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Student Affairs Committee

April 24, 2008

Minutes

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Present: V. Bielat, D. Strauss, K. Feathers, N. Simon, W. Slater

Minutes from February 2008 and agenda approved.

Retention, degree completion, and the electronic audit were the two major topics for this meeting. The following summarizes the discussion of these topics.

Retention/completion time span

There was some concern that students are admitted with low ACT scores because currently if either GPA or ACT is acceptable, students are admitted. While there was some discussion about whether acceptable scores on both should be required, the major concern was that students admitted with low ACT scores are not provided with the support that they need in order to be successful. If we are admitting these students, then we should provide the necessary support.

Another concern was that some students are being encouraged to take 12 credit hours a semester instead of 15. That extends the time for completion. However, some students, for example those with low ACT scores, could not successfully handle 15 credit hours. One recommendation was that achievement of 15 hours a semester should be discussed with all students.

Another factor that affects the time for completion is that many students take classes at night. However, advisors who might provide useful information and counseling are not available at night. Many of the current support mechanisms target full time students and there are fewer programs for non-traditional students. Additionally those programs that do exist are often not available at times convenient for those non-traditional students. Non traditional students also need different kinds of support, for example day care, financial assistance/advising.

Also courses are not available at night; so students often have to wait to take classes. This is compounded by programs with course pre-requisites as students wait for the pre-requisites to be available in the evening.

Pre-requisite courses also affect students who transfer into programs. For example, a student transferring in as a junior expecting to graduate in two years, might find that it will take three years to take the required courses in a major because of the pre-requisites. (They have to take course A before B and B before C and C before D.)

Completion time is also extended by the way content material is allocated across courses in some departments. Students may have to take well over 30 credit hours to satisfy the

requirements for licensure in a field because the required material is allocated across multiple courses instead of occurring in a few courses

Electronic Audit

Currently there are two different years that are used to determine degree requirements. The year of declaration of major is used to determine the courses in the major field, but the year of entrance to a post-

secondary program is used for general education require-ments. Therefore it is not clear which date should be used for the audit. The new audit would give students a choice of bulletin to use for the audit, but there are difficulties with this practice.

Some Gen. Ed. courses might not need a time limit or the time limit might vary for the same course for different majors. For example, the time limit might for a Gen. Ed. math course might be important for a business major, but not for an art major. The group discussed a suggestion that requirements and time limits should be determined by departments. There were several questions about this. What is the value of the degree if each program has different requirements? How would departmental control affect the Gen. Ed. curriculum?

For example, the current math requirements of math 0993 and 1000 are problematic. Math 0993 is a pre-requisite for 1000, but what is taught in 0993 does not prepare students for 1000. What if departments could use a different course for the math requirement or could determine that math was not required? Students currently delay taking math because of 0993 and this can lengthen their program. One current recommendation is for students to take math in the first year, but the problem is providing enough sections of the math classes to meet that demand.

Another issue discussed in relation to the electronic audit was students dropping out for a year. The audit would require a set of procedures including meeting with an advisor for any student who has not taken a course for a year. There were several issues discussed in relation to this topic.

First is the question of who will do the advising. Will this be done in the individual colleges or in a central advising office? What would this advising load be? How many students would this affect?

Second, some colleges already have procedures and policies in place that address their specific students. What happens to those policies?

Third, a blanket rule about a one year drop-out does not take into consideration the reason for the lack of attendance. For example, with our non-traditional students, pregnancy is
often the reason for dropping out for a year. Does a returning student who dropped out

because of pregnancy need the same advising as someone who dropped out because of low grades?

Finally, the proposal assumes advisors are available and that the system works smoothly. In actuality advisors are not currently available at times convenient for students and there are problems with paperwork. The process delays students when they cannot get appointments with advisors and paperwork gets lost.

The Plan of Work on the electronic audit was another topic of discussion. A major question was how the POW would be created. It sounds as if the system would be engineered to automatically set up a plan of work. Thus a student could request a plan of work for any major and see what courses he/she would need to take earn a degree in that major. On the surface this sounds like a good idea, but it is not free from problems.

The audit also seems to assume that once a POW if filed students simply follow the POW, and that program requirements are static, but programs that lead to licensure in a field can change without notice. For example the Michigan Department of Education often makes changes in teacher certification requirements that are effective within a few months. This sort of change can mean that students must now take new courses or different courses or that courses already completed might no longer be required. Students might be able to complete their degree program without making these changes, but they would not be eligible for licensure; therefore they must change their POW. If students are relying on the POW in the electronic audit system,

they might not even be aware of these changes. This raises the question of how students would be notified of such changes. Would they check the audit system? Would students do that on a regular basis? The group determined that notification by email would not work as students to a large extent do not read their WSU email.

There was also a concern that if the POW and declaration of major are done on line, students would be less likely to see an advisor, and part of the problem now is that they fail to consult with an advisor.

The issue of who creates and controls the POW is important. The group consensus seemed to be that the POW should be controlled by the department and generated by the advisor.

The group also felt that the electronic audit should be in the hands of departments, not the registrar�s office. We will need cooperation across the campus for the audit to be effective and that we need those �in the trenches� to be involved from the beginning in designing the audit.

Meeting ended at 3:15 pm.