PLYMOUTH STATE UNIVERSITY

FACULTY MEETING AGENDA

Wednesday, December 3, 2014

3:35pm – Newfound Room, Prospect Hall

I. Acceptance of the draft minutes of November 5, 2014.

II. Reports.

A. Sara Jayne Steen, President.

B. Julie Bernier, Provost and Vice President.

C. Cathy LeBlanc, Chair, Four Credit Task Force

Interim Report (Attachment 1).

D. Anne Jung-Mathews, Chair, Steering Committee.

E. Reports of the Principal Policy Committees

(Attachment 2).

III. Old Business (None).

IV. New Business.

Resolutions of the Standing Committees (none).

V. Announcements.

VI Adjournment.

Attachment 1

**Interim Report from the Four Credit Task Force—December, 2014**

**Members and Charge**

In the Spring 2014 semester, Provost Bernier asked for volunteers to serve on a Four Credit Task Force, which was then created with all of the faculty members who volunteered. The task force is comprised of nine faculty members, listed at the end of the report.

Provost Bernier charged the Task Force with the following:

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| ***1. To review the majority and minority reports of the previous (2008) task force on moving to a four credit model. To identify areas not previously addressed.***    ***2. To develop a report to the Faculty on the implications of changing to a 4-credit course model with attention to at least the following:***   * ***- the impact of such a model on Faculty workload*** * ***- financial implications of such a plan*** * ***- pedagogical concerns and student performance outcomes*** * ***- scheduling considerations*** * ***- general implications for General Education, but not specific policies or procedures of concern to the General Education Committee*** * ***- a possible time-line for implementation***   ***3. To make an interim report to the Faculty at the December 2014 Faculty Meeting and a final report to the Faculty in April 2015.*** |

In September, we met with Provost Bernier to be sure we understood our charge. We will be making a recommendation to the full faculty at the April, 2015 faculty meeting about whether to move to a 4 credit curriculum or not. The full faculty will then vote on our recommendation. In other words, the charge to the Task Force is to conduct research and gather data concerning a possible curricular change rather than make a policy about the possible curricular change.

Our conversation with Provost Bernier also led us to the understanding that there are several factors that have changed since the 2008 Task Force completed its work and those factors are driving the desire to reexamine the idea of a 4 credit curriculum. Those factors include:

1. Plymouth State University’s student retention rate has declined and one possible outcome of a move to a 4 credit curriculum is that students taking 4 classes a semester, rather than 5, would increase academic success and, therefore, retention rate.
2. The General Education program was newly implemented in 2008. Since a move to a 4 credit model would involve an overhaul of the General Education program, many faculty opposed the move on those grounds. In recent months, assessment and possible modification of the General Education program has been the focus of some faculty discussion and so a discussion of the 4 credit model might also be appropriate at this time.
3. The administration (and many faculty members) would like the standard teaching load to be 3 classes a semester. A 4 credit curriculum might allow PSU to move to a 3-3 teaching load without negative budget impact.
4. PSU’s budget situation is significantly different than it was in 2008 and moving to a 4 credit model might save money.

**Areas Not Previously Addressed**

The Task Force meets twice a month and, as our charge suggests, we began our work with a thorough review of the majority and minority reports from the 2008 Four Credit Task Force. We determined that the following areas were not fully addressed in those reports:

1. Are there any statistical data from institutions that have moved to a 4 credit model about the impact of that move on student success (engagement, retention rates, graduation rates, time to graduation, etc.)?
2. Are there other compelling factors (for example, financial) to support the move?
3. What would the time block schedule look like if we move to a 4 credit model?
4. Since the other USNH institutions use a 4 credit model, there are numerous questions about ease or increased difficulty of transfer between institutions:
   1. What percentage of our students transfer to schools using a 4 credit model?
   2. What percentage of our transfer students come to us from schools using a 4 credit model?
   3. How do the other USNH institutions deal with transfers from 3 credit institutions (like the community colleges)?
5. What would each major at PSU look like in a 4 credit model and how difficult would it be to draft those new curricula?
6. What would a 4 credit general education program look like?
7. What impact will a 4 credit model have on faculty scholarship? How will faculty who currently have credits reallocated to scholarship be dealt with? Will that reallocation go away? If it does go away, what impact will that have on our expectations for scholarly activity through the tenure process?
8. What impact will a 4 credit model have on faculty who have release time for service (for example, department chairs and program coordinators)?
9. What impact will a standard 3 course per semester (12 credits) teaching load have on faculty recruitment?

