

UHD Faculty Senate Meeting

May 7, 2012

Minutes

Present: A. Allen (President), G. Preuss (President-Elect), J. Schmertz (Secretary), P. Lyons (Past President)

J. Ahmad, C. Bachman, R. Beebe, M. Benavides, C. Burnett, T. Chiaviello, G. Evans, S. Farris, J. Hackett, J. Harned, P. Kintzele, P. Li, A. Pavelich, A. Sikka, K. Switzer, V. Tzouanas, W. Waller, I. Wang

Absent: V. Hryniv, R. McMahon, C. Nguyen, W. Nowak, S. Penkar, R. Scott, L. Spears, V. Zafiris

There were no minutes to approve, as this meeting was a specially-called meeting that took place one week after the previous Senate meeting. (The normal approval cycle for minutes takes two weeks.) Schmertz said she would send out the first draft of the May 1 minutes that night, wait a week for comments, and then send the final version to Senate for an online vote.

Report from Senate President Austin Allen

The ORCA policy and the grading policy went to the Academic Affairs Council for discussion and were approved. The next step is the president's signature.

UH System is working on a SAM (System Administrative Memo) requiring background checks for all employees with access to computer terminals (i.e. everyone). They are also working on a SAM regarding background checks for people who work with minors.

FSEC (Faculty Senate Executive Council) met with the Provost and President. Part of the discussion related to the above SAMs. Also discussed was a question raised in the minutes of the faculty assembly on the core curriculum about whether the Provost and President were "on the same page" with regard to the how the provost handled the core curriculum. Allen reported that the President had said that they were.

Allen outlined a list of Senate accomplishments for the year. Senate has

- Created a shared governance task force which has identified the key elements necessary to UHD's shared governance policy. FSEC will work with President Flores over the summer on improving the policy-writing process. Members of the shared governance task force will be invited to participate in these meetings.
- Created a task force for a Center of Teaching Excellence. This committee has produced and presented an extensive report which has been forwarded to the President and Provost.
- Created a task force for a Faculty Handbook.
- Provided guidance on a system for evaluating course releases. There are now forms faculty must fill out to justify their course releases. These are an extra step for faculty but filling them out should help prevent unexpected "yankings" of course releases.

- Reviewed and supported a plan for an Honors college.
- Moved to send ORCA policy and grading policy forward for approval of Academic Affairs Council.
- Coordinated opportunities and assemblies for faculty dialog. These covered issues such as admissions standards, faculty leadership on the core curriculum, dissemination of minutes from the committees.

Allen said the past year gave Senate a lot to look back on and be proud of. Its actions this year will bear more fruit in future years, particularly in the area of shared governance and teaching excellence.

Elections for Shared Governance committees

Ballots for the policy writing committees (Academic Policy Committee, Faculty Affairs Committee, and University Curriculum Committee) were distributed by President-Elect Gene Preuss.

Schmertz asked how the elections for the Credentials and Elections committee were going to be handled, since there were no ballots distributed for these positions. Preuss asked whose responsibility it was to elect that committee. Schmertz said it was the President-Elect's responsibility (as head of the Committee on Committees). As most faculty elections are conducted through the Credentials and Elections committee, she asked that the Credentials and Elections committee be constituted over the summer.

Questions were raised by senators on how many reps could be elected per college, and per department, to the policy writing committees. Preuss was uncertain. Moosally clarified that Senate had traditionally interpreted statements in the Senate Constitution on faculty committees to mean that there would not be more than one candidate from each department, and that the Committee on Committees was to screen the list prior to distributing ballots to Senate.

Chiaviello noted that this was a special session of Faculty Senate that had business to discuss, and the elections were taking up too much time. Senate voted to collect and count the ballots and address any problems later.

Report from Shared Governance Task Force (Yvonne Kendall, secretary)

On Sept 6, Senate voted to create a task force to review best shared governance practices at other universities and then to formulate a draft doc of revisions to the Academic Shared Governance Policy (PS 01.A.03). The policy addresses academic shared governance and the creation and revision of academic policies. The emphasis of the committee has been on clarifying committee *roles, processes, and accountability*.

