CLA Senate meeting 09.19.2016

Submitted by Sarah Keller

The meeting was called to order at 2:32 p.m.

1. Approval of Agenda

The agenda was approved.

1. Approval of Minutes

The minutes from the May 2016 CLA Senate meeting were approved.

1. Moderator’s report

The moderator sought an additional member of the senate to serve on the Senate Executive Committee (SEC). Mary Oleskiewicz volunteered and will henceforth serve on the SEC.

1. Dean’s report, given by Associate Dean Stephanie Hartwell.

Dean Hartwell noted that the Board of Trustees were meeting at the same time as our CLA Senate meeting, which is where David Terkla is. The Board is asking UMass-Boston to address a $20-25 million deficit.

Hartwell noted that they are going over how each unit deals with its budget and are meeting today to come up with recommendations. She thought they would likely propose a way to address the deficit over the next few years rather than all at once.

Senators asked several questions, especially about the cause of the budget shortfall. Hartwell noted it has been a point of consternation for all involved, and that dealing with the budget is a mercurial and fluid process because expenses continue whether or not the budgets have been fully sorted out. While over-projecting enrollments is frequently brought up as a major factor in the shortfall, there are several other possible causes, including capital investments.

Hartwell mentioned that the UMass system is holding our campus more accountable, in that we

are expanding and in the process of so much construction. Stephanie also stated that it is unlikely that we will achieve a student body of 25,000 in 2025. And, enrollments for the current academic year may be down 1% compared to last year.

The issue of the NTT non-reappointment letters kerfuffle was addressed: Hartwell described the process as part of a cost saving idea. There were questions about how much money was saved in the process. Hartwell noted it was reported to be a large number. One senator asked whether it was true that most of the appointments were hired back, and Hartwell said they were. Another senator asked how they saved any costs if most were hired back and wondered what was accomplished by the non-reappointment letters.

There was some discussion of whether the non-reappointment letters caused disruptions at the department level. A few senators noted that it definitively and negatively affected their departments (including one department that suffered difficulty in rehiring people who had received non-reappointment letters and sought other employment). Hartwell said that the deans were going to be soliciting feedback from departments about the kinds of impacts they experienced.

Finally, Hartwell highlighted a new initiative: an undergraduate research portfolio which is being piloted in the college: it is a program that gives undergrads an asterisk on their transcript to note that they did research with a professor.

*N.B.* There were no new courses to approve yet. There are many coming in the next meeting, but they are currently with the Academic Affairs Committee (AAC).

1. Adam Beresford from AAC attended the meeting to talk with the CLA Senators about what the AAC does and how their course approval process relates to the course approval process under the purview of the CLA Senate. The AAC is a 9-member committee from CSM and CLA. Their primary task is to review new course proposals; in addition, they review proposals for changes to existing courses.

The process for getting a new course approved: the faculty member proposing it fills out a one-form, which includes a syllabus and possibly accompanying documentation for distribution and/or diversity credit. The chair signs off on the proposal and it goes to Kelly Ahearn in the Dean’s office. She passes them along to the AAC, which reviews them, possibly offering feedback for revisions to the proposal before approving or rejecting it. If approved, it goes on to the SEC, which puts them on the agenda for the CLA Senate, which is then similarly charged with approving each course. The CLA Senate thus offers the final stamp of approval for new courses. They currently check the one-forms and the syllabi.

The process taken up by the AAC is as follows:

1. The chair farms the proposals out across the AAC membership: each member reads closely and reviews a few proposals;
2. All gather together to discuss all of them;
3. All determine whether significant changes need to be made;
4. The AAC chair communicates with the people proposing the course if revisions are requested.
5. If approved, the proposal is passed along to the SEC by the Friday before their monthly meeting (currently the SEC meets the week before the CLA Senate meeting).

Beresford noted that Oct 15 is last date to get a course into Kelly to have it considered in time (if approved) to get the new course into WISER before the spring semester. He urged senators to tell their departments to have faculty get any new course proposals done early in the semester.

A senator asked about what kinds of recommendations are made for revising the proposals. Beresford responded that the AAC looks for three things:

1. The **quality** of the syllabus and that everything is on it. They make sure it’s clear and that students can see what the course is about. They consider in general whether it looks like it will be a good course.
2. Whether the course is the right amount of **rigorous**: does it ask enough? Does it ask too much or too little of the students?
3. Is the course a good **FIT** for the college: is it a course that duplicates other courses in other departments?

In addition, the AAC takes into account whether the course description and syllabus are well written. They check for errors in English and for clarity. They check that the basic boilerplate language is in each syllabus (e.g., academic dishonesty, student accommodations through the Ross Center, etc.).

He noted that despite having guidelines and high standards for the quality, rigor, and fit of the proposals, the AAC likes to give autonomy to departments and individuals.

A long discussion ensued. The main questions senators asked concerned three issues (in order of how much time was spend on each issue, from most to least):

1. What is the role of the AAC vs. the CLA Senate in reviewing courses? Is the process redundant?
2. Should the CLA Senate be spending as much time as it does on reviewing courses, given the fact that each course has gone under review in three places before arriving in the senate?
3. Which things should be decided at each level? Should the Senate be responsible for catching typos? For looking at pre-reqs? What should the role be for the faculty member, chair, department, AAC, and/or CLA Senate?

