

UHD Faculty Senate Meeting

November 1, 2011

Minutes

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

J. Ahmad, C. Bachman, R. Beebe, M. Benavides, C. Burnett, A. Chiaviello, S. Farris, J. Hackett, J. Harned, V. Hrynkiv, P. Kintzele, P. Li, C. Nguyen, W. Nowak, A. Pavelich, S. Penkar, R. Scott, A. Sikka, L. Spears, W. Waller, K. Wright, V. Zafiridis

Absent: Evans, G., Switzer, K.

Report from Senate President Austin Allen

President Allen announced that Staff Council is planning a Christmas party. They want a cash bar and an evening celebration. They would like faculty involvement. Please let Austin know if you would like to volunteer.

Please attend one of the Strategic Planning public forums next week.

AAC (Academic Affairs Council) met last week and reviewed 5 policies. These included an updated version of the disability policy, the 6-drop policy created on emergency basis, the faculty dismissal policy, the grievance policy, and the academic honesty policy.

The grievance policy was presented at AAC. Trevor Hale (previously chair of the grievance committee) came to AAC with a list of issues pertaining to the grievance policy, such as how long each party gets to speak. The policy has been sent back to FAC (Faculty Affairs Committee) for review. Moosally said FAC will determine on Friday if the changes to the grievance policy requested by the provost and AAC are substantive and how quickly the policy can be turned around.

The academic honesty policy is still being discussed. There is interest in developing a tracking system as well as a matrix of penalties for different types of offenses. The Academic Policies Committee (APC) will review the policy.

Schmertz said she thought the faculty dismissals policy would fall under the purview of one of our shared governance policy writing committees. Spears asked for clarification: were policies pertaining to faculty bypassing our shared governance committees?

Moosally said the request for some of these policy changes came about over the summer in response to an audit. The Faculty Senate Executive Committee (FSEC) learned of these and agreed that they could be approved on an emergency basis, but she understood the policies were to go through the normal process afterwards. The policies did not get approved over the summer as expected, but they are the same policies initially presented as emergency policies. Ideally,

they should have come to FAC (the Faculty Affairs Committee, which she chairs) for review before AAC did anything with them. Moosally saw them as an ex-officio AAC member and was surprised that they had not reached her earlier as chair of FAC, now that the summer is over and FSEC does not need to stand-in for the shared governance committees. Since she understood these to be the same policies that FSEC had deemed non-substantive over the summer, she reviewed them with FAC and then requested that if they were signed by the president, the revised policies should be distributed with the comment that the changes were non-substantive.

Lyons said that policy changes need to go before FSEC and the chair of the appropriate committee before they can be deemed nonsubstantive. Academic Affairs should not act alone, even in the case of non-substantive changes. If this is not happening, we need to remind the Provost of the process, so that changes can be done openly.

Sikka elaborated: The shared governance policy has a process in place that states that if AAC decides to make changes on its own, they should consult with the chair of the committee under whose purview the policy falls to ensure the changes are nonsubstantive. We need to follow either normal shared governance procedures or emergency policy procedures. We should not allow emergency changes to be conflated with normal policy changes; this could lead to the complete bypassing of the shared governance committees.

Lyons said that there is no such thing as an emergency policy. He was supposed to take the issue of defining what might constitute an emergency and how policy should address one with President Flores last year when he was Faculty Senate President, but he “dropped the ball.”

Kendall (speaking from the audience) noted that we can get ourselves in trouble if we obey “emergency verbal instructions” –deviations from policy can only occur if the president officially recognizes them. She gave an example of when she was chair of University R&T and was told a deadline could be extended. However, the committee never received official confirmation from the president of the extended deadline, and so they abided by the deadlines in the existing policy

Allen said that he was planning to set up a meeting with Chapman and Flores, and the issue of procedures for changing policy can be on the agenda. Sikka noted that FSEC has not met with Flores or Chapman except once. FSEC should meet on a regular basis with administration.

Slate on Teaching Excellence Task Force

As a segue into this agenda item, Bill Waller told faculty to watch out for a Nov 11 professional development workshop on improving student success in groups of underachieving males. Seating is limited and speaker Aaron Thompson is highly recommended. RSVP to Dean Birchak. There are stipends for attendance.

Allen says that FSEC has assembled a large number of nominees for the Teaching Excellence Task Force. Do we want large number (12) to farm out duties/do research or do we want to keep

the committee smaller? Also, how does Senate feel about extending their original Feb 1 deadline?

Kintzele said he has heard concerns about the February 1 deadline not giving the committee time to deliver a quality product. He suggested an April 1 deadline.