The task force consists of Austin Allen and Johanna Schmertz, co-chairs, Yvonne Kendall (secretary), Susan Henney, Michelle Moosally, Larry Spears, and Penny Smith. In the fall of 2011, the committee met to research best practices and on Jan 17, 2012 presented its initial findings. The committee solicited input from faculty, and worked over Spring 2012 semester to develop a list of suggested revisions and work them into policy.

The Task Force addressed *roles* in shared governance:

1. inclusion of Senate as part of the approval chain for policies. Senate is now included in the process by tradition more than policy.
2. inclusion of Chairs' and Deans' Council as part of the policy approval chain. These bodies enforce policy, but, like Senate, do not have any official role in the existing shared governance policy.
3. elaboration of shared governance procedures at the departmental and college levels
4. delineation of the formation and scope of different types of committees
5. clear articulation of faculty and administrative roles
6. clear articulation of committee member responsibilities

The Task Force also addressed *processes* of shared governance. The amount of time spent on creating and revising policies is a key challenge of shared governance, as is the need for transparency and accountability as policies move through the process. The Task Force is revising the policy in ways that

1. establish expectations for distribution of agendas and minutes at each level of the process
2. establish timelines for each step of the process to ensure policies move from one level to the next while allowing sufficient time for stakeholder input.

Finally, the Task Force is in the process of addressing *accountability* in the shared governance process.

1. Current policy is silent on process for resolving violations of policy and of shared governance.
2. The new policy will contain section to address issues of compliance.

Recommendation from the Task Force:

The task force will present its draft of revisions to the shared governance policy to Senate in early Fall 2012. Because the shared governance policy is different from other policies in that it requires the consent of the Faculty Senate and the President, the Senate needs to agree to a specific process for approving the changes. The Task Force recommends four stages in the approval process:

1. Senate will distribute the Task Force's draft to the faculty assembly when the draft is ready;
2. Senate will hold a Faculty Assembly on the document and invite input from faculty;
3. Senate, via the Task Force, will make adjustments based on the input from the assembly and send out the revised draft for a final round of comments
4. Senate will vote on the final draft and send it forward to the President.

Kendall closed her remarks by inviting questions and referring to a flowchart developed by the committee to illustrate the steps in the policy approval process (attached).

Pavelich said he was not sure if the changes and flow chart devised by the Task Force would make revising policies any quicker. Kendall responded that the Task Force believes that once the

committees have a clearer idea of their responsibilities and timelines, policies will move more quickly. The Task Force wants to establish an environment for speedier work. However, there is no way to omit any stages in the process if we want input from the appropriate stakeholders (i.e. those most affected by the policies).

Chiaviello asked whether, if approved by Senate, the policy will be binding. Kendall clarified that the university President would need to approve it. If approved, the policy would be a "done deal." Chiaviello suggested that if he did not, the policy would be a "dead letter."

Benavides asked about the significance of a red arrow on the flow chart indicating what would happen if the President rejected a regular policy. Kendall said the policy would be sent back for review to the appropriate standing policy committee that had initiated it, and who knew who the appropriate stakeholders were.

Kendall said that the purpose was to create a document that was positive but allowed for all contingencies. She characterized the committee as congenial and hardworking. She suggested that further questions or suggestions for improvement be directed toward her, Schmertz, or another Task Force member.

Sikka noted that FSEC had noted in its recent discussions with the Provost and President that it was important for all members of the policy writing process to consult their constituencies before Senate is presented with a draft. Faculty members represent their colleges, not their departments, and administrators need to consult the appropriate staff. In the past, the first public vetting of a document has often been Senate. This bogs down Senate processes. She suggested that the Task Force include strong statements about the posting of agendas and consulting of constituencies.

Kendall said one reason the Task Force included the dotted line between standing policy committees and stakeholders in the policy flow chart was to ensure that stakeholder comments would be received and incorporated into policy drafts before these drafts reached Senate.

Schmertz encouraged Senators to email the Task Force over the summer. The Task Force will work over the summer and will be happy to receive further suggestions from faculty.

