Council of Chairs Minutes   Council of Chairs

12-6-2012

Council of Chairs Meeting, December 6, 2012

Marshall University

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1. Attendance:

    Chairs/Division Heads: Mike Castellani (CHM, President), Harlan Smith (FIN/ECN), Allen Stern (CITE), Karen McNealy (CD), Dan Holbrook (HST), David Mallory (BSC), Marty Laubach (SOC/ANT), Allyson Goodman (SOJMC), Steven Mewaldt (Psychology), Paula Lucas (COE), Del Chrol (COLA), Fred Mader (MGT/MKT/MIS)., Denise Landry (SON), John Schloss (SOP), Alfred Akinsete (MTH)

    AA: Corley Dennison

2. Mike Castellani called the meeting to order at 3:30 p.m.

3. The current MU policy on Co-requisites

    A. Corley Dennison stated that as long as two corequisite courses are listed as separate courses/sections on the schedule (i.e., with separate CRN's), then (1) during Schedule Adjustment Week students who drop one of these courses may be dropped from the other, but (2) after the official W period begins, there is nothing in current MU policy that forces students who drop one of the coreqs to drop the other one as well. Specifically, there is currently no Registrar-level enforcement mechanism designed to automatically drop students from the second coreq, during the W period, if they drop the first.

    B. Several members present noted that this problem has accreditation implications for colleges and programs: accrediting bodies often require that courses listed as "coreqs" be taught and taken together, and that if students are able to drop one and remain in the other then these courses cannot be listed as coreqs. This means that, first off, we must make sure that when we list courses as coreqs we really mean it and plan to enforce this. Second, we must develop workable enforcement mechanisms and strategies, in the cases of true coreqs, to force students to either complete both coreqs in the same semester or drop both together.

    C. Several chairs noted that they are able to enforce student enrollment in coreqs at the departmental level via, for example, requiring paper drop slips that won't be signed unless both coreqs are being dropped. Others noted that during the W period students aren't always required to produce paper drop slips to drop courses, so that implementing this method isn't foolproof.

    D. The members present agreed that each department does have the right to develop its own coreq enforcement policy. But this has led, at present, to inconsistent enforcement across campus. We agreed that we need to develop a campus-wide policy to create consistency of enforcement, but we are not sure of our options. Mike and Corley agreed to meet with Roberta Ferguson to discuss the coreq problem from the Registrar's point of view and to get her advice on enforcement. We may invite Roberta to attend a future Council meeting to discuss this topic with us.

4. Student Course Evaluations: Paper v Electronic?

    A. All members present noted the "small/non-random sample problem" we expect to encounter going forward, now that fall and spring course evaluations are being done online (as they have been the past few summer sessions). This is particularly unfortunate for untenured faculty, and for new faculty trying to establish their teaching records.

    B. Another operational problem noted is that the Evaluation Window set up for this semester cuts off partway through the Final Exam Period. Specifically, students can complete their course evaluations up to 11 p.m. on Monday December 17, but there's still a full day of exams yet to take place—on December 18. Some students will be able to complete their evaluations after completing their classes and knowing their course grades, while others will be doing evaluations prior to their final exams and/or knowing their final course grades. This must be changed going forward. The #1 suggestion made is that the Evaluation Window close prior to the start of Final Exams—just as had been the case with the paper evaluations we've been using up until now.

    C. Questions arose as to why we are now doing Fall and Spring online, and why we are Chairs just being brought into the discussion, now, after the online procedures has already been put in place. Chairs would like to have had some information, during the summer, on the university's experiences with online evaluations in recent summer sessions: What response rates are being achieved, and how do they differ from the paper-evaluation response rates we're familiar with? What benefits does the university expect to reap by making this switch?

        1. Corley noted that participation rates during the summer and the "early returns" MU has gotten so far this term indicate that participation does fall off but remains significant. The drop-off does not appear, so far, to be as drastic as many have expected.

        2. We also learned that a key impetus behind making the move to online evaluations this semester was the fact that the UCS evaluation scanner broke down recently and repairs are expensive. This precipitated the move to online evaluations this fall.

        3. Some benefits of the online system include eliminating the processing problems faced by UCS when dealing with the paper evaluations, and disseminating the results back to the faculty much quicker. The Chairs noted that, as this experiment proceeds, we should measure the costs of each procedure (paper/online) versus the benefits of each procedure and decide on this basis how to implement the evaluations going forward. Corley noted that the Provost should be part of this discussion, for the final decision belongs to him.

        4. Denise Landry (Nursing) noted that her program has used online evaluations for some time now, and find this approach to be logistically superior. The nursing students are always ready to provide feedback to instructors, and have made the online system work for them just as they did the paper system. We thus do have an example, at the program level, of the switch to online evaluations proving to be a net benefit.

D. Strategies for enhancing student participation in the online evaluation system were identified, including

   1. Scheduling time for the class in a computer lab, during the course, for students to complete the evaluation.

   2. Make the release of final course grades dependent on completion of the course evaluations. One Chair noted that this mechanism has worked well elsewhere, and might be worth a try in the MU context.

   3. Make the completion of the online evaluation a required component of the course, in a positive way, so that students understand that part of their responsibility in each course is to offer some assessment input via the evaluations.

   4. All agreed that one key way to improve student participation is to explain, in class, the importance of the exercise to the students. They need to know that their input is not useless or ignored, and that we value and respect their input.

E. On a broader level, several chairs raised the issue of "structural change" in the evaluation process, so that multiple assessment points could be embedded in each class, during a semester. The current single-data-point system is fraught with problems we're all familiar with; if we could go to a multiple-data-point system, with students providing constructive feedback along the way, this would be of great benefit. Especially for the new faculty and untenured faculty seeking to improve their teaching expertise and/or build up their teaching records for promotion and tenure.

5. The new Sharepoint site system for Faculty Searches
   A. Several chairs noted the difficulties this new system creates with respect to Letters of Recommendation, since they normally arrive direct from the writers, under separate cover. Chairs are also concerned about why we made such a big shift to this new system, knowing that within a year the university will be adopting the more comprehensive PeopleAdmin system. In short, this drastic shift in "standard operating procedures"—which will last just this academic year—has made it much more difficult, operationally, to manage our faculty searches.

   B. The extra burden this new system puts on the existing HR staff is enormous; no one present blames any particular HR staffer for any of the snafus that have occurred with this new system.

   C. Our discussion concluded with a basic question: How can we make this new system work better, this year, now that we're stuck with it for the time being?