

Minutes of the Faculty Standards Committee, University Senate, 12/7/2015

In Attendance:

- Pam Bramble, Fine Arts
- Preston Britner, Human Development & Family Studies
- Jack Clausen, Natural Resources and the Environment
- Dipak Dey, CLAS
- Maria-Luz Fernandez, Nutritional Sciences
- Michael Fischl, Law
- Doni Ivanov, USG
- Elizabeth Jockusch, Ecology & Evolutionary Biology
- Thulasi Kumar, OIRE
- Shariq Mohammed, Graduate Student Senate
- Sally Reis, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs (*Ex Officio* Member)
- Del Siegle, Education
- Lisa Werkmeister-Rozas, Social Work (by phone)
- Susanne Yelin

In Jc Beall's absence, Elizabeth Jockusch chaired the meeting, calling it to order at 1:30 p.m.

Minutes from the October 2015 and November 2015 were approved unanimously.

Agenda Item 1

Kumar shared a request of combining small sections (two online, two in-person) taught by one primary instructor to reach the minimum of five students to be evaluated. Discussion focused on validity and privacy issues. The committee recommends that instructors in such small courses utilize other means of formative assessment (13 yes; 1 abstain).

Kumar shared a similar request – from a Department – to have 68 students evaluate all 11 faculty under one coordinator, in order to evaluate the coordinator and the faculty. [In the past, coordinators have complained about being evaluated based on limited contact with students in such a system and whether such evaluations would be fair/valid.] Issues raised in our discussion included giving faculty “credit” for multiple sections, but also confusion regarding small, multiple “sections” (with same faculty), for purposes of evaluation. In cases in which 5+ students are enrolled (across multiple “sections”), OIRE may act to compute feedback for a faculty member.

Agenda Item 2

Concerning the charge from the Senate Executive Committee (SEC) to deal with low teaching performance issues, the FSC formed a subcommittee to make a draft report and recommendation to the FSC in its February 2016 meeting. The FSC Subcommittee on Teaching Performance and Effective Communication is comprised of Doni Ivanov, Elizabeth Jokusch, Del Siegle, and Susanne Yelin. Sally Reis offered to share examples of concerns with the subcommittee, should it be useful to the members.

Agenda Item 3

The SEC delivered notes from the Provost's office, as well as a table of English proficiency requirements for TAs at public institutions, on "the matter of communication abilities of TAs and faculty." The Provost's office and the SEC want to work together to achieve an effective solution to the matter. Vice Provost Sally Reis described the frequency of complaints regarding graduate student TAs/instructors for whom English is not their first language.

There was discussion as to whether the FSC Subcommittee on Teaching Performance and Effective Communication could examine graduate students as instructors in undergraduate classes. Elizabeth Jockusch questioned whether was outside the scope of FSC. It was decided that Scholastic Standards and the Graduate Faculty Council may be the appropriate entities for such matters.

Agenda Item 4

The FSC Subcommittee on Academic Freedom (Pam Bramble, Michael Fischl, and Doni Ivanov) provided a report on its work. Michael summarized the report, with the conclusion that no changes are warranted at this time, given clear statements in the University Bylaws (Article XIV, Section B) with reference to AAUP principles (see <http://www.aaup.org/file/1940%20Statement.pdf>). The subcommittee report is found in the Appendix. The FSC accepted the subcommittee's recommendation (13 yes; 1 abstain).

Old Business

Reminder: The FSC Subcommittee on Free Speech and Civility (Jack Clausen, Maria-Luz Fernandez, and Dustin Lavoie) will give a report at the February 2016 FSC meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:20 p.m.

Minutes submitted respectfully by Preston Britner.

Appendix:

Report of the FSC Subcommittee on Academic Freedom
(Pam Bramble, Michael Fischl, and Doni Ivanov; December 2015)

(1) The charge from the SEC asks the FSC to "take up the challenge of producing a concise statement that defines Academic Freedom" and makes that request on the stated assumption that "there is [currently] no clear or compelling statement" defining Academic Freedom and the University's commitment to same "in the policy sections of the University of Connecticut By Laws."

(2) The stated assumption is incorrect. Article XIV of the current by-laws ("The University Staff") devotes an entire section to the subject of Academic Freedom (Art. XIV, sec. B). The section in question begins with the following statement: "All members of the faculty, whether tenured or not, are entitled to academic freedom set forth in the 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure formulated by the Association of American Colleges and the American Association of University Professors." The section proceeds to elaborate the concept of Academic Freedom in terms of a faculty member's "full freedom in research and in the publication of the results"; "freedom in the classroom in treating his/her subject and in conducting a class"; and "free[dom] from institutional censorship or discipline" when "speak[ing] or writ[ing] as a citizen." It also offers a number of limits and caveats on these freedoms relating (for example) to the treatment of students, to the connection between course content and curriculum requirements, and to the duty to make clear that extracurricular utterances don't "speak for the [University]." These provisions largely track the 1940 Statement of Principles (hereafter "AAUP Principles") and the interpretations and elaborations of those principles that the AAUP has developed and adopted in the 75 years since they were first promulgated.

(3) The leading scholarly treatment of academic freedom, Matthew W. Finkin & Robert C. Post, *For the Common Good: Principles of American Academic Freedom* (Yale U. Press 2009) (hereafter "Finkin & Post"), characterizes the 1940 Statement of Principles as the "canonical formulation" of "[t]he American conception of academic freedom" and states that it has been endorsed by over two hundred academic associations and that it is widely adopted (if not invariably adhered to) in higher education. Were we writing from a clean slate -- that is, proposing Academic Freedom provisions for inclusion in the by-laws in the first instance -- we would thus almost surely want to begin with the AAUP Principles, and the burden of persuasion on anyone who preferred to re-invent the wheel would be considerable.

(4) The AAUP principles defining Academic Freedom are already in place in the existing by-laws, and there are at least three reasons to leave them undisturbed at this time. The first one is local: The University and the AAUP are currently engaged in collective bargaining, and a key subject of bargaining is the question of

enforcing Academic Freedom principles via the grievance process. It would obviously be extremely unwise for the Faculty Senate to consider re-writing the substance of those principles at a time when faculty representatives are endeavoring to secure a contractual mechanism for their enforcement. A second reason not to fiddle with the existing language is "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." Unless we are responding to particular concerns, difficulties, or experiences with the existing language, a re-write would invite trouble, waste time, and likely accomplish little. The third and final reason is that we would want to think long and hard before departing in any respect from the AAUP Principles and the collective wisdom they represent, and -- once again, absent particular concerns, difficulties, or experiences -- there is nothing to think long and hard about.

(5) We therefore recommend that no action be taken at this time with respect to the SEC's charge.