Strange Bedfellows

The Registrar’s Office and University Policy and Curriculum Committees

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Michigan State University is an affirmative-action equal-opportunity employer.
Overview

• Introduction to Michigan State University
• Academic Governance at Michigan State
  – Introduction to relevant committees
• University Curriculum and Catalog
  – Housed in the Office of the Registrar
  – Path of curricular requests
• The Changing Role of the Registrar
• Working with the Committees
  – Graduation Honors
  – Comprehensive Proposals
• Take Aways
• Questions and Answers
Michigan State University

• Nation’s pioneer Land Grant institution
• Located in East Lansing, MI
• 46,648 students (36,337 undergrads)
• 17 Colleges
  – 3 Medical Schools
  – MSU College of Law
• 6,860 degrees awarded in Spring 2008
• 6,284 unique courses active in Spring 2008
Assumptions

Curricular and academic policy changes:
• Occur via University-level academic governance
• Are guided by faculty input (faculty are responsible for the content of the curriculum)
• Require efficient implementation for institutional effectiveness

Office of the Registrar is an academic support unit:
• Staff understand how to implement curricular and policy change
MSU Registrar’s Office

Office of the Registrar at MSU includes:

• Registration Services
• Certification Services
• Information Services
• Academic Records
• University Curriculum and Catalog
Path of Curricular Requests

College
University Curriculum Administrator

UCC Sub A, B, or C

UCC Full Committee

Academic Council

Statewide Academic Program Review

About ½ of all programs go to at least one of these committees

UCAP  UGC  TEC
Academic Governance

Standing Committees established by University Bylaws

- University Committee on Academic Policy (UCAP)
- University Committee on Curriculum (UCC)
- University Graduate Council (UGC)

*Taken from Bylaws for Academic Governance -
https://www.msu.edu/unit/acadgov/bylaws/section4/index.html*
Academic Governance

Coordination Among Committees

- **UCAP**: 4.4.8. The Committee on Academic Policy shall coordinate its activities with those of the Committee on Curriculum, the Graduate Council, and other appropriate Academic Council Standing Committees.
- **UCC**: 4.5.5. The Committee on Curriculum shall coordinate its activities with those of the Committee on Academic Policy, the Graduate Council, and other appropriate Academic Council Standing Committees.
- **UGC**: 4.6.6. The University Graduate Council shall coordinate its activities with those of the Committee on Academic Policy, the Committee on Curriculum, and other appropriate Academic Council Standing Committees.

*Taken from Bylaws for Academic Governance - https://www.msu.edu/unit/acadgov/bylaws/section4/index.html*
University Curriculum and Catalog

• Became part of the Office of the Registrar July 1, 2000
  – Provost’s executive decision
  – Quick change
• Improves the link between curricular and academic policy change and its implementation
• The Registrar’s Office:
  – knows from requests it receives for exceptions, if curricular program requirements and related academic policies work;
  – is the steward of academic data;
  – serves as a resource for academic governance committees and university administrators who need data to inform curricular proposals and new or changed policies.
• Alignment of curricular approval process with enrollment periods and degree certification
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RO

UCAP

UGC

TEC

RO
Changing Role of the Registrar

- RO is traditionally a “policy enforcing” office
- Technology puts enormous amounts of information into reach
  - Students / Courses / Programs / Room scheduling
  - Requirement fulfillment
- Intimately acquainted with institutional data
- Uniquely positioned to observe trends in curriculum and academic policy
- Now has a responsibility to provide advice on these trends
Changing Roles

• Continuing evolution in job functions
• Presents challenges and opportunities
• Changes how the office works
  – What types of work are performed
  – Functionally
• Requires a changing skill set for Registrars and Associate Registrars
  – Data analysis
  – Writing, Editing
  – Knowledge of scope
  – Staff development
Working With the Committees

• Two examples of how the Registrar’s Office took a lead role and engaged with various University committees:
  – Graduation Honors
  – “Comprehensive” Proposal
Graduation Honors