The senators expressed both ends of the spectrum on all of these issues: e.g., that the senate should be the final say in approving courses and that the senate should drastically reduce the kind of review it does. The redundancy issue (that too many groups are doing the same work) was of great interest.

The idea that senators are overseeing the quality of the education of the students was raised, as was the fact that it is a large and broadly representative body that could, as non-specialized readers, provide insight about courses being created by specialized personnel who may know too much to be able to read the proposal like a student would.

It was proposed by a senator that maybe the AAC could flag anything that they would like us to look at more carefully and have the Senate spend more time with such a course. Beresford noted that the course would have to be approved to come to the senate at all, so such notations would be after their own final approval.

A senator asked whether CAPS courses go through the same process. Beresford noted that they have a different governance structure.

A senator asked whether we might look ONLY at the syllabus, not the one-form. Another suggested not having departments come in to talk about courses. It was suggested that the CLA senators should represent any courses being put through governance by their departments, contacting the faculty member who proposed it to make sure they could answer questions about it.

The issue of pre-reqs was discussed, and having the senate keep an eye on the number of courses being offered without them: a lot of courses no longer require pre-reqs to boost enrollments. A senator noted that this is a curricular issue and that we should have a more substantive discussion about the impact of enrollment pressure on students’ ability to take courses successfully.

In the end, the Senate decided that it would continue this conversation. We will still look at one-forms, and the AAC will flag anything they think we should look at more carefully. We will strategize about whether we should divide the proposals so that each senator would be responsible for looking at a few of the proposals more closely than the others. It was again noted that we senators represent our own departments’ proposals. The only time we would ask to bring the proposing faculty member is when there is something flagged and if we have questions.

1. Emily Wiemers: Majors, Honors, and Special Programs (MHSP)
   1. MHSP reviews changes in majors and minors, as well as reviewing proposals for new programs. Individual majors also are reviewed through this committee. Finally, it reviews the formation of centers within CLA. It has 10 members (7 from CLA and 3 from the College of Science and Mathematics [CSM])
   2. The process is less clear than in AAC because deans have more of a role in the approval of new majors and minors: the proposal has first to be informally approved by the dean’s council.
   3. For new majors proposals for new programs also go through Board of Higher Education.
   4. If a department wants to propose a new major, go through Emily and Dean Terkla.
   5. The MHSP committee compares the new program with other majors and minors so it will be consistent with norms for current programs. It makes sure that everything is in order so the program can be entered into WISER. It also checks to see whether the department has the resources to offer it (enough faculty, etc.) so that students will be able to complete the program in a timely fashion. Finally, it considers how this program overlaps with existing programs.
   6. As for centers: Wiemers noted that some are practical and low budget and some are not. They ask whether pedagogical reasons support the existence of the center. Centers are resource intensive.
   7. MHSP also looks at changes in tracks and concentrations, changes in a program (including graduate programs). They do not look at grad courses (which go to the faculty council).

A senator asked whether the centers have a kind of review (like AQUAD in other departments) procedure? Is there any review procedure for them?

It was noted that centers are a new phenomenon and emerged during the budget crisis. The CLA Senate reactivated the Budget Planning and Review Committee in part to track expenses like this. David Pantalone and the committee will report to us when appropriate.

1. Approval of Senate Committees, AY 16-17.

The moderator noted that there was some need to tweak the list because some committee members from the School for the Environment and the Honors College can only sit in on the committee, but not serve as full, participating/voting members. The senate committees were then unanimously approved.

1. Statement on Faculty Transparency.
   1. The CLA Senate was asked to look again at a statement that had been revised since first being sent to the senate last spring. It originated in response to REAB, and then to the current budget crisis in general. The senate gave the anonymous authors feedback on the statement last spring, including asking that they make the demands more precise, expand beyond REAB, and clarify in whose name was the statement being made. Now our question is: what to do with it in its revised form?
   2. Some options: we could share it with:
      1. individual departments
      2. the faculty council
      3. the planning and review committee
   3. Some senators noted that we should add something about our contract and/or something about the administration’s unilateral decision to make all instructors use Blackboard or the elimination of e-reserves, etc.
   4. Some senators felt the demands are not as specific as they should be and that the tone should be modified (some thought the tone too harsh; others, that it should be more forceful).
   5. It was suggested that the faculty members in CLA want the administration to seek out our input on major decisions on campus and that we should be provided with information about these decisions. It was argued that faculty should be seen as integral to administrative designs rather than actors who carry out the director’s orders. The primary concern raised by many senators was that faculty should be strongly represented in all decisions related to the academic big picture.
   6. It was determined that we would send the statement to the new Budget and Planning Review Committee. They should return it to us with comments in October so that we may decide how to approach this with our departments.
2. New Business.
   1. Announcement: the NEH Chairman, Bro Adams, is coming to campus on Tuesday, October 11 to talk about the humanities across the university. Senators were encouraged to announce to their departments.