

Minutes

Senate Scholastic Standards Committee (SSSC)

February 25, 2014

Hall Dorm, Room 123, 12:00-1:30 PM

SSSC Members (attending in **BOLD**): **Felicia Pratto (Chair)**, Robin Chazdon, David Clokey, **Joseph Crivello**, **Susanna Cowan**, **Dipak Dey**, **Lauren DiGrazia**, **Johann Peter Gogarten**, Lawrence Gramling, **Katrina Higgins**, **Elena Innes** (Undergraduate student representative), Jennifer Lease Butts (ex-officio), **Jill Livingston**, John Meyers (Undergraduate student representative), **Thomas Recchio**, Christopher Tomaszewski (Graduate student representative).

- 1) Minutes of the 12/5/13 meeting – were approved and the following clarification was offered regarding the bunched final assessments discussion from last meeting: SSSC members Katrina Higgins and Lauren DiGrazia will meet with Karen Bresciano of the Office of Student Services & Advocacy (OSSA) to determine whether to what degree the bunched final assessment policy is a matter of practice or policy vis-à-vis the Senate By-Laws.
- 2) Issue for future consideration by SSC
 - a) Lauren DiGrazia suggested the topic of the audit finding on last date of attendance for a future meeting. There has been discrepancy between a student's date of withdrawing from coursework and when a student vacates residence halls/terminates services.
 - b) Katrina Higgins suggested the topic of the language for "unclassified" (non-degree) students in the By-Laws. Terminology and practice are outdated.
- 3) (and 4) Syllabus requirement motion and AAUP opinion

There was consensus that the new, shorter language for the motion that was vetted and further revised by the Curricula and Courses Committee was acceptable and should go forward to the Senate next week.
- 4) See 3 above
- 5) Update on University Senate SEC Meetings
 - a) Felicia Pratto (Chair) reported to the SEC this committee's decision to allow undergraduates taking graduate level course to fulfill honors requirements and to also be able to count these course toward subsequent degrees

[Inserted Topic]

Pratto further reported that a major topic of discussion at the February 21 meeting was the issue of health insurance for graduate students. Both Jason Charrette of the Graduate Student Senate and Lawrence Goodheart of the Student Welfare Committee presented opposition to the high cost of this insurance.

Discussion in our committee included

- There was a promise of vastly increased money from NextGen Connecticut to go to graduate students, but no information regarding the details of that increased funding beyond reference to a meeting between the Provost and the Graduate Student Senate to discuss graduate student stipends
- The new health insurance plan designates the University's subsidy of insurance a grant, which is therefore taxable
- Departments are rallying around graduate students
- The cost increase (especially for graduate students with families) is at least to some degree caused by the re-classification of graduate students as "students" rather than "employees"

The committee determined that it would formulate a response to this that highlighted the following aspects of this issue:

- The potential negative impact of these higher costs (as an effect on "teaching conditions" on the quality of instruction
- The potential negative impact of these higher costs on UConn's ability to recruit high-quality graduate students

Joseph Crivello will draft this response.

NOTE: the following agenda items were taken out of order: first d) then a), b) etc.

- b) Request by SEC member to revise By-Law II E 10 language so that Associate Deans are given a formal functional role as designees for grade appeals.

Pratto suggested to the Committee the following language revision:

[In the subsequent discussion in this section, the term "the Dean of the school or college offering the course or his or her designated Associate Dean" should be substituted for "Department Head the grade in question is in a course offered in a non-departmentalized school or college.]

This language change was unanimously endorsed by the Committee through a vote.

[the meeting moved next to item d) below]

- c) SEC asked whether the application of the W (withdrawal/drop course) policy should be reviewed, as it is being applied differently by the different schools/colleges.

The committee endorsed the idea that this is more an issue of practice than one of rule. Katrina Higgins will draft language that suggests a common approach to “transcript exceptions” by the various schools/colleges.

d) Issue of shortened summer sessions

There was wide-ranging discussion of this topic. The following background, general information, and issues were offered by various committee members:

- The move from a 6-week to a 5-week session was in large part motivated by the need to minimize the impact of the summer program on Residential Life and other offices that need to use the final week (minimum) of summer to prepare the campus for students arriving for fall semester
- The 5-week session (with the “alternative” 6-week sessions) came out of discussions between a wide-range of stakeholders, including the Provost’s Office, Student Affairs, the Registrar, academic advisors, and various academic department heads
- The “alternative” 6-week session was left as an option for lab and other courses that deemed 5 weeks insufficient or inappropriate for their course content/delivery
- The summer sessions in place in the past (6-week sessions and 3-week “intensive” sessions) allowed for students to overlap sessions and exceed credit limits for sessions; the new schedule does not allow students to exceed these limits
- GEOC approval is required for any GenEd that wants to run in a 3-week session (Winter or May, for example); there are no existing GEOC requirements to approve courses for longer sessions
- The existing Senate By-Laws rarely mention summer sessions; summer sessions are not required terms and have therefore traditionally fallen outside the purview of many fall-spring policies
- Adding Senate oversight to summer sessions would have to include revising the By-Laws and redefining the relationship between optional summer sessions and requirement semesters
- Concern was expressed that shorter summer courses put increased burdens on both faculty and students and that student performance in summer courses and the possible educational cost of shorter courses should be further examined
- Committee members wondered whether summer was being “forced” on students because they could not, for example, find space in required lab classes during the fall and spring semesters. Katrina Higgins asserted that this was not the case for the 2013-2014 academic year. It was agreed further data regarding how many students needed labs vs. available lab courses seats would be useful to have historically and going forward.

