

Summary of College of Education's Forum on Curricular Reform

The Forum was held on March, 24th, 2006. It was attended by 32 faculty, administrators and staff members. Three members of the Committee on Curricular Reform.

Executive summary: Questions, comments and concerns fit within the following four basic areas: implementation, advising, curriculum and resources.

General

- A concern was voiced about how incoming applicants might feel when they are told they cannot declare their major when they enter as freshmen. This concern might especially apply to students in “professional” schools (such as Engineering / Fine Arts). Students might not wish to come here if this is the case. Were students polled about this?
- What has research indicated about other institutions in the U.S. with the University College (UC) structure? Are the issues being brought up encountered and how are they addressed?

Curricular

- How do we balance focus and generality? From a curricular perspective, how will departments keep things specialized for their majors while still meeting the needs of the general student population?
- (Referring to flags) how do the Reform recommendations help students obtain 21st Century skills? For example, IT fluency and Learning skills?
- A question was raised that the revision might not satisfy state requirements (say, for the undergraduate core curriculum).
- Along the same lines, students have so many other requirements, a question was asked about whether those requirements would stand *in addition* to those now introduced with the Reform? The concern was that these additional requirements will introduce a tremendous burden for some majors. For example, the Athletic training major only has 3 hours of electives.

Implementation

- What kind of oversight board will be constructed that will decide which flags will be assigned to which courses and how might this impinge on faculty's freedom to design courses?
- With respect to the signature courses, how will credit hours be distributed? Which department will be awarded the credit hours? To which department will the UC freshmen's credit hours be assigned?
- Who will decide what constitutes a signature course? Who will coordinate that? Is it going to be primarily UC putting courses together or will professors submit ideas for courses?
- There would have to be compensation (i.e. new lines) awarded to departments for, say, a professor who is teaching a signature course to cover the course that used to be taught by that professor. There would have to be long-term department commitment to ensure long-term participation (and support via new lines).
- Participants expressed interest in this reform and in the possibilities it might offer in terms of enticing students to the College of Education. This led to questions concerning the chances that faculty in the College of Education will get to teach signature courses? How do faculty become involved in signature course offerings?

Advising

- Seems that given 7,000 freshmen are admitted, that 20 or so advisors might be needed to ensure a 1:350 ratio). How can they possibly know about every department in the University? Seems like a Herculean task. Some anticipated that students will still end up going to both Departmental and UC advisors? And/or there was a concern that the UC advisors might lead freshmen to take the wrong set of pre-requisite courses for a major. Others recommended that an earlier model (the centralized Undergraduate Advising Center) had worked well and might be adopted into this new model while enhanced resources be provided to departmental and College advising.
- Question about Q-drops. Would students go to their UC advisors, departmental advisor or to the Dean's office advisor?

Resources

- The same concerns as have been mentioned by other Colleges were brought up with reference to class size. A question was asked about the reaction of students on the Committee. Andrew Carls (a student member of the Committee on Curricular Reform) noted that one of his best classes had been a large lecture course.
- Another question previously mentioned in other Colleges was also asked in our forum. How will it be possible to train the TAs for the signature courses?
- A “credibility gap” was mentioned frequently with reference to resource availability. Additional resources would be needed for this new model and the claim is that resources will be made available. However concerns were mentioned about the lack of resources for current programs. Complaints were made about writing component courses with 60 students enrolled and only funding for one TA. If current needs are not being and have not been met, how can the new resource needs be met? For example, in Kinesiology, they had to freeze undergrad admissions program because it was not possible to offer enough classroom seats for the number of majors needing those seats.
- It seems that enhancing the undergraduate curriculum should not only address the core curriculum but also the resource needs in the upper-division offerings.