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Prior Learning Assessment Proposal

Submitted by: Devon Anderson

8/25/2016

Discussion:

At the June Senate meeting, the moderator asked to bring this item from the Graduate Committee to the Senate for further clarification. The proposal (included in the April GC minutes) is attached here for reference.

Rationale:

The PLA proposal would help create guidelines/policies for Graduate Programs across campus.

Response:

Minutes, 9/6/2016: Discussion Item: COGS Prior Learning Assessment Policy Dustin Anderson (CLASS), Graduate Committee chair, noted that the committee had been working on this for an extended period of time and felt confident that this was ready to come before the Faculty Senate as a proposal, then opened to questions to be answered by himself or other committee members present.

Alan Mackelprang (COBA) asked what the expected number of requests might be.

Meca Williams-Johnson (COE) said they do not initially expect a large number of students to make this request. The committee wanted to make sure that every department had control over how many were accepted. Students can request up to 9 credit hours, but a prior learning experience would have to be very specific and unique in order to satisfy the requirements of the course.

Lowell Mooney (COBA) [*partly inaudible*] asked if the fees will go to the department that takes the time to do the evaluations. He also thought giving three hours of credit for one hour of tuition, and releasing the student from 15 weeks in class, is a big incentive to have these requests coming out of the woodwork and would be a substantial hit to faculty service load as time progresses. He liked the 9-hour provision, but wondered if we need to leave the cost out of our ads until we see how many requests we get, and he wanted fees to go to the departments conducting the reviews.

Meca Williams-Johnson (COE) believed that the student should pay for the one credit hour before a committee even begins its evaluation, and believed that would make students think carefully about making such requests. However, the committee would be willing to

reconsider the fees and deferring them to departments. She added that departments would control "how much and how many people we'll be evaluating. "

Anderson agreed with Williams-Johnson, and added that he didn't think there will be university-level marketing for this. This is a uniform approach that every program would have to undertake and market, which marketing would impact the number of requests. Departments could choose not to offer this, or to "market 9 hours at a 3 hour rate," though he didn't believe that was the spirit of the proposal. Nevertheless, all would be decided at the program level for each of the programs in the university.

Marc Cyr (CLASS) thought one issue needing clarification is the fees, and shared Mooney's concerns as well, though he thought the up-front payment would help alleviate the situation. But he noted that who gets that money is unclear. He thought the proposal needed to be tweaked. Page 11 Moderator Flynn noted that neither was it clear that program faculty could decide whether the plan was appropriate or not for them.

Mackelprang thought that requests would grow in number and increasingly make for heavy service loads for faculty in those programs doing this. The proposal did not seem to address this variability in service loads.

Mooney wondered, if the requests grew to a point where the chair decided they were taking too much faculty time and "decides to take care of themselves, so does that then take the curriculum so to speak out of the hands of the faculty . . . would that be a concern if a department chair decided to just take care of that himself?"

Williams-Johnson said the committee wants departments to have control and the ability, should requests become overwhelming, to stop participation.

Provost Bartels had a couple of points: Starting the program sets a precedent, so suddenly ceasing it could create the problem of students arguing about the cessation. Also, regarding the money, she suspected that tuition dollars couldn't just be sent somewhere other than the institution. She thought some compensation plan for faculty going above and beyond teaching and service requirements could be developed, but wasn't sure about that.

Anderson agreed the money issue needed more investigation. He thought Wayne Smith, who worked with the subcommittee on this, might have some answers as to how tuition is handled in other areas like CLEP or IB or AP at the undergraduate level, or in the program where we have military personnel coming off of active service who get some credits. As for opting out, the spirit of this was to have individual programs come up with policies of their own, and any changes that would have to happen thereafter would be done with the approval of the College of Graduate Studies to make sure that there was continuity and consistency in the policies; he said that was marked out in the proposal itself. He emphasized that the spirit of this is not to cheat programs out of student face time or one-on-one time, but to recognize that some students come in with the kind of knowledge that would make them exciting candidates for a program, but often we lose those students because they would have to re-take things that they may have already taken. So part of this initiative is recruitment.

Mackelprang suggested that the one-credit upfront be framed as a fee, with students then paying the standard tuition rate for any credits granted.

Moderator Flynn did not want to limit discussion, but said it sounded to him like this needed to go back to the committee for revision.

Anderson noted it was on their upcoming agenda and he would take with him the information from this meeting. He asked, for clarity's sake, for a list of concerns. Moderator Flynn said the two of them would sit down and work that out. Discussion raised a further concern: Whether students could make such requests only when entering a program, or after they had been here for some time.

Cyr noted that he had not heard much opposition to what Anderson called the "spirit" of the program, but much concern with the mechanics of the policy as proposed.

Attachment: Prior Learning Assessment