University Council on Graduate Study  
March 17, 2009  
Minutes  
3:00-5:00 p.m.  
817 CL

Attending: Patricia Beeson (Chair), Troy Boone (A&S), Stephen Carr (A&S), Nicole Constable (A&S), Valire Copeland (Social Work), William Dunn (Public and International Affairs), Robert Gibbs (Pharmacy), Amanda Godley (Education), Paula Grabowski (Interdisciplinary), Mary Elizabeth Happ (Nursing), John Horn (Medicine), Margaret Mahoney (Law), Robert Parker (Engineering), Louis Pingel (Education), Sandra Quinn (Public Health), Jayant Rajgopal (Engineering), Mark Roberts (Medicine), Martin Weiss (Information Sciences), Stephanie Hoogendoorn (Provost’s Office)

Guests: Lu-in Wang (Law)

Approval of Minutes
The minutes of the January 13, 2009 meeting were approved.

Announcements
The reception honoring the nominees and recipients of the Provost’s Award for Excellence in Mentoring will be held on April 7, 2009 in the Lower Lounge of the William Pitt Union from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Members will receive their invitation by campus mail.

Best Practices for the Assessment of Certificate and Degree Granting Programs: Nicole Constable from the School of Arts and Sciences and Lu-in Wang from the School of Law shared examples of assessment plans currently in use by their schools and discussed the procedures in their schools for drafting and reviewing these plans. Major topics of discussion and suggested best practices included:

- Several council members wanted to know how to differentiate the individual success of strong students independent from the impact of curriculum on students. This is a hard question that can be addressed through revising assessment plans and thinking about data. Vice Provost Beeson added that assessment is a process that requires many years of thought to get it right.
- One council member asked if any graduate programs have made changes to their curriculum in response to this process. Not yet because graduate programs have only recently started to collect data. Undergraduate programs started this process earlier and as a result some programs have decided to increase their writing requirements.
- Programs might consider telling students what the student learning outcomes are.
- Council discussed how to create incentives/rewards for faculty participation. Programs should help faculty members understand that assessment is tool to help programs improve. Programs should distribute responsibilities so that all faculty members are engaged in thinking about assessment. Junior faculty may find that tasks such as reviewing comprehensive exams help them to learn about the department standards and practices.
- Assessment committees should be standing committees in departments (as opposed to ad
hoc committees).

- It was noted that interesting data are found when the student learning outcomes are not reached. Faculty should try to ask questions that do not have obvious answers.
- Another difficult task is how to assess “soft” skills that are increasingly being recognized as important to professional development and success.
- Faculty assessment should be addressed as part of established annual departmental procedures, not part of program assessment.
- Vice Provost Beeson noted that programs should choose three to five student learning outcomes to assess and that assessment of programs should be a part of an annual and ongoing curriculum review.
- Programs should want to assess their own programs so that others outside Pitt don’t do it for them.

Council thanked the speakers for sharing their examples and for initiating the discussion.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:30 p.m. The next meeting of Council will take place on April 14, 2009.