Education Meeting  
Friday, January 30, 2009

The meeting was convened at 2:05pm by Howard Elman who presented the first agenda topic (see attached agenda).

**Topic 1**  
Howard asked the committee to vote on a change in required time for graduate students to reach candidacy in the Ph.D. program from five to four years.

The intent of this change is to set department expectations for students with the understanding that individual field committees may have their own internal set of expectations that vary from one to another. However, overall, it is felt that a 4 year timeline is reasonable to complete the work. This time structure is meant for the overall benefit of the students. It was also noted that the college dean and university provost want all degree programs to have a shorter time-frame during which students will move through their programs.

During fall 2008, Howard formed an ad-hoc committee composed of Profs Bhattacharjee, Elman, Foster, Hollingsworth, Khuller, Pop, and Samet to review the issues associated with this proposed change. During the fall the suggested change had been to go from 5 to 3 years but the committee recommended the 4 year change given some of the differences among the field committee expectations.

Howard noted that exceptions to the policy can still be made by the Assoc Chair for Graduate Education with the strong support of the student’s advisor and a reasonable justification.

One of the student representatives could not attend the meeting but his comments regarding the change were read. He strongly felt that if the timeline was changed to 4 years, then students should also be required to take a semester of an 898 class (research course).

It was also noted that this change, if approved, could not be retroactive and would not go into effect until fall 2010. Following the meeting, Jenny Story checked with the Graduate School and learned that the change can go into effect Fall 2009 without a review by the campus PCC committee.

The question was moved and seconded and a vote was taken. The motion for change from 5 to 4 years for graduate students to reach candidacy in the Ph.D. was passed.

Following the vote, Howard raised some additional program changes that could be considered in the future. Several of these topics were mentioned by the ad-hoc committee and by members present at today’s meeting. Howard asked members to send their ideas to him and he would consider a discussion during a fall 2009 Education Meeting should a strong sentiment to initiate further program changes be voiced.
Topic 2
Jeff Hollingsworth introduced the second agenda topic, “Add a discussion section to CMSC 351”. This is a sophomore level algorithms class in which students seem to have a greater problem than in CMSC 212 or 132 (students receive a higher percentage of low grades in this course than 212 or 132). Whether the content or how the division of time used to teach lectures and discussion sections is the problem is not clear. Jeff noted that how the course has been scheduled/taught (2) 75 minute lectures and (1) 50 minute discussion is different from what campus approved so one or several changes will be needed. Course changes must be processed through campus so there will be limits to what change options exist. For example, Jeff feels that there is no chance that campus will approve a 75 minute discussion section. It was also mentioned that most math classes are taught over 3 days vs. the 2 day, 75 minute lectures, followed by CS. The department has some qualitative data that goes back several years but little quantitative data on 351.

A motion was made to send this issue to the field committee for review and recommendations on changes which will be beneficial to CS students. The motion was seconded and the vote was unanimous. It is hoped that by fall 2009, the question can again be discussed at an Education Committee Meeting.

Topic 3
The last topic, “best practices in teaching” was also presented by Jeff Hollingsworth based on information gathered from student evaluations. (see attached slides)

The purpose of the presentation was to make faculty members aware of what students have raised as teaching issues, resulting in lower teaching scores. Jeff noted that campus sees course syllabus as a “contract between the faculty member and the student” which should not be changed during the semester. A suggestion was made to add a statement which says, “Instructors reserve the right to make syllabus changes as deemed necessary due to unusual circumstances”.

Office hours which seem to range from 1 to 4 hours per week depending on the faculty member involved were noted. The intent should be that students have options in case hours conflict with other classes. Consistency was also another issue raised by students and faculty members approached this from different perspectives. The presentation was not meant to tell faculty members what to do but to make them aware of how their different teaching approaches can have a negative impact on students. A faculty member may believe that a change is in the best interest of the class but students may see the change as unfair and disruptive to their work structure.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:05pm.