**Statistical Data: Student Success, Retention, and Graduation Rates**

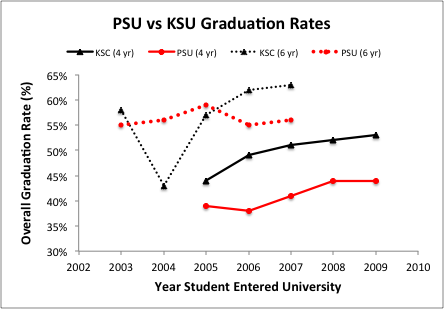
The 2008 Task Force visited three institutions that had made the move to a 4 credit curriculum and reported their findings at that time. None of that data, however, provided information concerning student success before and after the move to 4 credits. We (the current Task Force) contacted those institutions to see if they had new data regarding student success but, just like in 2008, all information provided from those three institutions was anecdotal.

Because we are part of the USNH system with Keene State College, one of the 3 institutions that the 2008 Task Force visited, Provost Bernier was able to provide us with graduation rate statistics for both KSC and PSU. The following tables show the latest available four year and six year graduation rates for both institutions. The four year graduation data for the cohort entering in Fall 2010 and graduating in Spring 2014 were not yet available. Similarly, the six year graduation data for the cohort entering in Fall 2008 and graduating by Spring 2014 were also not yet available.

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| **Six Year Graduation Rates** | | |
| **Fall Entering Cohort** | **KSC** | **PSU** |
| 2003 | 58% | 55% |
| 2004 | 43% | 56% |
| 2005 | 57% | 59% |
| 2006 | 62% | 55% |
| 2007 | 63% | 56% |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Four Year Graduation Rates** | | |
| **Fall Entering Cohort** | **KSC** | **PSU** |
| 2005 | 44% | 39% |
| 2006 | 49% | 38% |
| 2007 | 51% | 41% |
| 2008 | 52% | 44% |
| 2009 | 53% | 44% |

We have also included a chart of the above data to show that the trend for graduation rates for both institutions is generally upward. Graduation rates at Keene (black) and Plymouth (red) after 4 years (solid lines) and 6 years (dashed). The years denote entrance year.



KSC transitioned all students to a 4 credit system in 2007. This shows that a trend toward higher graduation rates began before the transition to a 4 credit model and may reflect other factors. PSU’s rate was improved over the same period.

But some members of the Task Force have pointed out that KSC made the move to a 4 credit curriculum in Fall 2007 for all students (not just incoming students). This means that students entering in Fall 2005 and graduating in Spring 2009 would have completed 2 years in a 3 credit curriculum and 2 years in a 4 credit curriculum. Those entering in Fall 2006 completed 1 year in a 3 credit curriculum and 3 years in a 4 credit curriculum and students entering in Fall 2007 would have done all 4 years in the 4 credit curriculum. The four year graduation rate for first-time, first year students entering KSC in 2005 was 44% but that rate jumped to 49% for students entering in 2006 and continued to increase for students entering in Fall 2007. A look at the six year graduation rate shows a similar increase (from 57% to 62%) for students entering in Fall 2006 (and, therefore, spending most of their time in a 4 credit curriculum).

The members of the Task Force disagree about how to interpret these data. Some members feel that the data tell us nothing about the relationship between a 4 credit curriculum and graduation rates. Other members feel that these data show a correlation (although not a causal relationship) between a student spending at least 3 years in a 4 credit model and increased graduation rates and that it should be noted as well that the gap between the graduation rates at KSC and PSU has grown over the period shown (from 5% to 9% for the four year graduation rate and from 3% to 7% for the six year graduation rate). Of course, we cannot conclude that KSC’s 4 credit curriculum is the cause of this increased gap.

We also did a literature review to see if we could find any data about the impact of a 4 credit model on student success and were unable to find any such studies. Finally, we contacted George Kuh, who administers the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE), for data concerning student engagement at institutions before and after such a switch and again, we were unable to obtain any statistical data.

**Financial and Faculty Workload Impact**

Provost Bernier told us that, for a number of reasons, she and the President would like the entire faculty to have a 3-3 teaching load. However, it would cost over $3 million per year to do this if we remain in a 3 credit model. (The details of that report are available on request.) Therefore, moving the entire faculty to a 3-3 teaching load in a 3 credit model is not going to happen in the foreseeable future. In addition, the reallocation of faculty time for scholarly activity is expensive. Provost Bernier writes:

“There are currently approx. 57 fewer classes taught due to reallocated time (faculty teaching 3/3 or 3/4 load). If these faculty taught a full 12 credits (3/3 load with courses @ 4-credits each) the savings would be approx**- $222,000/year**”

Given the current budget situation and the proposed budget prioritization process, scholarship reallocations are likely going to go away whether we move to a four credit model or not. It is simply too expensive given the current budget situation. So the only way to move the entire faculty to a 3-3 load is to have each of those 3 classes be 4 credit classes so that the standard teaching load remains at 12 credits per semester.

