Analysis of UGC New Course Approval Process

This study is designed to assess whether the UGC policy for course approval is being implemented as written in support of a culture of assessment grounded in explicit descriptions of student learning expectations at the course level. To assess compliance with the UGC's course approval policy, the expectations of which are outlined below, all CRFs reviewed and approved by the UGC during AY 2009-2010 were examined. This includes both new courses and modifications to existing courses. Additionally, the explicitness of the student learning outcomes was assessed according to the Explicitness criterion of the Rubric for Creating and Aligning Student Learning Outcomes. Summary results are reported below. Raw data are available in the worksheets of the Excel workbook ("Undergrad Course Approval Process Analysis") titled New Course and Modified Existing Course.

All CRFs were assessed for their compliance with the following expectations of the UGC Procedures and Policies for Approval of New Undergraduate Courses and Undergraduate Course Changes:

1) All CRFs must be approved by the Curriculum Committee of the School (or other faculty committee designated to review curricular matters)
2) All CRFs must be approved by the Dean of the School
3) New courses CRFs should be accompanied by a 1 to 2-page course outline (not a full course syllabus) summarizing
    course content and purpose
    goals for student learning outcomes
    how such goals connect to the program or degree objectives
4) The course outline content should also help reviewers understand whether the course includes proper learning assessment tools
5) The course outline should also allow reviewers to adequately assess student workload and potential overlap with other courses by including sufficient information on format, topics, and the the types of readings.
6) For courses satisfying General Education, CRF should address how the course addresses three or more of the Guiding Principles for General Education at UC Merced
7) To modify an existing course, instructors should indicate briefly in the explanation box of the CRF the reason for proposed course changes. There is no indication a course outline is required.

The content of the course outline is not specifically enumerated as part of the criteria for reviewing CFRs (bullet 8 of the policy).

Results:

New Courses
100% of new courses (48/48) include a course outline, of these 31% resembled a traditional syllabus.

Of these 48 course requests:

98% included some description of Course Content and Purpose. The single exception was a special topics course so the content will change with the offering. The CRF did include student learning outcomes.
96% included Student Learning Outcomes. The electronic records for the two CRFs lacking outcomes do not include any comments about this omission, whereas it is clear similar omissions had been rectified for other CRFs.
21% described how goals for student learning outcomes connect to program or degree PLOs
56% included learning assessment tools
46% described the course format
42% described the course topics
71% described the types of readings
84% of courses that support a GE requirement included a description of how the course meets three or more of the 8 Guiding Principles. Most addressed 4.

Of the student learning outcomes provided,

35% were assessed to be Emerging with respect to the Explicitness criterion of the Rubric for Creating and Aligning Student Learning Outcomes
17% were assessed as intermediate to the Emerging and Developed levels of development (E/D)
35% were assessed as developed
9% were assessed as intermediate to the Developed and Highly Developed levels of development (D/HD)

4% were assessed as HD

Three course descriptions were flagged by reviewing faculty as lacking learning outcomes or as not "WASC compliant". For all three, the approved course descriptions included student learning outcomes. Two approved CFRs lacked student learning outcomes and did not include any comments about this omission.

Modifications to Existing Courses

The policy does not mandate the submission of a course outline or learning outcomes. However, 37 requests included course learning outcomes.

Of the student learning outcomes provided,

19% were assessed to be Emerging with respect to the Explicitness criterion of the Rubric for Creating and Aligning Student Learning Outcomes

28% were assessed as intermediate to the Emerging and Developed levels of development (E/D)

33% were assessed as developed

0% were assessed as intermediate to the Developed and Highly Developed levels of development (D/HD)

19% were assessed as HD

These data are not considered in the summary below.

Summary

In keeping with the policy, nearly all approved new course requests included a course outlines/syllabi with a description of the course goals (98%) and course-level, student learning outcomes (96%). The single course lacking a course outline requested dispensation on the grounds that, as a specical topics course, the content would change with the offering. The request did include learning outcomes. No explanation was provided for the two courses lacking student learning outcomes. However, one was the unit bearing laboratory component of a lecture course, which included learning outcomes.

Of the learning outcomes examined, nearly 50% were assessed to be developed or better with respect to the Explicitness criterion of the Rubric for Creating and Aligning Student Learning Outcomes. Nearly a third were judged to be emerging, indicating a relatively low level of development with respect to the degree to which they are measurable and describe relevant skills or knowledge clearly.

Nearly 80% of approved course requests did not connect course-level student learning outcomes to program or degree PLOs as expected by the policy. This calls into question the alignment of new courses with the program curriculum and overarching learning outcomes as well as the communication of this important information to students.

Finally, in keeping with policy, nearly 85% of approved new course requests that were indicated to satisfy a GE requirement described how the course meets three or more of the Eight Guiding Principles of General Education. Most addressed four.

Other less critical policy criteria with respect to supporting assessment were met to varying degrees, with all being met in less than approximately 70% of the approved courses and several at much lower levels. The policy does not request the alignment of course level student learning outcomes and assessment methods.