Department Council Minutes  
Friday, October 24, 2008

The meeting was convened by Larry Davis at 12:10pm. As there were a number of new members, Larry asked that we go around the table and introduce one another.

The first agenda topic was a discussion of the department’s financial situation. The depressed economy in the country is also having an impact on the university. The state’s estimated revenues are substantially down from original predictions. There was a 3% budget cut this summer within our college of which 1.3% was an across the board cut to all departments and the remainder being retained by the Dean for additional anticipated cuts this year. Should the cuts be greater than 3%, the department will need to consider how further reductions can be made. Up until now, most of the cuts have been to staff positions since salary is the primary cost factor in the budget and there isn’t anything we can do ref. professorial salaries. When funds begin to flow again at the university, they are not returned uniformly to all units so it will be the objective of the department to garner additional funds at some future time.

In conjunction with the most recent budget cut, a hiring freeze was imposed. Only positions paid from research funds can be filled or a waiver must be requested to fill a position on state funding. Because the UG Academic Advisor’s position had been advertised prior to the freeze and the department felt it was a critical position to fill, a waiver was filed and approval given by the Provost.

There has also been agreement with Steve Halperin, Dean CMPS, that unofficial recruitment for the Minker Professorship position continue. If an outstanding candidate is located, then a waiver will be filed requesting permission to hire.

Provost Farvarden with the approval of Pres. Mote has initiated a strategic planning process which will include at a minimum, all academic programs and research institutes. Beginning summer 2009, 2% of each unit’s budget will revert to campus (some to the college dean and some to the Provost). The department’s strategic plan will be due February 2009; the provost and dean will then determine which units will benefit from the sequestered funds.

Jeff Hollingsworth, the new Associate Chair for UG Education, then summarized his ideas for the undergraduate program. His emphasis will be on “student retention” and “UG research”. He is most concerned about ‘at risk students’ which seem to surface sometime during their sophomore year. Some students begin to question if computer science should be their major either due to a decreasing lack of interest in the subject or because of difficulties encountered in their academic programs. Students have moved onto a variety of new majors; there are no statistics available.

Jeff plans in spring 2009 to pilot an event involving two companies who have indicated an interest in CS students. It will be billed as “shadow a computer professional” for a
day. Students will go to a specific company, see what an average work day is like and get a practical view of the work and issues being handled by the particular company.

Jeff is also looking at how the UG office functions and what can be done to streamline work for staff and make information available to the department’s UG students. Various forms will be put on-line, and advisors will be able to pull-up information on students which should provide better information to advisors. UG scholarship funds exist and students will be encouraged to apply; the department would like to see an increase in the number of UG student who apply for scholarship funds. A revised scholarship application is being developed so that students can apply once for as many scholarships as they wish, assuming that they met the criteria. This will decrease the work on the part of students and if this produces an increase in the number of applicants, it will help the department seek additional funding.

The combined UG/M.S. program currently has 5 students and the details of the program are being explored. This program has not been widely advertised nor understood by faculty members; thus, there is an effort underway to flush out program specific information and make it available to all.

There have been some inroads made to the Criminal Justice Department to offer a course in fall 2009 which can be taken by CS and Criminal Justice majors. Depending on the student interest and working out details that will satisfy faculty members in both majors, there might be the possibility of a future double major being offered. This will take time to develop but it seems that this could be a strong educational program offering in the future.

Finally, improved communications between UG students and the department is needed. Not all students read the UG blog, so there will be a weekly mailing to all UG majors and the information will also be posted to the UG blog.

The issue of how to get more UG students interested in participating in research early in their program was discussed. A “theme based lunch” may be explored with tables devoted to specific research areas to promote discussion. Involving graduate and senior UG students who can then advise students on research, what is available, who to contact etc. will also be explored. There are some graduate students who would be very interested in working with UG students especially since they are considering if they want to go into academia upon graduation. Graduate student often do not have contact with undergraduates once they begin their graduate programs. UG students can also contact one of the Honors Co-Chairs to discuss research options.

Jeff ended his presentation by asking members to send him ideas or stop by for a more in-depth discussion.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:10pm.