Senate Follow-up on Faculty Assembly on the TX Common Core Curriculum

Allen began the discussion with Bill Waller's recommendation, distributed last week, for including in the core 6 hours of composition instruction. The recommendation was displayed on the projection system.

Pavelich asked whether, by "composition," Waller had intended a technical term referring to freshman comp classes taught by English departments or, more generally, any writing class. Waller said he meant the former: English departments currently hold the expertise and experience called for in his recommendation. Pavelich said that while English faculty currently hold this expertise, faculty from other disciplines may as well, at some point in the future, and that he believed the recommendation should therefore call for six hours of "writing instruction," not "composition instruction."

Schmertz said that Composition Studies is a recognized field of expertise housed within English departments. Most universities have two-semester composition sequences that address the fundamental writing skills that college students need to move ahead in the core curriculum. She thinks that while it would be good for people outside English to become composition experts, it is safe to say that students will always need the fundamentals provided in the existing two-course sequence. She said this is what “composition” means and what it will continue to mean for a long time.

Benavides asked how many hours of composition instruction were being asked for by the Coordinating Board and where the hours would come from. Pavelich said the Coordinating Board was not asking for any composition hours. Waller said he structured the recommendation so that the six hours could be fit into the framework in the core in a variety of ways: the six hours could come from the 6 hours allotted to the Communications foundational component area, or some of them could come from the component area option.

Waller noted that writing skills are a hallmark of critical thinking. Even in math, students are asked to interpret and explain their results. Students need the writing requirements to do so intelligibly, but more importantly because writing teaches students how to think. He is concerned that if students have a less demanding writing requirement than currently exists, they will be weaker than they are now, and the university’s credibility will be damaged.

Harned agreed with Schmertz that the term “composition” was important to the recommendation because right now the expertise on the subject is in English departments, and English faculty are trained in teaching it as graduate students. We may have a strong writing across the curriculum program in the future, and at that point 3 of the 6 hours might be handled by expert writing teachers within the academic discipline; this is in fact a movement within the field of Composition Studies.

Harned continued by saying that the Communications subcommittee has been placed in an impossible box. The committee wants six hours to go to composition but also want three hours of communications, which includes speaking and listening. He offered a friendly amendment to Waller’s recommendation: that 3 hours of the component area option be allotted to the communications foundational area committee, giving it a total of 9 hours, to be used for 6 required hours of composition and 3 required hours in communications. Waller accepted the friendly amendment. Switzer (Senate member on the Core Oversight Task Force) said she fully supported Harned’s amendment.

Chiaviello noted that the field of rhetoric had split into two disciplines in the 19th century, with the written communications portion going into English departments and speech portion into Communications departments. Communications now encompasses a range of fields that mostly covers topics and approaches from a social sciences perspective; writing is “extraneous” to this methodology.

Farris made clear that the friendly amendment merely makes it possible for UHD to continue to do what it is currently doing: requiring 6 hours of composition and 3 of speech.

Benavides asked if the 3 hours of the component area option being discussed were the three “floating” hours of the six hours set aside by THECB for component area options (formerly known as “institutional” options). She asked what had happened to the possibility of using 3 of those hours for science labs. Pavelich said that discussion was “over.”

Evans said she didn’t think it was necessary to raise the qualifications/credentials of the writing instructors in the recommendation, as the SACS credentialing process would take care of that. She is conflicted about the recommendation because while she supports even more writing requirements than are being proposed, she fears the Senate is placing itself in opposition to the work the committees are already doing. At the end of the day, a recommendation won’t bind what the committees do.

Harned said that the consequence of not supporting the recommendation will inevitably be the loss of three of the six hours of composition, as the six hours in the Communications component area will be divided between English and Communications. Evans said the Communications committee would do this whether or not the recommendation was accepted. Harned said that if the committee had three more hours to work with, as detailed in the recommendation, this would not happen. Evans reiterated that this would be up to the committee to decide.

Switzer said an even greater conflict is who decides the disposition of the three floating component area option hours. The Core Oversight Task Force has not been given the authority to decide this. Senate needs to listen to what our colleagues want. The recommendation offers the committees guidance and sends a signal to upper administration that we need to know who decides on the three floating hours. The Communications subcommittee needs to know whether they have 6 or 9 hours to work with, as this will change the decisions they make.

