Committee on Undergraduate Education
Committee Outcomes from Spring 2013

The Committee on Undergraduate Education (CUE) was created in Spring 2013 when student representatives of the Government of the Student Body felt that more communication between students and the faculty and administration of academic departments would be beneficial. They felt that more avenues of communication could improve the student’s learning experience, aid instructors in the classroom, and cause students to be more engaged in their education. Faculty leaders agreed that this was a worthy goal and thus CUE was given the following charge:

The committee’s purpose is to provide a structure for on-going and open dialog about undergraduate education at ISU.

The committee administrative home is in CELT and is chaired by the CELT Director. The committee is made up of eight members and the chair. Members include four undergraduates (2 from GS3 and 2 non-GSB) and four faculty members (2 department chairs and 2 appointed from the faculty senate). The committee roster is included at the end of this report.

Overarching goals of CUE include:
- To ensure that student input is being considered at the departmental level in each academic department on campus.
- To ensure that faculty concerns are being heard by students.
- To ensure that students understand the professor evaluation process and how it is used.
  - To also ensure that faculty privacy is maintained.
- To ensure that faculty members hear students’ concerns

In working toward those goals, in spring 2013 a survey was developed and administered via Qualtrics to gather data from both undergraduate student leaders and department chairs. The survey asked about what avenues and processes were in place that enabled students to provide input and have interaction with faculty on curriculum and teaching. Participants provided information on what was currently being done in their department and rated the effectiveness of each.

Department chairs rated their level of satisfaction with “student input into education practices/policies in their department” as satisfied (91%) or very satisfied (9%). The sample size was 22. In contrast students were split in their response with almost equal numbers being very dissatisfied (3%) or dissatisfied (32%) and 31% being satisfied combined with 14% being very satisfied. The sample size was 29.

Even with a limited number of student responses (37 total students participated, but not all of them answered every question) the CUE discussed the survey results in detail.

The outcomes of these discussions have resulted in a set of best practices we recommend to either initiate, or enhance, communication between students and faculty related to teaching and the curriculum at the departmental level. These best practices are listed below.

- Include an undergraduate student on the departmental curriculum committee
  - Students should provide input on who should be appointed to the committee.
  - Possibly one representative from the student club and a second elected from the students at large.

Report developed CUE members, August 2013
• Often, the student organizations that are associated with their corresponding majors are an effective way to communicate with the students. Students found in the organization are assumed to be more engaged in their education because they are already taking an active role
  o When general student input is needed or desired on an issue or change in the department, then going to the student organization’s general meeting or meeting with their executive cabinet can be a good way of discerning the students’ opinions
• Gather student input on departmental issues, including curriculum, through student appointments on departmental Advisory Boards, etc.
  o As mentioned in the bullet above, student organizations can be effective ways to reach out to a large number of students. An example would be for the students to create a new leadership position in their student organization whose responsibility it is to serve these appointments. The student could be elected among their peers and bring student concerns and opinions to advisory boards, curriculum committees, etc.
  o This type of communication should be two-way. It would also be the responsibility of the appointed student to report back to the student organization on things like:
    ▪ What topics the faculty are discussing
    ▪ Why certain practices are in place or certain classes required
    ▪ How professor evaluations are used
      • How evaluations are used is often misconceived by students so simply explaining to them how they work may help improve the student/faculty relationship
  o This person would be an alternative conduit to the faculty/administration for questions or concerns from other students
• Iowa State has a tradition of using learning communities effectively to communicate with students
  o Use these learning communities through the student mentors as another avenue of disseminating information to students and vice-versa
• To improve two-way communication have a student present a summary of student activities at a faculty meeting each semester
  o This method can help faculty be aware of what students are doing in their field of study outside of the classroom.
• Open forums between faculty/administration and students can be utilized to get students’ opinions and have a two-way discussion about departmental matters.
• Have the Department Chair or Curriculum Committee Chair do a presentation in the 101/110 course to let incoming students know how changes have been made based on student feedback. This will help new students understand how and why faculty teach the way they do in certain courses.
• Many departments utilize departmental newsletters to communicate with students. If not done so already, consider using email lists to send out newsletters to the student body
• Often students are inclined to go to their academic advisors when they have a problem or see an area that can be improved within the department
  o If not done so already, it can be beneficial to get advisors involved in these types of discussions and use them as a way to get student ideas to faculty/administration and subsequently get decisions and explanations sent back to students
• Create a poster and display it in a prominent place for students. The poster can highlight specific examples of how student feedback is being used in the department so students who are not in the introductory courses can also see how their input is being used.
• Provide an avenue for students to discuss directly with faculty how they learn best. A potential avenue would be through departmental curriculum or undergraduate program committees.
  o For examples of how to do this, see bullets 1-3 above
Ultimately, it takes the combined effort of students and faculty/administrators working together to foster a culture of communication in each academic department. Ideally, improved communication will lead to a better relationship between the two groups and will improve the overall learning experience of students and teaching experience of instructors.

### AY12-13 Committee Members

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