Meeting of the Villanova University
Academic Policy Committee

Wednesday, September 18, 2019
9:00 - 10:00 AM
Fedigan Room (SAC 400)

Minutes

Present: Jennifer Altamuro, Matt Clarkin, Scott Dressler, Elizabeth Greco (alternate), Stacey Havlik, Marylu Hill, Stephanie Katz, Christopher Kilby (chair), Stefanie Knauss, Rory Kramer, Eric Lomazoff, Joyce Russell, John Shindelar, Javad Siah, Ani Ural, Andrea Welker, Craig Wheeland

Absent: Sherry Burrell (NIA), Kathy Byrnes (NIA), Zuyi (Jacky) Huang (NIA), Adele Lindenmeyr (NIA), Stephen Napier (NIA), Christine Kelleher Palus (NIA), Lesley Perry, Elizabeth Petit de Mange (NIA), Michael Posner (NIA)

Administrative Items

1) Ani Ural volunteered to take notes.

2) Introduction of new committee members: Jennifer Altamuro (replacing Tina Yang (VSB) who left for University of South Florida), Elizabeth Greco (SGA alternate), Stefanie Knauss (replacing Sarah-Vaughan Brakman (CLAS-Arts) who is on sabbatical leave), and John Shindelar (Graduate Student Council rep). Also congratulations to Stacey Havlik and Eric Lomazoff on promotion and tenure!

Business, Old and New

3) Update on Canvas Pilot, Matt Kerbel (Interim Vice Provost for Teaching and Learning) & Kevin Donahue (Assistant Vice President, Instructional Technologies) [Old Business] Because Villanova's Blackboard license is expiring and because Blackboard is being replaced by Blackboard Ultra—an entirely new system—the university has been exploring different learning management systems. The initial front runner was Desire to Learn (D2L) but various shortcomings (e.g., grading features) led to a reconsideration (and a temporary extension of VU's Blackboard license). The university is now focusing on Canvas; the Board of Trustees is expected approve the switch to Canvas at a meeting later this year. If approved, the transition from Blackboard to Canvas will start June 2020 and finish June 2021 (when VU's Blackboard license expires). The cost of Canvas is comparable to Blackboard Ultra; open source alternatives (e.g., Moodle) would require two support staff to run and therefore do not offer dramatic cost savings. For instructors, the transition to Canvas may be labor intensive as materials cannot be pulled directly from Blackboard, but this would be true even if we stayed with Blackboard because of the required transition to Ultra. Interested faculty can begin the transition to Canvas right away. Students will benefit from a more "modern" interface and better integration with mobile apps.

3) Office of Disability Services (ODS) Accommodation Letters [New Business]

APC discussed faculty concerns with overly broad or vague accommodations in letters from ODS. The central concern is that broad/vague language can either undermine the academic integrity of assignments, assessments, and instruction if the instructor allows the student to take full advantage of this or puts the faculty member at risk if they impose limits. Eric Lomazoff stressed the asymmetry of the situation, with the student and ODS knowing exactly what the disability is and the faculty only having what is communicated in the letter. Christopher Kilby suggested that APC work on improved language for such letters to suggest to ODS; Craig Wheeland offered to serve as the conduit to forward suggestions to ODS. APC members were invited to email Christopher if they wanted to help with wordsmithing.

4) Course Preview Policy [Old Business]
Craig Wheeland reported that he sent the Course Preview Policy to the Registrar at the beginning of the summer for feedback on the feasibility of piloting. In August, Craig met with Pam Braxton (Registrar), who expressed some concern that this would extend the Registrar's "busy season" past the Add date. Christopher Kilby pointed out that the Course Preview Policy should not have this effect since no post-registration adjustments would be needed. Matt Clarkin indicated that Spring 2020 would be ideal for piloting, with the full roll out Fall 2020 if there were no major issues. Matt and Craig will continue to liaise with the Registrar.

5) Subcommittees
Christopher briefly reviewed the charges of APC's four subcommittees and circulated a sign-up sheet where people could either "re-up" for their committee or switch. Subcommittee chair positions were also open; Christopher offered to chair the Out of Colleges Programs subcommittee. [Post meeting note: Rory Kramer agreed to chair the CATS subcommittee and Eric Lomazoff agreed to the chair the Add/Drop subcommittee; we still need a chair for the Student Course Load subcommittee.]

6) Honor Program
For the benefit of new APC members, the meeting packet included a reprint of APC's March 21, 2017 recommendations concerning a policy for Honors courses with department or program designations. In addition to laying out a collaborative process, the policy stated that Honors must email the policy to department and program chairs each semester and that the policy must be posted on the Honors Program website. Craig Wheeland confirmed that his office had adopted this recommendation as official policy. Christopher Kilby recounted reports from chairs that the email was sent only once (not each semester). Furthermore, he could not find the policy on the Honors website. Finally, there are new reports of non-compliance with the staffing principles laid out in the policy. In one example, an Honors section of a Philosophy course was offered without involvement of the chair (and without using Department faculty). Other APC members reported a similar reversion to previous practices though some noted the difficulty of staffing Honors sections in some setting. Craig Wheeland indicated this is an ongoing effort and that he is optimistic the process is improving. In addition, Craig pointed out that there have also been instances of departments applying the Honors designation to a course without approval of the Honors Program.

Christopher noted the potential for similar issues with the College of Professional Studies (CPS) and study abroad programs run directly by Villanova. The committee discussed various possible technical solutions based on procedures for listing a course with the registrar. One proposal was a double confirmation system where departments submit a spreadsheet to the registrar with their course offerings, including Honors (or CPS or study abroad) designations. At the same time, the Honors Program (or CPS or study abroad) also submits a list of courses with approved Honors (or CPS or study abroad) designations. Any inconsistencies between the two lists would be kicked back to both parties for resolution.

Thanks to Ani for excellent and easy to read notes!