COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY REPORT ON THE CONVERSION FACTOR

May 30, 2006
Report to the Riverside Division of the Academic Senate

On May 4, 2006, the Chair of the Riverside Division and the Chair of the Committee on Education Policy (CEP) received simultaneously the Report of the Cross-College Committee on Conversion (the C-4 group). The C-4 group – composed of the Executive Committee chairs of CHASS, CNAS, and BCOE; the Associate Deans for Student Affairs of the same three colleges; the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Academic Programs; and a representative from CEP who is also currently the Chair of the Academic Senate Committee on Courses – organized itself to consider issues raised at the February, 2006, meeting of the Division related to conversion. At that time, the issues at hand revolved around 22 courses that the CHASS faculty had put forward to the Committee on Courses for conversion from 4 to 5 units. Because several of these courses are recommended to fulfill breadth requirements in the Bourns College of Engineering, prior to the meeting, the chair of the Executive Committee of BCOE objected to the conversions. At the meeting, other members of the faculty at large raised a range of concerns. It was agreed via a formal motion at the meeting that those 22 courses be tabled and that a moratorium be placed on other course conversions until CEP reported back to the Division on these matters.

This report should not be seen as a definitive statement on the conversion factor at UCR; rather it should be taken as a good faith effort by CEP to fulfill its responsibilities as spelled out by the resolution of the Division membership at the February, 2006, meeting. CEP believes that it will take many more months of a deep and far-ranging consideration of conversion in relationship to general education and/or breadth at UCR, among a much wider segment of the entire UCR faculty, before any long-lasting measures of educational policy can be formulated. Having said that, CEP here attempts to provide an overview of the findings of the C-4 Report (the full report is attached) and to make some interim recommendations on conversion to the Division.

The C-4 Report’s Findings and CEP’s First Recommendation

CEP commends the C-4 group for its considerable efforts to bring together data on conversion and to summarize the results of conversion at UCLA, where the process achieved substantial results for the improvement of UCLA’s conversion ratio (for a more in-depth explanation of these, see the appended C-4 report). The findings of the committee were introduced as follows by Vice Provost Grosovsky in his forwarding letter of May 4 to the Chair of the Division and the Chair of CEP:
The committee recognized that a multi-dimensional approach would be the most effective and appropriate way to address the conversion issue. Our recommendations for multi-dimensional action are organized into five categories.

1. Increase of Unit Assignment for Selected Courses
2. Expected Progress Regulation
3. Increased Unit Caps for Students in Good Standing and on Academic Probation
4. Improvement of UCR Freshmen Experience programs by Development of Learning Community/Curriculum Cluster Models
5. Unit Credit for Participation in Campus Cultural Events, Seminar Series or Physical Education Courses

Recommendation 1 was the most difficult issue for the committee, although members established consensus on two guiding principles that structured our discussion and allowed us to move forward. We all agreed that we should respect the recommendation of the CHASS faculty regarding the courses currently proposed for unit increase. We also agreed that we should ensure all UCR students have an appropriate number of courses from which to choose as they satisfy their college’s breadth requirements. The committee determined that the course unit increase proposal from CHASS was carefully vetted by faculty in various departments as well as by Committee on Courses, who felt the proposed changes were justified on the basis of pedagogical and student workload considerations. Furthermore, analysis of the CHASS proposal showed that less than 20% of CNAS and BCOE breadth course enrollment would be affected. Therefore the majority of the committee recommends approval of the unit increase proposal, while acknowledging that there remains some dissent on the recommendation by BCOE.

The remaining recommendations were unanimously endorsed, though each college may implement these actions in various ways. The sixth, and in some ways most important aspect of our recommendations, are College-level plans for utilization of these various approaches. These are outlined in some detail within the attached report. Perhaps the most important implication of this approach is the need for General Education reform, starting with modernization and added flexibility in the breadth requirement. This would allow Colleges to develop strategies that are well integrated with their student success initiatives, rather than having a “one size fits all” campus plan.