Windy Lawrence, speaking from the audience, introduced herself as a member of the Communications department and of the Communications subcommittee. She said the committee would welcome the recommendation granting them 9 hours, because the committee is now in the untenable position of trying to cram too much instruction into 6 hours. Most universities in her experience teach both communications and composition, and the demands of both disciplines are equally rigorous. Passing the recommendation would help the committee work together instead of being pitted against one another.

Sikka said that our colleagues in the subcommittees and in the Core Oversight Task Force have been placed in a very awkward position. We need to pass the recommendation because our students need the composition classes—K-12 is not currently doing a good job of teaching students critical thinking or writing or even helping students figure out what they know about something. We will need to look beyond the component area option to figure out where courses that feed into majors (e.g. science labs) go. Our majors will need to be restructured. She

endorses devoting 9 hours to the communications component, and dividing them as proposed. The recommendation is not an imposition on our colleagues; it helps them.

Waller said that Mike Matson (science faculty member on the Oversight Task Force) had informed faculty at the presentations before the Faculty Assembly that he expected that the science hours would be spent the same as before: there are 6 hours allocated to science in the current core and there will be 6 in the new core. Pavelich concurred that labs are not in the current core.

Pavelich said that the Provost is not budging on using 3 of the 6 component area option hours for student success, which means that the 3 extra hours we are asking to be devoted to communications would use up all of our institutional option hours. However, he believes that even given this restriction, the recommendation is the right way to go.

Sikka asked Pavelich a “rhetorical question”: To whom does the curriculum belong? She assured Pavelich he did not need to answer her question.

Lyons said that we were really also talking about the faculty’s right to weigh in on all 6 of the component area option hours available to universities. We could address the problem Pavelich was alluding to by removing the word “the” from “the three hours.” This way we would not be implying that faculty had consented to having three of the 6 institutionally designated hours decided for them. The issue, as Sikka suggested, is who owns the curriculum.

Farris called the question. Allen said there was a motion to drop the “the”—were there any seconds? Pavelich seconded. It was decided to take the change as a friendly amendment to the recommendation rather than to vote on it. The recommendation passed unanimously as amended. It is included at the bottom of these minutes as “Appendix A.”

Discussion of Recommendations made by Faculty Assembly

Benavides asked about the recommendations that had emerged from the Faculty Assembly on April 27.

Allen read the two recommendations.

1. “Reconstitute the General Education Committee with elected, tenured members of the faculty assembly by September, 2012.”
2. “Replace the current chair of the Core Oversight Task Force with a tenured member of the faculty assembly.”

Farris suggested a change to the second recommendation indicating that the chair of the Core Oversight Committee needed to be elected by faculty. Benavides seconded. The change passed.

Pavelich said he serves on the Core Oversight Task Force at the request of Senate, and he believes that if the chair were replaced by a faculty member not currently serving on that body, the committee's work will be set back severely. The committee has been meeting for 2 hours a week for many months. There are problems with the process, but they are not the fault of the current chair.

Lyons said one purpose of the recommendation is to make clear that the committee and process need to be driven by faculty. Having an administrator as chair undercuts this principle. He understands why the committee would not want a faculty member new to the committee taking on the role of chair. However, a provost can have a lot of influence on an assistant provost. The intent of the recommendation is to alleviate the burden being placed on the committee by administration so that they can function well as a faculty committee. Sikka concurred with Lyons' statement.

William Waters, a member of the Oversight Committee speaking from the audience, stated that he did not think replacing the chair of that committee (Gary Stading) would be disruptive. The committee has been "chasing its tail" for some time because its chair is beholden to the provost and unable to act on behalf of the faculty.

Switzer, also a member of the committee, stated that Stading is in a bind because he is trying to straddle two worlds. He is an administrator but also considers himself a faculty member because he has tenure and continues to teach. She said she tends to support the recommendation but as a member of the committee will abstain from voting at Senate.

