COMMITTEE REPORT – ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

May 31, 2012

To: John Stallone, Speaker, Faculty Senate
    Executive Committee, Faculty Senate

From: Brian Perkins, Chair, Academic Affairs Committee

Subject: University Studies Recommendations

Background and Rationale:

University Studies (UNST) Degree options at Texas A&M University are offered by each of the colleges. The UNST Degree format provides students flexibility to create individualized degree plans at Texas A&M. The format also provides additional opportunities for access to courses in colleges that may have restricted admission. Students complete 21-24 hours in a primary area of concentration, 15-18 hours in a minor that may be in the same college, and several other hours that may serve as prerequisite credit hours for required courses in the primary area or the minor. As such, students may take the majority of their hours for the UNST degree from departments within a single College.

Currently, the UNST degree is administered through the General Academic Programs office and not through the individual Colleges. The AOC Deans have unanimously recommended a number of changes to the UNST guidelines that clarify applications and admissions to the UNST program and shift the administration of the UNST degree to the academic colleges. Under this arrangement each college would administer the degree for students interested in the area of concentration that resides in that college.

Academic Affairs Committee has reviewed the request and received a majority of votes to approve the recommendations. AAC noted language about an oversight committee and raised minor concerns about the workload and scope of the committee, although this did not disqualify the recommendations. AOC Deans would like to receive approval of the Faculty Senate and the President this summer to have these changes in effect by the 2012-2013 academic year.

Recommendation:

1. To accept the recommendations of the University Studies AOC Subcommittee as presented (see attached document).
Recommendations, University Studies AOC Subcommittee

Chair: Les Feigenbaum

Members: Robin Autenreith, Sarah Bednarz, Danielle Harris, Kristin Harper

Admissions

1. Admission to each individual UNST program should continue to be at the discretion of the Department and/or College that hosts the concentration.

2. The admission process needs to be scalable and flexible; the hosting Department and/or College should have a choice of one of two options: 1) student applications filtered through General Studies; or 2) student applications handled directly by the College / Department. For clarity and simplicity programs should have to select one of the options. This has the potential for speeding up the approval process and for larger programs, there is already an infrastructure in place to work with these students. In addition, students typically need assistance in completing the proposed degree plan.

3. First time in college (FTIC) students and transfer students could be accepted into University Studies as long as they select one of the “pre-packaged” combinations of concentration and minors.
   - If the students are FTIC, and not accepted into their first or second choice, UNST should be presented to them as an alternative. This will require the development of an information packet that can be sent to these students.
   - Transfer students will have to meet the minimum requirements listed below and understand that there would likely be no chance of changing majors because of the number of hours.
     - A transfer student that wishes to enter a UNST program must have completed 24 hours at the time of application, have a 3.0 GPA, and have completed one TAMU core math and science class.

Colleges and Departments will have to work together to develop “pre-packaged” combinations (e.g., the UNST in secondary science teaching) and then have them reviewed through the curriculum approval process. This will guarantee faculty involvement in curricular development.

Application

1. Application deadlines need to be aligned with the recommendations of the other taskforce.

2. The elements of the new application will be limited to personal information, a 500 word statement of why applicants are selecting this UNST package or combination of concentration and minors, a degree plan, and approval by each minor-granting Department / College.
General UNST Guidelines

1. Courses may not be double counted between the concentration and the minors. If Compass / Howdy cannot be programmed to accommodate this then that link should be removed from the student’s Howdy portal.

2. Curricular Services (Sandra Williams) should be charged with developing a Minor website—and given adequate resources to carry the charge out. This website should list all of the minors, their requirements, and a link to the home department for more information. Curricular Services facilitates all curriculum changes and is in the best position to keep the information current.

3. There needs to be a “one stop place” where students can get general information or, more importantly, pointed in the right direction if they are transitioning from one degree plan to another. This can be a real or virtual location but we recommend enhanced advising for such students.

4. The development of new concentrations should be encouraged and rewarded. The approval process that is in place is appropriate.

5. There should be an oversight committee in place to help facilitate the development of the pre-packaged programs and to provide a forum for best practices.

6. The students who are admitted into UNST (FTIC & external transfer) will be directed to specific New Student Conferences (NSC). These conferences will have a preconference advising session, where the students are briefed on program specifics and have the opportunity for the needed one-on-one advising. The numbers of students that must be processed during standard NSC sessions prohibit the level of personal attention that is needed for customized degree programs.

7. Transfer students, since they were admitted into specific UNST “pre-packaged” programs, will not be permitted to change into another degree program prior to the completion of their first semester at TAMU. This mirrors the rule that applies to FTIC students and makes it more difficult for these students to closet major.

8. Assessment of UNST degrees is very important. The oversight committee should review broad scale UNST assessment data on a regular basis to ensure quality and refine and improve programs. We believe all UNST students should complete a program-specific exit survey, followed by periodic follow ups to measure student satisfaction with the program; preparation for the careers they have selected; and recommendations for ways to improve UNST. We also recommend that each “pre-packaged program” develop a full assessment accessible through WEAVE Online including a mission statement, clear learning outcomes aligned to University learning outcomes, related measures, achievement targets, and prepare yearly action plans to improve the programs based on findings. Other UNST degrees with smaller enrollments and more student-specific concentration/minor combinations should be assessed by the College in which the concentration is located, perhaps using an ePortfolio evaluated by the College Assessment Committee using an appropriate rubric.