

**Part-time Faculty Confab
Fall 2005**

**Discussion Groups Views on Select Recommendations
of
The Report of the Task Force on General Education**

Participants in the Confab included both part-time faculty and members of the Teaching Academy. Individuals worked collectively in discussion groups to consider selected recommendations from the report of the Task Force on General Education. An emphasis was placed on determining issues and views of particular importance to part-time faculty.

Members of the discussion groups were: Bill Barstow (Biology), Lizz Bernstein (English), Carol Cotton (Health Promotion and Behavior), Jan Hathcote (Family & Consumer Sciences), Jim Hopkins (Terry College), Pat McKeown (Terry College), Maureen O'Brien (Landscape Architecture), Diana Ranson (Romance Languages), Ellen Ritchey (Music Therapy), Rose Simmons (Housing & Consumer Economics), Hoke Wilder (Management), and Jerry Whiteside (Management)

Group responses indicated a favorable view of most task force recommendations. An assortment of pertinent observations and constructive suggestions were made.

Recommendation I.2.1: Incorporate significant writing assignments into more courses across the University so that students are exposed to rigorous writing experiences throughout their undergraduate career.

- Discussants were very supportive of this objective, which was viewed as very important.
- Most reported asking students to complete significant writing assignments that prepare them for the professional writing in each of their fields, such as lab reports, short to-the-point summaries in business, research papers in linguistics, or 30-page papers in public health. Many students of the discussants received writing and oral project assignments, with a large number having 2 page reports graded on grammar and organization.
- Reported student resistance to having with grammar count in class grading.
- Emphasized that both time availability and class size are issues to implementation.
- Suggested it would be constructive to have writing support for foreign languages, such as tutors in the writing center or TAs for writing intensive courses.
- Noted that some universities, *e.g.* Univ. California, Santa Barbara, require students to take at least 6 writing intensive courses in any field for graduation.

Recommendation I.2.8: Faculty should include in their classes, where appropriate, formal oral presentations, exercises that engage students in oral arguments, and classroom discussions.

- Discussants felt that this is an important activity and great idea for emphasis.
- Reported a variety of subject-specific applications, such as video-taped presentations of landscape architecture projects or oral presentations in French conversation courses which are critiqued and then students present a second version. Again emphasized that many students of the discussants received writing and oral project assignments.
- Expressed concern with class size, noting that it is difficult to incorporate oral activities into larger courses.
- Emphasized that assignments may present special difficulties in grading. Questioned whether it is preferable to use a rubric that carefully outlines each aspect of the presentation that is included in the grade *vs.* holistic grading. Wondered about availability of resources on campus to provide guidance in grading such assignments.

Recommendation I.2.9: Faculty should include, when possible, class opportunities for collaborative learning.

- Discussants expressed mixed support, some believing essential and some noting reservations.
- Felt that experiences suggested that team work may cause grade inflation.
- Constructively suggested the strategic utility of using peer evaluation (*e.g.* with a rating scale 1-5) to differentiate contributions.
- Emphasized the desirability of keeping teamwork as a relatively low proportion of overall grade.

Recommendation II.1.9: Encourage the departmental scheduling of more MWF classes and schedule more one- and two-credit hour classes on WF and MF as well as more varied, campus-wide, residence hall, learning community, and student club events for students during the weekend (Friday afternoon through Sunday evening). Such events could be academic, cultural, athletic, or purely social.

- Discussants reacted mostly negatively to this subject, rendering a thumbs down decision.
- Emphasized the importance of providing a campus and classroom atmosphere conducive to the best learning experience, with decreased attention to which days the learning takes place. Criticized in particular the idea of such scheduling serving a punitive or controlling purpose regarding student behavior.
- Rejected the concept that faculty be expected to work on weekends.
- Noted constructively that part-time faculty may have greater flexibility in scheduling for particular week days because their concerns about research days are less than regular faculty.

Recommendation II.2.2: Renew efforts to implement the University Curriculum Committee's recommendation to develop and implement a "plus-minus" grading system across the University to allow for better grade differentiation in academic performance and to strengthen the rigor of undergraduate courses.

- Discussants were unable to reach a uniform consensus on this subject, although preponderance expressed a somewhat favorable view.

Recommendation II.2.7: Improve the instructional environment in classrooms by installing modern technology appropriate to given classrooms, and then adopt a plan for maintaining and replacing this equipment as needed.

- Discussants emphasized that because technology plays such an essential role in the classroom, technical support, training, and updates of facilities are critical issues, particularly to part-time faculty.
- Expressed concerns related to malfunctions in the technologically complex classroom. Noted importance of availability of back-up units, of matching laptops and projectors, and deliver of projectors delivered, if needed.
- Alerted to importance of knowing who to call when equipment does not work.
- Emphasized need for training in technology before it is implemented. Used as example, training in EMMA, required by English department for submission of student work, but with insufficient familiarity among all faculty members.
- Emphasized also need for appropriate furniture in classrooms when students are required to have laptops, as in Landscape Architecture, along with the need for more widespread wireless areas across campus.