**Curricular Revision Challenge**

The majority and minority reports from the 2008 Task Force both made claims about the level of difficulty and the kinds of challenges that making a switch to a 4 credit curriculum would involve. We decided fairly early on that we would need to check these claims. In addition, as we were discussing the implications of moving to a 4 credit curriculum, implementation issues kept arising as potential questions. We therefore decided that we needed to try to implement parts of the curriculum so that we could present actual implications rather than imagined implications. We each began with our own degree programs to determine how easy or difficult it would be to convert it to a 4 credit curriculum. All of us were able to come up with a 4 credit version of our degree program with about four hours (or less) of work. We discovered the following by undertaking this exercise:

1. These curriculum revisions must be done by the faculty most familiar with the programs. Only they have the expertise to determine how the program learning outcomes might be able to be repackaged.
2. There are a variety of ways to undertake such revisions. Some may start completely over with the learning objectives for the program and build new courses that address the objectives in new ways. Others may start with the existing program and determine which courses could be combined so that all learning objectives continue to be addressed.
3. Some of the degree programs will be easier to convert to 4 credits than others.
4. Some degree programs will require that the number of credits to graduation be increased from our current 120 to 128, which is the number of credits a student would earn if s/he took four 4-credit classes per semester for eight semesters. Other degree programs may not need the number of credits for graduation to be increased.
5. Looking at a department’s curriculum with fresh eyes for new purposes can lead to positive questioning of why the curriculum is designed the way that it is. At least one member of the Task Force discovered things in his department’s curriculum that he and his colleagues may want to change regardless of whether we move to 4 credits or not.

Having gone through this exercise with some of our own programs, we now plan to visit other departments and engage in a similar activity so that we have some experience with which to comment on the ease or difficulty with which these curriculum revisions can be undertaken.

We are in the process of looking a variety of ways in which the General Education program might be changed so that it continues to meet the objective of the program while not increasing the number of credits required for Gen Ed. We intend this exploration to be simply informational and it does not take the place of the Gen Ed committee working to change Gen Ed should the faculty vote to move to a 4 credit model.

We are also in the process of creating a new time schedule to accommodate 4 credit classes. Our assumption is that seat time will be proportionately increased for the standard 4 credit class. That is, our standard classes require 50 minutes of seat time per credit or 150 minutes per week for a 3 credit class. Therefore, we assume a standard 4 credit class will require 200 minutes of seat time per week. Of course, there will continue to be some 4 credit classes that require more seat time just as there are some 3 credit classes now that require more than 150 minutes of seat time per week. We also assume that some departments might want to teach some of their classes using a hybrid model where some seat time for a class is replaced by online and/or out-of-class work.

**Future Work**

We are trying to add more members to the Task Force since we believe as many voices as possible should be added to the conversation. We have asked several members of the faculty to join us and as of the writing of this report, none have joined us. We encourage additional members to join us in this important work by contacting any member of the Task Force and volunteering your time and energy. We encourage input into our investigation from all members of the faculty, even if you don’t have time to actually serve on the Task Force. Any information or suggestions can be sent to any member of the Task Force for inclusion in our work.

We are examining ways in which the Task Force can help each academic department to look in some detail at the challenges and opportunities they would face if we were to move forward with a 4 credit curriculum. Once we determine the best way to move forward with that task, we will be contacting each department to begin that conversation.

Finally, we are continuing to fill in the gaps in information that we identified earlier in this report.

Respectfully submitted by the members of the 4 Credit Task Force:

Susan Buchholz-Jones—Nursing

Lisa Doner—Environmental Science and Policy

Cathie LeBlanc—Communication and Media Studies

Ann McClellan—English

Sam Miller—Atmospheric Science and Chemistry

Paul Mroczka—Music, Theater, and Dance

Robyn Parker—College of Business Administration

Justin Wright—Mathematics

Jayme Yahr—Art

Attachment 2

**General Education Committee Report 11/24/14**

Since the spring of 2014, the General Education Committee has been working on an assessment plan that begins with a focus on addressing the question, How do we know that students are learning what we want them to learn with regard to general education?  As a first step, we have drafted learning outcomes for the four General Education Directions.

The General Education Committee has revised the outcomes based on feedback received from faculty during two Faculty Week sessions. At those sessions, we also received support for our plan for implementing the learning outcomes. We are continuing to seek feedback on the outcomes, most recently through the Project Share sessions offered by the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. Our plan is to finalize the outcomes this spring and integrate the assessment of learning outcomes into the processes for initial course proposals and sunset renewals starting next the next academic year.

We believe that establishing shared learning outcomes for General Education Directions courses and assessing those outcomes will provide essential information about the effectiveness of our general education program. In 2005, the General Education Assessment Task Force recommended establishing learning outcomes as a top priority for general education program assessment. Until now, this recommendation had not been addressed. Assessing student achievement of general education learning outcomes was also identified as a priority in the most recent NEASC review. The USNH Board of Trustees has also charged PSU to assess student learning in general education. We also believe that the assessment of student learning is essential for a high quality general education programs. For these reasons, we are focusing on this aspect of program assessment.