Keeping this overview in mind, CEP has the following commentary and makes its first recommendation:

- With the majority of the C-4 group, CEP believes that CHASS departments have acted in good faith on conversion, in concert with the principles as spelled out in the C-4 report. Not only are there gains to be made in terms of funding as the conversion ratio improves; in many cases, as the C-4 report indicates, students will be better served pedagogically, in concert with enacting learning communities and other programs aimed at improving student success, by the conversion of some courses from 4 to 5 units.

- Based on CEP’s knowledge of the processes through which the Committee on Courses has approved CHASS courses for conversion, CEP is confident that the courses have been fully and appropriately vetted.
• The Chair of the Committee on Courses made strong efforts on behalf of the C-4 group to arrange, on an interim basis, that each of the social science departments keep at four units at least one of their lower-division courses commonly approved for breadth in BCOE and/or CNAS. CEP observes a relatively small proportion of the CHASS courses approved for breadth by both BCOE and CNAS have been proposed for conversion (see C-4 report, Table 7). CEP is satisfied that on an interim basis (we recommend one year), that these measures constitute a suitable and fair plan.

• THEREFORE, CEP RECOMMENDS THAT THE CHASS COURSES CURRENTLY PROPOSED BY THE COMMITTEE ON COURSES FOR CONVERSION BE SUBMITTED FOR APPROVAL AT THE MAY, 2006, DIVISION MEETING.

On-going Concerns of the BCOE Faculty and CEP’s Second Recommendation

Shortly after receiving the C-4 report, the following message was received from the Chair of the BCOE Executive Committee, Professor Teodor Przymusinski, a member of the C-4 group:

I think that I need to clarify the record and BCOE’s position on Recommendation #1 (as stated very clearly in my previous emails to the Committee):

1) EC of BCOE does not in any way endorse or support the proposed course unit increases nor does it feel that these changes were necessarily justified on the basis of curricular needs. Most of the courses proposed for unit increases were not changed in any major way and thus it is difficult to see what the pedagogical justification for such changes might have been.

2) EC of BCOE believes that we need to implement a moratorium on any future unit increases until a proper approach and policies are worked out. Otherwise, several departments in our college will be faced with very difficult issues of students exceeding their maximum allowed # of credits.

3) To the best of our knowledge, the current allocation of a few CHASS courses to remain at level 4 is inadequate for our students to meet their breadth requirements.

4) EC of BCOE believes that as a matter of a general policy, any major changes proposed to courses heavily used by other colleges for breadth requirements should be first consulted with these colleges before being approved. This seemingly obvious requirement was violated this time.

5) We believe that Committees on Educational Policy and Committees on Courses should require such consultation as a precondition for approval of any such major changes.

Our Committee has expressed its views on this issue very clearly during our two previous meetings with the administration to discuss the convergence issues.

Professor Przymusinski then argued further to the Chair of CEP as follows:

I also wanted to point out the specific negative effects the 4-5 unit changes will have for our ABET accreditation process (BTW, ABET accreditation is an absolute must for a reputable engineering program):

We are required to provide outcomes-based justifications for our curricular changes. The 4-5 unit changes would need to be addressed in our ABET documents in two ways:

1. If we increase the total number of units we dedicate to breadth courses, we’d need to show *in and outcomes-based fashion* that we made the change from 4-5 units to redress shortcomings we identified based on measurements of curricular outcomes.
For example, we’d have to show that we measured the abilities of our students to satisfy the desired outcomes or program objectives, found them lacking, and argue that the change to 5 units would turn things around for them.

It seems unlikely we could do that, as things stand.

2. Even worse, if the additional units taken up by the CHASS courses cause us to drop any required or elective courses from our programs, we’d be required to demonstrate that this reduction was actually beneficial to our programs.

Again, that is not be an argument we’d want to make.

