Academic Computing Steering Committee (AcCSC)

Minutes of Meetings:
October 24, 2000
Olin 102, 3:30 pm

Present: Batson, Boyer, Cossey, Keller, Klein, McFadden, Sener, Traver, Wolf

Review of last meeting's minutes

Budgets: Cossey, Klein, McFadden, Wolf will be meeting with the FEC next Monday, Oct. 30 to begin to prioritize budget requests on the academic side. This Committee should have a chance to review and support what Academic Affairs brings to P&P. The Chair expresses hope that all items are presented to P&P, with priorities, so that the full P&P can see what we feel are the College's technology needs.

Distance Learning: The bulk of the meeting was taken up in a discussion of College policy toward students wishing to take distance learning courses from other institutions. We had written a draft policy last spring, which had been returned by the AAC, with the request that we propose a more restrictive policy toward distance learning courses.

Last week, Tom McFadden circulated a taxonomy of distance learning courses versus online courses, and a discussion paper on how much distance education was too much. These served as the basis for a discussion of what AAC really wants this Committee to do. Doug Klein offered a second draft of our memo with some specific recommendations. Specifically, he suggested:

Union College will award transfer credit for a maximum of three distance education/online courses, so long as:
1. the courses meet the same requirements as other
transfer and cross-registered courses;
2. courses are accredited courses offered from a regionally accredited college or university; and
3. the home institution awards its enrolled undergraduate students course credit toward towards one of its accredited undergraduate degrees; and
4. these courses are not taken in the student’s senior year; and
5. in addition to (1), the proposal for transfer is reviewed and approved in advance by the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education.

The wording of (3) is to ensure that the DL courses are not offered primarily to alumni or high school students. Fuat Sener suggested that not only should the offering institution award credit, but that there should actually be students from that institution enrolled in the course. This would ensure that the offering institution shared the value of students and faculty being able to meet in person, and this would exclude courses offered by strictly online institutions.

Cherrice Traver noted that the exclusion of seniors might preclude students taking advanced courses that Union could not offer; others agreed that there was no point in excluding seniors.

Tom McFadden worried that we should apply the same standards to transfer students as to students currently enrolled at Union. This generated considerable discussion, with most committee members feeling that awarding of transfer credit to incoming students was up to the Admissions office and the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Education, and that we should not automatically rule out any one type of course (i.e. distance learning courses).

Consensus was that, initially at least, any distance learning course a Union student wants to take for Union credit should be reviewed by someone here, probably the Assoc. Dean for Undergraduate Education. Eventually we may be able to evolve uniform standards.

Consensus also was that this is an issue that will not go away. More and more courses will be available in some
way online, and our students will almost certainly want to take advantage of some of them. Becoming isolationist will not be a successful strategy. We should think about making some of our courses open to students from other institutions, and/or admitting more students to be in residence if significant numbers of them begin taking courses through distance learning from other institutions. We should seek to maintain an even "balance of trade" -- offering DL courses to as many outside students as our students take from other institutions.

John Boyer raised a key point. Why was AAC asking us to consider this issue. We are, after all, a computing steering committee, not an academic policy-making committee. Our job is to assess whether there is any pedagogical reason why students should be prevented from taking distance learning courses. Last Spring, we said that so long as students follow established college standards for seeking and receiving approval, we saw no problem. If AAC wishes to establish stricter limits for DL courses than for courses, say, from community colleges, then that should be AAC's responsibility, not ours.

Based on our deliberations, we suggest the following language regarding students wishing to take distance learning courses:

Union College will award credit for a distance education/online course, so long as:

1. the course is accredited at a regionally accredited college or university; and
2. the home institution awards its enrolled undergraduate students course credit toward towards one of its accredited undergraduate degrees; and
3. the course meets all other requirements for courses offered by other institutions and accepted for credit at Union College; and
4. the request is reviewed and approved in advance by the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education.

If in addition, the AAC wishes to limit the number of DL courses that a student may receive credit for at Union, it may wish to adopt language such as the following which
stresses the value of a residential educational experience. The AcCSC warns, however, that Union (or any other liberal arts college) should and need not appear reactionary or defensive in the face of distance learning.

Union's traditional strength is based on the belief, stated in the College Mission Statement that “the close relationship between its faculty and students motivates to learn.” In consideration of the importance we place on students’ participating in a residential learning community, we recommend the following policy regarding distance learning courses taken from other institutions.

At this point, the AAC may wish to choose a maximum number of DL courses (noting that the College now accepts up to 18 courses from transfer students, which may come from a very wide variety of schools), and then refer to the four points above as the criteria for matriculated Union students to receive credit for DL courses.

Other business:
Doug Klein met with the AAC on Monday, Oct. 23 to review the timeline for implementing web advising (and, with Kimmo Rosenthal, discuss the whole issue of advising at Union). He also told AAC that this Committee is re-working the distance learning memo we submitted last Spring.

Tom McFadden expressed concern that during the change in company supporting printing and photocopying on campus, students and staff not be inconvenienced. He noted that since this appears to be happening near the end of the term, there is the potential for serious disruption in Library operations. The Chair will convey our concerns to the Bookstore Manager.

Several committee members expressed concern that all affected offices and programs be consulted before a decision on the CTY proposal. Dwight has called a meeting for Thursday morning, October 26 to discuss the implications
Tom Smith contacted the Committee to inform us that one of his staff had resigned to take another job. He is even now working on getting approval to fill that position.

The meeting adjourned at 4:50 pm.

Next meeting: Tuesday, October 31, 2000, 3:30 pm, Olin 102.