Minutes  
Committee on Academic Quality  
October 16, 2008  


After introductions, Bill was reelected chair of the committee. Bill and other members briefly reviewed past accomplishments of the committee. These include initiating the following: the enforcement of prerequisites (departments are now reviewing theirs), a campus-wide assessment coordinator (the position is currently open), and the Professional Development Center. Bill pointed out that historically the committee has worked on identifying discrete issues that the committee feels would improve the quality of instruction and learning on campus and then passing them to the relevant authorities.

Next discussed were initiatives that are less advanced. These include student pictures in Banner so that faculty can more quickly connect student names and faces (it is currently working its way through administration), the suggestion for the Professional Development Center to offer orientation to adjunct faculty (a proposal was written by Bill last year but not approved by the Committee) and a campus-wide electronic discussion on teaching (Bill will contact John Kane, the head of CELT; several pointed out that John had set up Angel learning communities on various teaching topics).

Issues left unresolved from last year include a campus-wide classroom evaluation (perhaps based on IDEA: http://www.theideacenter.org/) and a campus-wide report on grade distribution by classes. For example, Cornell does this: http://registrar.sas.cornell.edu/Student/mediangradesA.html. [When looking for this web page, Bill also found this very interesting article: "Princeton Leads in Grade Deflation" http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/2007-03-27-princeton-grades_N.htm ]

Next the committee discussed initiatives for this year:

- Steve proposed that the committee look at the issue of Fall Break. In Faculty Assembly, the claim was made that a Fall Break was pedagogically useful for students. He wonders if the empirical data support this assertion.

- John suggested that we examine student expectations (Richard pointed out that student views of Gen Ed Courses merited particular attention). Bill recounted a short study in "My Freshman Year" where many students see learning as perhaps a third of the total value of college. Bill went on to say that perhaps a focus group of students could be formed. Bill will ask for the campus report from NSSE (National Study on Student Engagement) and FSSE (Faculty Survey of Student Engagement) as well as the corresponding SUNY one. It was pointed out that the survey participants were not necessarily randomly selected. Many committee members pointed out that students don't read and there was general puzzlement over this. Steve then wisely pointed out that such concerns are commonly discussed, but what can we do? As Susan put it, what could be our "action item?" She suggested looking at the number of textbooks purchased. More broadly, perhaps we could survey students in some fashion. Steve asked to what degree are students responding to faculty student behavior? Richard pointed out that some faculty are concerned about student effort yet their grading does not reflect their concerns. Also, Webe pointed out that we want to teach students how to learn. There seemed to be general consensus on this point: in some fashion we want a document that will explain student behavior, motivation, and expectations to faculty.

Finally, we decided to meet again in two weeks, Thursday, Oct. 30, 8:30 to 9:30. There seemed to be general consensus to meet every three weeks, but in two weeks COLT will meet at this time. Bill will find us a room.

To Do Items
- obtain copies of the campus NSSE, FSSE, and similar SUNY report (Bill)
- send previous proposal on orientation of adjuncts (Bill)
- ask John Kane about campus-wide electronic discussion of teaching (Bill)
- obtain a room for the next meeting (Bill)