to place out of particular courses and many BC students decide to enroll in a course for which they could have used an APU.

In our subsequent discussion, the committee raised these questions and concerns:

- Should BC allow an incoming student to use APUs to place out of all course work in some areas of the course? Or, should a student who places out of a core course in some area, be required to take a more advanced class in that area?
- A related question: does an incoming student who took an AP course and earned a high AP test score have knowledge or experience in that field equivalent to knowledge or experience gained by a student who takes that course at BC? If not, is it a mistake to offer APUs for AP classes?
- Who decides what AP test score should earn an APU in a particular department or field? Why isn't faculty more involved in this decision?
- Would adopting stricter standards for awarding APUs hurt BC's ability to recruit top students?
- Don't incoming BC students take AP classes for a wide range of reasons -- e.g., (as Pete Wilson suggested) to advance their education, to get into a certain college, to get out of college quicker, or to get a chance to focus right away on 'stuff they like' -- and aren't some of these reasons more worthy of our support than others?

Mary French explained that previous BC committees have decided that a 4 or 5 on the AP test does fulfill college level work; that it is difficult to measure how a stricter AP policy

would affect our recruitment abilities; that, while BC students do seem eager to get out of core courses they believe repeat courses they have already taken, most took AP courses primarily to get into a good college and do not seem overly focused on the details of our policy; that, on the other hand, BC's standards are already stricter than almost all of our competitors, particularly because many of them (including Harvard and Penn) offer credits and not just placement for APUs; that faculty over the years have been consulted about their department's policy on AP scores but that some departments, such as Math, Biology, and Chemistry, have been much more actively involved than other departments in studying, weighing in with Admissions, and advising students on this issue; that the Admissions Office would welcome more faculty involvement and discussion on this issue; and that she also doesn't know who ultimately makes the decision on what AP score earns APUs in each department but that she would be happy to try to find out where and how that decision is made.

The committee agreed that all of these questions deserve further study and discussion.

A final question was raised and briefly considered: will the switch to a credit-based system change our policies and procedures regarding APUs? We agreed that this question, too, will require further study and discussion.

Meeting adjourned at 12:30.