Education Meeting Minutes  
Friday, February 16, 2007

The meeting was convened by Larry Davis at 2pm.

The first agenda topic was “Hallway Posters”. It was suggested that some of the older posters that are in the department’s hallways should be removed. Larry said that if the posters reflected really good projects, the fact that the information is old should not matter. On the other hand, if the information does not cover significant research and is outdated, then the posters can be removed by the faculty member who is responsible for the original research. Ideally, having research projects displayed is good for the department, so if any faculty members want to send Larry a PDF file reflecting current research, please do so. Larry will review the files and determine if the department will have the information made into a poster. Since there is some cost associated with this, we will try to recycle the frames of older posters if possible.

The second agenda topic was presented by Jan Plane on the upcoming Middle States visit which covers the period, March 4 through 7. On March 5 and 6 campus administrators expect that the reviewers will select, at random, departments to be visited. Faculty members are urged to go to the department’s web site and pull-up specific information on the Department’s Middle States Evaluation Process that has been underway for the past year. Jan summarized the process as:

1. What the department has done to be ready for the review
2. What was learned during the internal process
3. What the outcomes are and what should be done given the information that was obtained

Four plans were created, one for each program offered by the department (minor, bachelor’s degree, master’s degree, and doctorate). Learning outcomes were defined for each program and assessments were scheduled for each year. There are four assessments for the UG and Graduates programs.

It is likely that the Middle States personnel will want to know more about “lessons learned” and that information will be posted to the department’s web page. One important factor of this review is to maximize faculty involvement so it is important to be aware of the process and be helpful should committee members come to faculty offices. The goal is for the department to utilize the information and make program improvements. The full document on the Middle States Evaluation can be found at: http://www.cs.umd.edu/~jplane/Assessments.

The third topic, “Committee Report – UG Introductory Course Sequence Evaluation” was presented by Adam Porter. The following website contains a course roadmap and the raw data used to produce the report and roadmap. It can be viewed at: www.cs.umd.edu/~aporter/Committee/coursemap.html
Following the last faculty retreat, Larry Davis had charged a committee to do the following:

1. Evaluate the success of the new introductory sequence and suggest any modifications that should be made.
2. Review the intellectual content of CMSC 212 and also determine if there is content overlap between CMSC 212 and 311.
3. Determine if there are disconnects between faculty assumptions about what students will learn in the 100-300 level sequence courses and what they actually know by the time they take 400 level courses.
4. Work with field committees and ECE to obtain defined knowledge and skill expectations of students once they complete 300 level courses.
5. Map the outcomes to the 400 level courses and suggest changes to the curricula for faculty discussion.

Adam stated that during the past few years the department has tried to improve the UG curriculum; overall, there has been substantial improvement in academic quality. The committee did find that some of the changes created new problems while other changes did not fully address all of the older issues. Although the CS courses teach important material, there are issues with how the courses support/relate to the broad UG curriculum and students’ academic development. Problems include course overlap, lack of information flow between courses, and a quantity of complex concepts being presented at in early introductory courses.

One example of a problem is CMSC 330. The course teaches core CS concepts and is a perquisite for 400 level courses. It appears that there should be serious consideration for paring back the number of 400 level courses that require 330 as a prerequisite. There needs to be a comprehensive evaluation of CMSC 330 and faculty need to agree on what the key concepts should be.

It is also clear that 100 and 200 level courses do need to reduce the number of topics that are covered. There is too much information for the average student to grasp and it is difficult for the instructor to move through all of the information in a semester. Consideration should be given to offering one-credit courses to cover some of this information. Students outside the major may find such courses of interest and there are skills needed by industry (like programming in C++) that could be taught.

Hard decisions are needed if the department decides to continue to offer a four year program. Few students can now successfully finish in this timeframe.

The committee recommended that work continue on defining course outcomes, define academic goals that the curriculum achieves, and evaluation measurements be put into place that can be used to note successes or make future changes.

Much of this work relates to the type of evaluation that the Middle States Committee is looking for from campus departments.
The last agenda topic, “Digital Media Design: DIGM, a joint ARTT/CMSC Major” was presented by Bonnie Dorr and Amitabh Varshney. The presentation and materials can be viewed at: http://www.umiacs.umd.edu/~bonnie/DOGM-Major-Feb2007-ver6.doc

During the last faculty retreat there was discussion of creating various two-track course concentrations to broaden the student base and provide interesting topics and useful skills. This effort might also increase the diversity of the current student base since we have learned that female students are less likely to major in computer science. Possible campus benefits would be increased student enrollment and a more diverse student base.

The computer games industry is becoming an important segment of the national economy. The State of Maryland has one of the largest clusters of gaming companies on the East Coast (over 50 companies) and thus, the University of Maryland is uniquely positioned to provide graduates for this industry. Currently, UMCP students who are interested in this subject only have the “create your own major” option offered by the campus Individual Studies Program. This option is not as attractive to potential employers.

The proposal made by Dorr and Varshney was to offer two-tracks – one for Art oriented students (satisfying ARHU requirements) and one for CS oriented students (satisfying CMPS requirements). Although a DIGS minor rather than a major was originally suggested, it was learned that a minor would not be possible without forcing students to take a lengthy double prerequisite structure. A minor cannot contain prerequisites that would go beyond a total of 24 credits within the minor concentration. This constraint cannot be satisfied if upper-level digital media courses in both CMSC and ARTT courses are included. It was felt that it was not feasible to propose a minor in this area for the general campus population. The proposal includes additional resources that would be needed as well as a draft course road-map.

There was some general discussion among faculty members. A motion was passed to further develop the program, gather additional information, and make contact with other campus administrators.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:20pm.