The chair of CEP received permission of Professor Przymusinski to share these concerns with the rest of CEP. After considering these concerns, CEP has the following observations and recommendations:

- CEP is sympathetic to the concerns of the BCOE faculty that any unit increase for CHASS or CNAS courses used to satisfy breadth by their students may begin to overload their students with too many units. However, at the moment, as the C-4 report indicates (see Table 7), there are very few courses proposed for conversion by CHASS in relationship to the total number the BCOE faculty accepts for breadth. Therefore, CEP does not believe that the current proposed conversions will cause undue harm to BCOE students.

- Having said this, CEP also recognizes that if conversion continues on a college-by-college basis in the absence of a mechanism for consultation across colleges, the current stalemate will be replicated.

- THEREFORE, CEP PROPOSES THAT BEGINNING IMMEDIATELY, THE ACADEMIC SENATE DEVELOP AN ACTION PLAN FOR ACADEMIC YEAR 2006-07 ON CONVERSION AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO GENERAL EDUCATION/BREADTH. THE PLAN SHOULD INCLUDE, AT A MINIMUM, THE FOLLOWING:

  - A recognition of the importance of facilitating, college by college, and campus-wide, a complete and thorough discussion among the faculty at large of general education/breadth at UCR in relationship to conversion.

  - A commitment by the C-4 Group and CEP to work together on mechanisms to facilitate this discussion. These might include town hall meetings; the formation, college by college and campus-wide, of General Education Small Groups composed of faculty members and appropriate administrators; and the creation of a cross-college coordinating committee, similar to C-4 but perhaps larger, to consider all the pros and cons of course conversion in relationship to the overarching goals of the campus concerning undergraduate education and student success. If formed, CEP recommends that the cross-college coordinating committee on conversion be jointly appointed by the EVC-P and the Chair of the Academic Senate.
If these steps are taken, CEP believes that the Committee on Courses should stay apprised constantly of the on-going discussion and that further proposals from departments for course conversion, from CHASS faculty or otherwise, should be carefully considered in light of potential long-term policy suggestions emanating from these groups.  **CEP has found that to impose a moratorium arbitrarily on course conversions causes confusion for faculty and staff alike. Until a campus-wide discussion takes place and long-term decisions made about conversion, decisions on individual courses must be mediated by the Committee on Courses in as collegial a fashion as possible, recognizing the concerns of all faculty across the campus about the impact such conversions may have on their programs.**

**Proposed Regulations on Expected Progress for Undergraduate Students**

On the matter of regulations on Expected Progress for Undergraduate Students, CEP understands that the C-4 group reached broad consensus on this matter. CEP believed that it was best for the Academic Senate Advisory Committee to take up this matter before any in-depth consideration by CEP. If asked by the Advisory Committee to comment, CEP would be glad to do so at a later time.

CEP also notes that when/if the proposed regulations are circulated for comment to appropriate committees that further study and analysis of the consequences for students is needed. Undergraduate Council, working with staff in the VPUAP’s office, might be the best committee to undertake such data collection.

**Further Suggestions from CEP Members**

As CEP took up consideration of matters related to conversion, its members put their individual and collective minds to the problem. Many concerns about potential problems for faculty and students, and suggestions for long-term solutions to the conversion dilemma arose. We include the most detailed of these discussions here for the benefit of the Division membership at large. As a committee, at this time, we are not proposing implementation of any of these specific measures. However, we suggest that these ideas be considered by any future groups and committees constituted at the college-level and campus-wide-level during academic year 2006-2007 as they move forward to consider conversion in a more in-depth manner:

Discussion set #1:

One thing I was thinking about is that some 3-unit courses could help by giving a bit more flexibility to students, which would be especially useful to BCOE students dealing with the 216 unit cap. As you probably saw, I raised this possibility already in a circulating CEP e-mail and noted that BCOE defines a course, for breadth requirement purposes, as being of 4 or more units. Dan then pointed out in his follow-up that all three colleges have this same definition of what a course is, and that the concept probably came out of a past CEP. What would you think of suggesting that this definition of a course be backed down to 3
units to allow greater flexibility and to encourage development of some 3-unit courses?

