

Graduate Faculty Council Meeting Minutes: February 27, 2002

Whetten Graduate Center, Room 200
3:00 P.M.

1. The meeting was called to order at 3:05 P.M. Associate Vice Provost James Henkel presided.
2. It was moved, seconded, and passed on a voice vote to approve as distributed the minutes of the 01-30-2002 meeting.
3. J. Henkel introduced Paul Kobulnicky, Vice Chancellor for Information Services, who was present to discuss with the Council the recent implementation of the initial phases of the PeopleSoft student administration computer system, i.e., student records and course registration. He explained the history of the PeopleSoft initiative at UConn. The suite of software was purchased in 1998. He spoke about the original decision to run PeopleSoft in UConn's mainframe environment (which later became problematic), and he explained that PeopleSoft runs on three sets of servers (Web, application, and database servers).

Early tests of the system were conducted last Fall. The PeopleSoft system was used for Graduate School and Law School course registration while undergraduate students registered via the Touch Tone Telephone system. Peak PeopleSoft usage topped out at about 1,400 simultaneous users. It became clear that this exceeded the effective capacity of PeopleSoft running on UConn's mainframe computer.

Kobulnicky explained that a transition to a UNIX environment is underway. The next modules to be implemented are student advisement, admissions, and, finally, financial aid (the most complex of the modules). Concurrent with the change to the UNIX environment is the upgrade from PeopleSoft 7.6 to PeopleSoft 8.0. In making these changes, steps will be taken to be able to control the number of simultaneous student users while insuring that faculty and staff can access the system as needed with good response time. Version 8.0 is targeted for use by the first quarter of 2004.

It was noted that this system does not lend itself to producing a printable class schedule. Kobulnicky noted that efforts are underway to be able to post updated class schedules periodically on the Web. He noted also that significant work is underway to insure that a wide variety of reports will be available to faculty and staff.

Kobulnicky responded to a variety of questions. In particular, there was discussion about the need for a printed class schedule. Kobulnicky agreed to look into producing a meaningful printed class schedule.

4. In follow-up to continued discussion at the 1-30-2002 meeting of the Council concerning a proposal of a sub-committee of the University Senate to modify the academic calendar,

a draft statement concerning the calendar proposal authored by J. Marsden on behalf of the GFC Executive Committee was presented for consideration and discussion.

There was consensus on a number of editorial changes to the draft as well as agreement to add a section concerning the impact that the proposed calendar modification would have on the offerings of the Connecticut Repertory Theater.

The finalized text of the statement is presented below:

The Graduate Faculty Council, which represents approximately 1,100 members of the Graduate Faculty, would like to express its severe reservations about the proposed alterations to the academic calendar. The Council is less concerned with the attempt to regularize the fall semester than with the proposed elimination of the current January intersession. These concerns have been expressed by faculty from departments and Schools across the University.

The current January intersession presents many notable strengths, both for the University's research mission and for teaching on the graduate and undergraduate level.

Research

Because of the extended block of time free from holidays and teaching commitments, the current intersession is a major source of research productivity for the faculty from all disciplines. It provides many opportunities for:

- sustained time for research and writing.
- grant writing and preparation - many granting agencies both public and private (e.g., NSF, NIH, USDA) have deadlines in February.
- contact with research collaborators.
- travel to collections and archives which cannot be reached during the semester (and which are often closed during late December through early January).

- research in the Southern Hemisphere - such research is especially important to fields such as Anthropology and Ecology and Evolutionary Biology.
- graduate student travel to archives - often this is the only time graduate students can afford travel to distant collections as airfares are low during January (although not over Christmas and New Years or during May).
- conference attendance, especially international meetings.

Teaching

The current intersession is equally important in terms of its contributions to teaching. It provides:

- time to prepare new classes - this time is especially necessary when preparing new graduate courses.
- time to redesign and bring current courses up to date - this is especially important in subjects where the field can change rapidly (e.g., Genetics).
- time to read and comment upon dissertation chapters.
- time to participate in unique educational opportunities currently conducted in January, such as the Arts in England program, which would be economically unfeasible in a "Maymester" due to increased airfares and hotel rates.

The Graduate Faculty Council sees three overriding negative consequences to the proposed changes to the academic calendar:

1. Loss of instructional time -- The proposed calendar reduces the semester to thirteen weeks and four days (rather than fourteen weeks). This causes several complications:

- loss of instructional time.
- scheduling difficulties for labs and graduate seminars.
- loss of uniformity between different sections of the same class.

2. Loss of the intersession -- Holding classes two to three weeks earlier in January presents many problems for the University's research and teaching mission, including:

- potentially catastrophic reduction in research productivity among both faculty and graduate students - gaining a week in December is not equivalent because many faculty have family obligations during this time and many archives are closed during the Christmas and New Year's holidays.
- time spent on departmental hiring at national conferences during this time further reduces time available to faculty for research.
- harsh January weather increases the potential for "snow days," leading to even more losses in instructional time.

3. Substantial Hardship for the School of Fine Arts -- The proposed changes to the fall calendar would prevent the Connecticut Repertory Theater from staging two productions in the fall semester unless these productions overlap. This change in schedule:

- reduces practical training opportunities for students thus preventing many from being eligible for membership in professional unions after graduation, which in turn damages the ability of the program to attract good students.

- severely curtails the budget of the CRT because of the lack of ticket sales during the weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas.

The University has presented no compelling reasons for making such a significant change. Any possible gains seem unlikely to offset the many negative repercussions. Therefore, the Graduate Faculty Council cannot support the current proposal for altering the academic calendar.

Following discussion, it was moved (K. Haller), seconded, and passed without dissent on a voice vote to endorse the statement as modified by the Council during the course of discussion and to request that the Vice Provost for Research and Graduate Education forward the statement on behalf of the Council to the President, the Chancellor, the Senate Executive Committee, and to the Senate Scholastic Standards Committee.

5. The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Thomas B. Peters
Secretary

Present:

- Alexandrescu, A. (alt)
- Clifford, J.G.
- Hasson, S.
- Mukhopdhyay, N.
- Smith, E.
- Andrie, R.
- Cormier, V. (alt)
- Herzberger, D.
- Salamone, J.
- Stern, D.
- Barnes-Farrell, J.
- Cusson, R.
- Higonnet, M.
- Schultz, E.
- Streifer, P.
- Basu, A.
- Fernandez, M.L.
- Karan, O.
- Segal, J.
- Troyer, J.
- Brody, H.
- Frogley, A.
- Linnekin, J.

- Sheehan, N.
- vanLear, C.A. (alt)
- Brown, R.
- Haller, K.
- Marsden, J.
- Shvartsman, A.
- Warner, G

Graduate School:

- Henkel, J.

Speaker: Paul Kobulnicky, Vice Chancellor for Information Services

Regrets:

- Cournoyer, D.
- Hart, I.
- Peters, T.