

## **Minutes of the Faculty Standards Committee, University Senate, 10/12/2015** [draft]

### In Attendance:

- Jc Beall, Chair, Philosophy
- Pam Bramble, Fine Arts
- Jack Clausen, CAHNR
- Maria-Luz Fernandez, CAHNR
- Michael Fischl, Law
- Elizabeth Jockusch, Ecology & Evolutionary Biology
- Lisa Werkmeister-Rozas, Social Work
- Susanne Yelin, Physics
- Marcy Balunas, Pharmacy
- Preston Britner, Human Development & Family Studies
- Shariq Mohammed, Graduate Student Senate
- Sally Reis, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs (*Ex Officio* Member)

### Guest:

- Gary English, Chair, Senate Executive Committee (SEC)

VP Reis followed up on a discussion from the last FSC meeting (see minutes of 9/21/2015, Agenda Item 2) re. the possible hold of grades (i.e., delayed delivery) until a student completed their student evaluations of teaching (SETs)? There is a concern re. contract law and confidentiality issues. There will be a study of this matter by the General Council and Attorney General (primary contact: Nicole Gelson). If such a change were to be approved, Sally noted that a PeopleSoft change would be required to implement it.

The FSC took the opportunity of the time with the SEC Chair to review and discuss an SEC draft motion to the Senate and three SEC charges to the FSC.

### **Agenda Item 1**

FSC revisited the draft SEC motion to the Senate re. Realignment of the Deans' Constituency Representation to University Senate (see Appendix 1 and Agenda Item 1 of the FSC's 9/21/2015 minutes). The SEC Chair stated that the original intention of the SEC was to create a new category for the Associate Deans. A concern was that some Deans were encouraging/pushing for the election of Associate Deans in the Faculty category. The SEC intent was to preserve/promote faculty representation in the Senate. The SEC will consider a revised proposal that attends to the concerns raised by FSC in our 9/21/2015 meeting.

## **Agenda Item 2**

We discussed the SEC charge to FSC to “take up the issue of how faculty may be encouraged to seek assistance in improving teaching when some set of indicators demonstrate clear problems in the classroom.” (See Appendix 2 and Agenda Item 3 of the FSC’s 9/21/2015 minutes).

Topics raised during the discussion included:

- What procedural changes should ensue (esp. in terms of supplementing SETs)? Consider role of types of classes, topics, etc., effects on SETs, and ways to assist those struggling.
- What is the faculty’s responsibility in the handling of “really poor” teaching. In the spirit of having faculty get ahead of the issue, FSC should take it up.
- What are the related national discussions re. post-tenure review (note: the SEC Chair favors an alternative, positive language framing and not “post-tenure review”).
- Process: What are the possibilities of faculty/ administration/ AAUP/ University discussions? How will the FSC proceed? Sub-committees are likely, and this point will be taken up at the 11/2/2015 FSC meeting. Broader reach to university?
- What are the national models?
- What are the roles of Department Heads and Deans? One recommendation could improve the structure that Department Heads must follow, with steps (or options). By-laws for dismissal: unprofessional behavior (already exists).
- Question re. consequences (jeopardy to tenure?): What are the mechanisms for post-tenure faculty? What standards and options do faculty wish to present?
- What would the mechanisms be for graduate students, under their new contractual status?

## **Agenda Item 3**

FSC received the SEC charge to FSC re. a statement of Free Speech and Civility at the University of Connecticut (see Appendix 1 for the text of the charge). A University of Chicago statement will be shared as an example. President Hersbt would welcome a bold assertion of Free Speech protection.

There was discussion on definitions. Verbal abuse, of course, is not covered. Public discourse, however, should be encouraged. What is “free speech”? vs. “interpersonal”? Should these concepts be compartmentalized? Should no topic or position be off limits? What is an unacceptable “manner” of discourse?

The administration may offer ideas or resources. Consider Attorney General, Michael Gilbert, AAUP, the Civility Task Force, etc. and other sources of ideas and expertise.

The SEC Chair shared his view that verbal abuse shouldn't be punished through academic channels.

There was a question raised re. scope. Was the focus (for FSC) on faculty? The SEC was considering the full University (including administrators, staff, and students, as well as faculty).

Towards an first (abstract) platform for discussion, the FSC Chair suggested an initial framing of the issue(s) of free speech and civility as follows:

- Free speech concerns topics of discourse (and/or expression), and the freedom involved is that no topic is off limits.
- Civility (in the context of free speech) prima facie concerns manner of discourse (and/or expression); however, it might concern positions taken on the topic in question.

#### **Agenda Item 4**

FSC discussed the SEC charge to FSC re. a Statement on Academic Freedom (see Appendix 2 for the text of the charge).

The SEC and UConn AAUP have discussed the need for such a statement. President Herbst is squarely behind the idea. Some FSC members expressed surprise that such a statement did not already exist in the University's By-Laws. One option would be to adopt the AAUP's national policy statement. The issue could come up through collective bargaining, but several FSC members expressed a preference for codification with the By-Laws.

---

Minutes submitted respectfully by Preston Britner. [Slight edits provided by Jc Beall.]

## **Appendix 1**

### **Senate Executive Committee Charge to Faculty Standards regarding Free Speech and Civility at the University of Connecticut.**

At the request of President Susan Herbst, the SEC is requesting that the Faculty Standards Committee of the University Senate take up the question of Free Speech and Civility at the University of Connecticut. As this issue has been debated across the country in various ways and at many universities, the SEC agrees it is important for the University of Connecticut to have a clear and unequivocal statement regarding the imperative of Free Speech in all public discourse at the University. One way to frame the question may be to ask: What, if any, special obligations exist to create a safe, civil and inclusive environment within the university community and still maintain our commitment to the First Amendment of the Constitution?

Once adopted by the University Senate this statement, with the support of the Administration, will be put forth as a proposal to the Board of Trustees for inclusion in the University By-Laws. We would like a proposal brought to the University Senate floor for discussion and adoption no later than the April meeting, 2016.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Senate Executive Committee Charge to Faculty Standards regarding a Statement on Academic Freedom.**

As there is no clear or compelling statement in the policy sections of the University of Connecticut By-Laws regarding Academic Freedom, The Senate Executive Committee (SEC) is requesting that the Faculty Standards Committee of the University Senate, take up the challenge of producing a concise statement that defines Academic Freedom and clearly indicates University commitment to Academic Freedom in all operations of the University. Once adopted by the University Senate this statement, with the support of the Administration, will be put forth as a proposal to the Board of Trustees for inclusion in the University By-Laws. We would like a proposal brought to the University Senate floor for discussion and adoption no later than the April meeting, 2016.