The meeting was convened at 2:05pm by Jeff Hollingsworth due to Larry Davis being out of town. Jeff emphasized that all agenda topics were for discussion as no vote would be taken at this meeting. In order for all topics to be covered, each presenter would need to limit their segment to approximately 20 minutes.

Howard Elman gave an overview of the first topic, “Deadline for Admission to Ph.D. Candidacy”. He asked the faculty to consider changing the current time-line from 5 years to 3 years. Advancement to candidacy means completion of 9 courses plus acceptance of a preliminary research proposal.

This would mean setting new expectations for graduate students. During the last student review, more than 20 students were identified as having been in the program for a very long period without having made significant progress. It is felt that these students are a drain on the system, that it is not helpful to permit them to remain with little hope of them progressing, and it creates a negative environment for all other students. Exceptions could still be considered but raising the average to 3 years would have a significant impact on the quality of the environment. Steve Halperin, CMPS Dean, is also lobbying for this change and has been discussing the topic with all CMPS departments. Tackling this issue is part of the university’s strategic plan which has as one objective, an increase in program ranking. This is one factor that can make a difference.

Concern was voiced that over 90% of current students will not meet this 3 year requirement. One of the student representatives said that he has not advanced to candidacy because the load of 9 courses, plus TA assignments, plus working on research that was not in his particular area (needed to do this to be supported as a GRA because that is where the money was) has prolonged his program. He did not feel that 3 years was reasonable given the realities of the program.

Howard had checked a variety of other programs’ web sites prior to the meeting: Texas and Wisconsin appear to have the 3 year limit; ECE at UMD has a 5 year limit; Mechanical Engr at UMD has a 2 year limit and 1 year with entering with a M.S.; Johns Hopkins and Princeton also have 3 year limits. There was some discussion about the accuracy of the web sites so further checking would be needed for accurate comparisons.

The allotted discussion time was up so Howard said that he would try to redefine “candidacy” so that perhaps there could be further discussion and a vote in the near future.

Topic # 2 was introduced by Samir Khuller. He and Bobby Bhattacharjee have been working on a proposal for a new course, “The Science Behind Computing”. In this course a student will learn the basic ideas behind computer programming and develop their own programs. The course will be open to both CS majors as well as non-majors.
and would become a university CORE course. For further information regarding CORE courses and changes coming to the university go to: www.ugst.umd.edu/core

The intent will be to cover topics with a limited amount of depth (some topics to be covered have been at the 400 level in the past). It is hoped that the course can be offered in fall 2009 and the department will evaluate how it is received. The proposal will be processed through campus PCC but there is no way to predict how long it will take to reach final approval.

Initial goals are to get more students interested in CS and learn what the discipline is about. It is hoped that smart students might become more interested in CS and consider a major or minor in the subject.

It was pointed out that the issue of attendance should be addressed as it could be a problem with the PCC committee. Brandi Adams mentioned that this course could eliminate a one credit course that she has been teaching, which she feels is not effective.

There was mention that by adding a math pre-requisite it could help students taking other courses but that would also change the mixture of students who would take this course. There was also a comment that the course might be of interest to high school students so perhaps this could be offered at a time that would permit them to enroll. A student mentioned that it was this type of information in combination with how algorithms drive technology that first got him interested in computer science.

Evan mentioned that clickers are used in his class and over 80% of the students said that there use keeps them interested; however, a student representative said that most of the students he knows hate clickers.

Time was called so that the next topic could be presented. Samir said he hoped that a vote could be taken at the next education meeting.

Topic #3 was presented by Alan Sussman. He and Neil Spring have been working on a course proposal called, “Introduction to Computer Systems” or “How Computer Systems Work”. The overall goals for the course are:

- Provide a coherent view of computer systems from both a software and hardware perspective.
- Decrease the length of the introductory sequence and reduce the time for student to reach upper level CS courses.
- Eliminate redundancy between topics covered in CMSC 212 and 311.

Programming in “C” will be used to implement work but the course will not be a “C” programming class. It was noted that there was no “C” text book listed in the proposal
but this was an oversight and one will be added. There is still work to be done on the proposal and determining what projects should be offered will be covered.

The intent is to offer the course in fall 2009. A question was asked whether this course would change the attrition rate in CS? It is hoped that it would but there is need to teach how things work (present a bigger picture with fewer details) whether it changes the rate or not. One of the students felt that this was a necessary course offering but that it would be difficult to cover everything listed in one course.

Alan also acknowledged that there is campus pressure to improve the department’s 6 year graduation rates. It was pointed out that students find CMSC 212 very frustrating and the course is generally hated even if a student does ok. It was also suggested that CMSC 312 and 330 should not be taken together unless a student really wants a lot of programming.

The course will need to be coordinated with ECE so that engineering students get what they need for their program and CS students will need admittance into ECE courses (currently there is a limited admission) so that they too can complete their program.

If the faculty vote to accept the course, there are plans for Alan and an instructor to teach it in fall 2009. Please send email to Alan if anyone has suggestions. A vote will be taken at the next education meeting.

Jeff mentioned that the UG office is currently working on the fall 2009 course schedule so a decision must be reached at the next meeting if it is going to be entered into the campus system.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:05pm.