The committee resolved that Committee faculty and student members should question their colleagues about summer sessions further so that we can explore this issue further.

6) Discussion of redrafted by-laws regarding bunched finals

See the clarification under 1) above

7) New Business

a) Elena Innes (also a member of USG) introduced the idea of a Web site where students could “match” their learning styles to the teaching styles of professors.

Elena’s questions for the Committee included

- Who would create such content (students? faculty?)
- Where would such content appear (at a uconn.edu site? at a student-driven site such as ratemyprofessors.com?)

Discussion included the following points and concerns:

- Would students take such information as a contract in the sense that a professor who didn’t abide by his/her description would be held accountable by students for modifying a teaching method/mode/tool/etc?
- Would a student-created site be overly biased (likely to highlight evaluative content vs. neutral description)
- Could such a site be optional for professors who wanted to take part?
- Could USG host the site?
- Could the information provided combine information provided by professors with student input?
- Could this information appear on academic department web sites?

It was suggested that Elena (with help from USG colleagues) draw up a list of what information would be wanted on such a site; the list could be offered to faculty as a checklist (check a box if a course includes x).

b) Joseph Crivello announced that the Provost had committed two rooms in Arjona to serve as a Testing Center. The intent is to have the Center open by summer and made available to CLAS advising during Orientation.

Meeting adjourned at 1:20 PM

NEXT MEETING: Tuesday, March 11th, 12:00-1:30 PM

Appendix 1: Proposed By Laws Change on Bunched Final Assessments.

Current By-Laws

12. Semester Examinations and Final Assessments

a. During the semester examinations shall be held only during regularly scheduled class periods. Permission for exceptions to this rule can be granted by the deans of the school or college in which the course is offered. Courses for which such exception has been granted shall carry a footnote to that effect in the published Directory of Classes. In the event of student absences from examinations given during the semester, decisions regarding possible make-up examinations shall be the prerogative of the instructor.

It is required that all undergraduate courses provide a clear form of final assessment of student work at the end of the semester, the assessment being consonant with and sufficient for the learning goals of the course. Such assessment may include but is not limited to proctored in-class examinations, projects in project based courses, portfolios in writing intensive courses, and take-home finals, for example.

~~In all undergraduate courses the final assessments must be due at the times scheduled by the university during the week set aside for final assessments, and at no other times, so as not to compromise instructional time at the end of the semester.~~ In the case of in-class and other proctored final examinations, these examinations must be given in the places and at the times scheduled by the university. For all in-class final examinations and for all final assessments that are assigned during the last week of classes, the university's bunched final examination policy will apply. *[I think we still need to deal with the problem of performances and projects that can only be done at specified times which may conflict with an in class examination.]*

~~The requirement for a final assessment may be waived in the case of independent studies as defined by the departments and in other special cases, such as lab courses, where a convincing argument is made that a discrete, final assessment is not the best method of evaluation for the course. Such cases require approval of the department and of the dean of the school or college before the beginning of the semester in which the course will be offered.~~

A student who is prevented by sickness or other unavoidable causes from ~~attending~~ **completing** a scheduled **final assessment exam** must apply to the Office of Student Services and Advocacy for an excuse that will authorize the student's instructor to give a makeup.

A student whose absence from a final ~~examination~~ **assessment** is not excused in this way shall receive a failure for this ~~examination~~ **assessment**. A student whose absence is excused by the Office of Student Services and Advocacy shall have an opportunity to take an examination without penalty.

There shall be no more than five examination periods scheduled each day, covering two class periods, and each examination period shall be two hours in length. A student whose final examination schedule includes four examinations in two consecutive calendar days may request a rescheduled examination in place of one of the four scheduled examinations. A student whose schedule includes three examinations in one calendar day or three examinations in consecutive time blocks spanning parts of two consecutive days may request a make-up examination in place of one of the three scheduled examinations. In all cases concerning the rescheduling of bunched exams, the student must present to the instructor a note of permission granted by the Office of Student Services and Advocacy, whose prerogative it is to determine which of the bunched examinations may be rescheduled.

Each instructor shall determine in his or her own courses the weight to be assigned to the final examination in computing the semester grade of a student. Each instructor in charge of a course is expected to assume responsibility for proctoring semester examinations, including the final examination.

Appendix 2: Revised Motion on Course Syllabi Approved by Senate Courses and Curriculum Committee.

Senate Scholastic Standards and Curricula and Courses Committees

MOTION: New section of Rules and Regulations: Section 1.5

Syllabus Requirement

(Date)

Background: The syllabus provides essential information on course content and assessment, and it helps to clarify instructor expectations. Despite its important function, and despite language elsewhere in the By-Laws that assumes the existence of a syllabus, there presently is no requirement for a syllabus. SSC has been discussing this problem for three years, and it has consulted with Faculty Standards and C&C (hence the jointly sponsored motion) with particular attentiveness to the views of students. The overwhelming conclusion is that a syllabus supports the interests of instructors and students in fundamental ways, and consequently the By-Laws should make explicit that the provision of a syllabus is mandatory. The Motion defines three basic categories of information a syllabus should contain, categories that apply in equal measure (though they would be stated very differently) in regular courses and in independent studies and internships.

Motion: Add the following to the *Miscellaneous* section of the Senate Rules and Regulations as Section 1.5:

5. *Syllabi*

Faculty shall provide syllabi to students in their courses, including internships and independent studies. Syllabi shall specify what will be taught, how it will be taught, how learning will be assessed, and how grades will be assigned.