Moosally, speaking from the audience, said that she was at the Faculty Assembly at which this recommendation was first introduced. Her feeling was that the recommendation was never intended to be about Stading as an individual but rather about the committee's ability to function independently as a committee. The committee is unable to vote, and carry out the results of its vote, because all of its decisions are vetted from above. Whatever decision the Senate makes should send the signal that we are trying to empower the committee. If the provost has a vision about the core, he should share it publicly and put his ideas on the table for open conversation, rather than letting it trickle down indirectly through methods that are not transparent.

Responding to Pavelich's concern about continuity, Lyons asked whether, if Stading were no longer chair, he might remain on the committee, and whether the committee should select its own chair.

Sikka cautioned Senate against referring to individuals and suggested we think more in terms of role conflicts. She thinks it is important for the Provost to have representatives on the Oversight committee but we need to recognize when role conflicts prevent faculty from exercising its primary responsibility towards curriculum.

Allen said he did not want to influence Senate's decision but that based on past experience, he thought the Senate's recommendation would be ignored. He reminded Senate that they had elected representatives to the Oversight committee, and the faculty members elected were rejected by the Provost. There might be undue pressure placed on the person picked to lead the committee.

Farris said that to her, the recommendation sends the message that the faculty own the curriculum. If the provost rejects the recommendation, he is sending the opposite message. THECB has said repeatedly that faculty own the curriculum. Senate can own its position and does not need to base it on the Provost's possible response.

Bill Waller said that it would have been good if a faculty member had been chosen to chair the task force in the first place, but he was concerned that adding a clause about the chair being elected will doom the recommendation. However, he did not see any better way to pick the chair.

Evans said that she understood the purpose of sending a message about the faculty owning the curriculum but said the recommendation did not actually say this—it is about replacing one person with another. Without such language, the recommendation comes across as confrontational.

Schmertz said that one way to soften the issue of faculty electing a replacement chair would be to change the language to say that the chair would be elected "by Faculty Senate procedures." This would allow the Faculty Senate Executive Committee to vet possible names with Senate and negotiate a compromise with administration that would allow for a faculty chair for the Oversight committee. This would mean that Senate would have to be willing to accept someone who was not their top choice.

Schmertz further suggested that a "whereas" be added to the recommendation that made it clear that faculty ownership of the curriculum was the reason the faculty was asking to replace the chair of the Core Oversight Task Force.

At this point Schmertz's tape recorder ran out of storage space, and the remainder of the meeting was not recorded. The meeting ran for a few more minutes, during which the following recommendation was passed, with 15 in favor and 5 abstentions:

Whereas:

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board has made clear that the process of revising the core curriculum is the responsibility of the faculty,

The UHD Faculty Senate Therefore Resolves:

That, the chair of the Core Oversight Taskforce be a tenured member of the Faculty Assembly to be elected through Faculty Senate procedures by May 30, 2012.

Appendix A

Whereas:

- 1) Written communication skills remain among the top abilities employers are seeking for the 21st century workforce;
- 2) The ability to write clearly and persuasively is one of the hallmarks of critical thinking;
- 3) The ability to write clearly and persuasively is essential for success at all levels of the undergraduate and graduate curriculum;
- 4) Written communication skills are a significant barrier to academic achievement for a large percentage of UHD students;
- 5) The most effective way to teach fundamental writing skills is through a devoted cadre of faculty trained and experienced at teaching composition;

The UHD Faculty Senate Therefore Recommends:

That, Three hours of the component area option be allotted to the Communications Component Committee, giving it a total of nine hours to be used for six required hours in composition and three required hours in communications.

Notes:

- 1) ACICS survey of 1,006 employers conducted in Nov. 2011 ranks written communication skills as 5th on a list of desirable skills for applicants, but near last in the actual ability of applicants.
- 4) Only 47% of the Fall 2009 FTIC cohort completed freshman composition in five long semesters. The Fall 2011 C or better passing rate for Eng 1301 was 62% and for Eng 1302 it was 55%.
- 5) The full-time coverage rate for Eng 1301 is 47% and for Eng 1302 it is 39%.

Respectfully submitted,

Johanna Schmertz, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of English

Faculty Senate Secretary