• Spring 2006: The RO discovered that policy and practice were out of sync regarding the awarding of graduation honors

• Awarding graduation honors in higher percentages than stipulated by policy

• The RO gathered data from the previous 10 years of graduates
Graduation Honors - Findings

• The ten-year trend showed an increase in cumulative GPA of graduates

• Policy stipulated that 6% receive “With High Honor” and the next 14% receive “With Honor” (20% of graduates total)

• *Academic Programs* catalog indicated what the “target” GPAs for assigning honors were, but had not been updated in several years
Graduation Honors - Policy Revision

• Engaged with curriculum and policy committees to revise Academic Programs catalog

• The percentages of graduation honors were reaffirmed at 6% and 14% (20% total)

• Determining the GPA thresholds necessary to meet those percentages is handled by the RO

• New GPA thresholds were implemented in stages over a three-year period
Working With the Committees

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  – Graduation Honors
  – “Comprehensive” Proposal
Comprehensive Proposal

• A series of seemingly unrelated topics came under discussion over an academic year
• Became increasingly obvious that the curriculum committee couldn’t address the topics independently of each other
• UCC requested information and analysis to review, act, and send forward for additional governance review
Comprehensive Proposal

- When one aspect of the curricular structure is changed it affects other aspects of the curriculum
  - Institutional mission affects where, how, and when academic programs are delivered
  - Faculty are responsible for curricular content and have opportunities to provide input on policy
  - Individual components of degree programs need to relate clearly to one another for students to understand requirements and track progress
  - There is a relationship between undergraduate and graduate-level programs
Comprehensive Proposal

• Benchmarking best practices with peer and other institutions is important to enhance program competitiveness, inter-institutional agreements, and credit transfer

• Questions, concerns, and suggestions from MSU faculty and academic units, as offered by their representatives to academic governance, need to inform policy and taxonomic changes
The Process

• The University Curriculum Administrator and the RO worked with the Provost’s Office and UCC to generate a draft set of proposals
  – A rationale for each
  – Background information
  – Supporting documentation
  – How it related to established policy and/or other proposals
The Process (cont.)

• Iterative review with UCC Chairperson and Subcommittee D (the chairs of the other UCC subcommittees)
• UCC representatives took the drafts back to the 17 college curriculum committees for input
• UCC held open sessions to discuss the proposals and receive feedback from across campus
  – Attended by hundreds of people
• Incorporated feedback and concerns into the proposals
• UCC took action and forwarded ten of the twelve proposals for further governance review
The Process – The Flow

1. Presented the Proposals to UCC Full Committee
2. Drafts back to the 17 college curriculum committees for input
3. Open sessions to discuss the proposals and receive feedback
4. Incorporated feedback and concerns into the proposals
5. Review with UCC Chair and Subcommittee D
The Process (never ending)

- UCAP and UGC reviewed and took action on all of the proposals
  - Some finer points were tweaked in committee
- Once approved, the University Curriculum Administrator updated Academic Programs catalog and the Associate Provost sent notification to the campus about the changes
Take Aways

• RO involvement in Curriculum and Policy committees can be mutually beneficial
• Requires the support of the Provost’s Office and “buy in” from the committees
• RO’s role is advisory and must defer to the faculty
  – When to be seen and not heard
  – Need to ask “What are you trying to accomplish?” and then suggest ways to reach the goal
Take Aways

• Registrar’s Office
  – Staff implicitly ask themselves, “How will colleges and students react?”
  – Staff meet with and invite feedback from directors of student affairs and associate deans.
  – Office has enhanced it credibility because it can roll-out a change and indicate consultations with colleges.

• Colleges
  – Know they can ask questions freely.
  – Know they can request changes (technological / process / etc.).
  – Provide input and raise issues.
  – Know their explanation of the impact on students will be heard.
Questions and Answers

What questions do you have at this time?

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This presentation is available online at the Michigan State University Registrar’s website:

http://www.reg.msu.edu/aboutus.asp