Here is another thought. There is a sense that the "one size fits all" approach is one flaw of our current system. One aspect of this, it seems to me, is non-majors courses. Various departments offer less or more non-majors courses, some of which satisfy breadth requirements, and some do not. The collective knowledge of the CEP members would give a clearer picture of this, at least clearer than what I have since I especially lack knowledge about CHASS. I do know that in CNAS, nonmajors courses meeting breadth requirement standards are available in several departments, including but not limited to biology, entomology, physics, math, and botany and plant sciences. In some cases, departments have different sequences for different purposes. For example, Physics 2A-C & 2LA-LC (labs) are intended for biological sciences students, whereas Physics 40A-E (labs included in A-D) are intended for engineering and physical sciences students. This is a good thing. Similarly Biology 2 and 3 are not intended for natural science majors, while Biology 5A-C are recommended for science majors. At the upper division level, there are Biochemistry 100 and Biochemistry 110A-C. A sore spot among some CNAS faculty is organic chemistry. Previously there were Chemistry 8A-C for life and some physical sciences students and Chemistry 112A-C for chemistry majors. Some years ago 8A-C were dropped, which is still a sore point in some CNAS departments. My point is that most of our nonmajors courses and alternate sequences were designed when the campus was 5,000 students. Now we exceed 15,000 students. Perhaps CEP could encourage departments to re-examine their offerings of this sort and consider restructuring some existing courses, or replacing them with new courses, that are aimed toward the special needs of students outside their own majors. What was not viable on a campus of 5,000 students might now be viable on a campus of 15,000. CEP could particularly encourage cooperation between the departments in modifying or creating "sequences" of courses from different departments that are tailored to fulfill breadth needs for blocks of students from other majors (such as engineering) (if this sounds like General Education in disguise, it is intended to be so).

Discussion set #2:

After reading the C-4 report, here a few thoughts about unit conversion. As Lynda said when we first started talking about unit conversion, this project is mainly about money. I do favor trying to get more funding for UCR, but we need to be careful not to harm students in the process. A basic underlying problem is that we will be inflating unit values for courses but not changing the 216 unit limit—set by systemwide. So, students who might be harmed are those who must go over 200 units to complete their major, such as BCOE students, or students who have other legitimate reasons for going over 200, such as CNAS students who want to take additional breadth courses or double major in a CHASS field. The latter group of students includes some of our best, and I would hate to see this group of students pressured to take fewer courses or graduate early. Furthermore, students taking large numbers of units per year
are not the source of the problem. In fact these students provide more FTE enrollment per year than students taking fewer units, and a student who graduates in 4 years with 216 units provides more FTE enrollment over that interval than a student who graduates in 4 years with 180 units.

Looking at the specific list of courses in Table 6, this is clearly just the first group of courses to convert to 5 units, as some departments such as History, Sociology and Ethnic Studies have no courses on the list. So, it is somewhat difficult to see how the final plan will look. Looking at departments who have proposed courses for unit conversion, Anthropology very considerately held one high enrollment breadth course (ANTH 1) at 4 units. In contrast, Political Sciences is proposing to convert all lower division breadth courses to 5 units. Economics is holding only 2 courses at 4 units. One of these (ECON 4) doesn’t seem to be taught anymore—I couldn’t find it in the Schedule of Courses for the current year or for next Fall. The other course, ECON 6 (Environmental Economics) is actually a CNAS course (ENSC 6) that is cross-listed in Economics. This course is taught to 110 students once per year, and I’m not sure whether it even counts as a breadth course. All students have to take a course in ECON or POSC to graduate, so converting all lower division courses in those two departments to 5 units isn’t very helpful.

Bottom line, I would feel much more comfortable about this proposal if:
1. All departments, including Economics and Political Sciences, were asked to hold at least one breadth course with high enrollment at 4 units.
2. The Associate Deans for Student Affairs issued a joint statement saying that they will continue to allow exceptions from the 216 unit limit for students who have a legitimate reason for going over 216, provided that they are in good academic standing and plan to graduate in 4 years. Since all of the Associate Deans are on the C-4 committee, such a statement could come from that committee.