EDUCATION COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

The Education Committee Meeting for fall 2006 was held on Friday, November 10. Larry Davis convened the meeting at 2pm and reviewed the agenda.

The first agenda topic was a discussion of the Graduate Program Revision Committee’s Report, a topic first discussed at the last faculty retreat. Of the 5 committee members, 3 were also members on the retreat committee that had initially gathered information on this topic. A. Udaya Shankar, Committee Chair, led the discussion by summarizing the report consisting of 4 recommendations with each containing sub-categories.

**Recommendation 1 (adding an early-research requirement)**
The goal of this requirement is to emphasize that “research” is a core requirement for the degree and should be viewed as important as course work. There had been some concern expressed that students often did not have a faculty advisor by their $5^{th}$ semester but in checking on this statement, it seems that the majority of graduate students do identify an advisor by this stage in their graduate program.

**Discussion:** (The following comments were expressed by faculty but do not necessarily represent the views of all those present.)

a. This recommendation is a good one but it should be considered as “aspirational” vs. required. Faculty should consider that if students are required to take a one semester “research course”, how would this new requirement be enforced? Consideration could be given to adding a research component to the existing course structure so that students do not acquire additional credit for the research component.

b. Students should be encouraged to complete the “research component” within their first year but required to do so no later then the end of their second year. Recommendation 1.b. in the report should be changed to read that the student presentation should be attended by at least two supervising faculty members.

c. Some concern was expressed that this research requirement would put more work on both faculty and students in an already crowded graduate course schedule.

d. Some faculty members felt that this was a great recommendation, long needed in the curriculum.

e. The Assoc. Chair for Graduate Education mentioned that the department would need to develop a mechanism for announcing student research projects and faculty members would need to agree on supervising at least one graduate student per year (beyond their normal student advisory responsibilities).

f. It was noted that students need a list of courses that provide breadth within the discipline. No such list exists at this time.
Recommendation 2 (changing Ph.D. coursework requirement) Shankar mentioned that this recommendation is similar to the course structure that existed in the past.

Discussion: (The following comments were expressed by faculty but do not necessarily represent the views of all those present.)

a. One faculty member indicated that he would support this recommendation if each field committee defined what is “core” within the specialty area. Several faculty members stated that it is difficult to define “core”. In the past, when teaching assignments were made, those who taught the “core courses” had easy access to graduate students and this was resented by some faculty members who did not know the students as well as those who taught core courses.

b. A recommendation was made to form a committee that would establish “core courses” (there are currently too many 800 level courses that are taught vs. existing 600 and 700 level courses that are on the books; faculty need to teach more courses at the 600 and 700 level vs. creating additional new courses.).

c. A suggestion was made that 3-4 courses within each specialty area should be defined as “core” not just one course within each specialty area so that there would not be a problem with course assignments for faculty members and students could be assured that “core courses” would be taught each semester.

d. It was noted that this department’s strength is not in the teaching of “core courses” but in their applications. However, some members felt that it is important for all graduates to have a strong knowledge of “core computer science” even if that is not the area in which they conducted their research. When students are interviewing for positions, they often don’t do well because of their limited knowledge in core subject matter. The proposed changes in the curriculum are based on student needs and not on what faculty may want to teach. Core courses should cover the general field of computer science and not, necessarily, be related to all of the department’s research areas.

e. There was a suggestion that the 400 level courses should be taught more extensively and perhaps have separate sections offered to graduate students since some of these courses represent “cores curriculum”. Some faculty have assumed that graduate students possess a strong background in core subject matter but it seems that not all graduate students have received such instruction at the undergraduate level.

Recommendation 3 (loosening current Ph.D. coursework requirements)

Discussion: (The following comments were expressed by faculty but do not necessarily represent the views of all those present.)

a. Existing 600 and 700 level courses should be offered at least once every two years so that students can construct their schedules. Once per year would be ideal but there was some concern voiced that this would not be
possible given the number of faculty members who are available to teach these courses.
b. There was little additional discussion regarding this recommendation.
Recommendation 4 (changing the format of the preliminary exam)

Discussion: (The following comments were expressed by faculty but do not necessarily represent the views of all those present.)

a. The recommendation suggests that the exam be separated into a two day period. A counter suggestion was made not to separate the components of the exam into two days since it is already difficult to schedule these exams.

b. Another solution might be to change the format of the exam. Have the reading list review occur first. Only if the student’s performance is acceptable should the committee move forward to the research proposal portion of the exam.

The meeting’s second agenda topic, presented by Adam Porter, Committee Chair, was a status report on revisions to the undergraduate program.

The faculty retreat highlighted areas within the UG curriculum that raised questions such as the value of some course curriculum or the use of that information when moving from one course level to another (300 to 400 level courses as an example). One question that has been asked is, “how well do the UG courses prepare students for jobs or graduate work?” Some course topics do not lead to any higher level course while other data shows that course content is critical for some courses that lead to the 400 level course series. Although some faculty members have indicated where they believe problems exist, there isn’t agreement among them on these issues. Thus, the committee was charged to gather this data and then make recommendations which support changes.

Recommendations could suggest changes in course content and requirements. The committee is hoping to finish their work within the next few weeks at which time a report will be issued.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:20pm.