Preuss suggested the committee might set its own deadline, as long as the committee provides regular updates to Senate. Farris asked what the purpose was of the original deadline. Sikka said the original request for an early deadline came from Gail Evans, and it had to do with budget cycle. Sikka is fine with postponing but says the committee's report should coincide with Senate's meeting cycle. A final report should happen in time for possible implementation the following spring. She also believes concerns about the need for cross-disciplinary discussion are another reason to extend the committee's deadline.

Harned said he thought there should be members from IT on the committee. Allen agreed and said he would pursue it.

Sikka made a motion that the committee contain a maximum of 12 members. The motion passed 24-1.

Sikka moved that the deadline would be May 1. The motion passed 20-3.

New Business: Posting of Syllabi

Chiaviello moved to put the new business item regarding syllabus posting ahead of the old business item on searches. The motion passed.

Allen provided background for the issue: last week Chapman told chairs to tell faculty that he wanted all faculty syllabi posted by November 7. After hearing concerns, Allen talked to Chapman about the very short deadline. Chapman told Allen that he was not expecting 100% compliance at this late date but wants a "good faith effort."

Chiaviello said he was concerned about the November 7 deadline for a number of reasons. The deadline conflicts with a deadline already in a System directive, and faculty had been told it would not be possible to change their syllabi after the posting. Further, he is involved in a program that is currently planning to change next semester's textbook, and the committee is still in the research stage of that process. Farris added that major readings in her classes are often determined by the students themselves, making it impossible to post a syllabus before the class has begun. Chiaviello noted that students already have access to course descriptions via the course catalog.

Benavides asked for clarification on the System directive. Moosally said that House Bill 2504 required that syllabi must be posted by the seventh class day. A UH-System Task Force examined the bill after it was passed to determine how the System would comply and determined faculty should post their syllabi by the first class day but should have a 30-day window

beforehand to do so. Syllabi could be uploaded as many as 30 days prior to the first class day, but they would not be visible to the public until the first class day. Moosally added that an English department member spoke directly to Chapman today and was told that the syllabi submitted by November 7 could not be edited.

Preuss said he thought that the System task force report only pertained to the initial “rollout” of the bill’s implementation. He understood from Chapman that it was acceptable if faculty followed the original Nov 1 deadline, but in the future he wanted syllabi to be posted in time for student registration. Preuss also believes that after syllabi are posted, they are still editable.

Lyons said we should adhere to the current System recommendation and consider at leisure whether students will benefit from changes we might consider—we should look for ways to balance student and faculty needs as we consider any future changes. Consideration of faculty workload and how faculty develop their materials has been put aside “for some reason that is not really clear.” He wants information from Chapman about what Chapman really wants.

Li said he has had the experience of having contracted for a new textbook after his syllabi were posted but being unable to change the information on the e-syllabus. He never heard back from IT when he wanted to make the correction.

Sikka noted that the TX legislation requiring the posting of syllabi was aimed at providing transparency in our courses. These e-syllabi are being viewed by external constituencies to monitor how we conduct our academic disciplines and also serves the purpose of allowing students to “shop for courses” based on the limited information the e-syllabi provide. She mentioned the book *Academically Adrift*, which warns that students are poorly served when we take a consumerist mentality toward education.

Sikka continued that the UH System Task Force put a great deal of time into deciding how the legislation should be implemented. If we are going to make changes to what the System Task Force asked for, let’s do it in a timely way that does not “freak out the faculty.”

Harned says that the e-syllabus requires faculty to post their readings in advance, something he plans over the summer or during Christmas breaks, not during the semester. An early posting of e-syllabi will not allow for things like staffing changes or changes in course readings and makes innovation difficult.

Schmertz said that students have been directed toward her e-syllabus to make their decisions. The disjunction between the e-syllabus and the “real” syllabus is not observed, even internally within the university.

Pavelich thinks we should find out what the Provost really wants before we start fighting against it; students need more information than what they might get in a catalog.

Chiaviello disagreed with Pavelich and said we needed to make our feelings known: we already know what the Provost wants. He asked if there was any data on what use students are making of the e-syllabi, how many “hits” they got.

Wright says he likes to adjust his syllabi based on student responses. He noted that this is difficult when his evaluations are delivered to him late.

Kendall pointed out that we should put language in our e-syllabi indicating that items may change based on the instructor's discretion. She does not think we should be locked in prematurely; this makes it difficult to exercise our academic freedom. She puts this caveat on all her syllabi as a way to "protect pedagogy."

Moosally reminded Senate that the issue we are discussing came about as a result of a legislative agenda that caused great concern for universities across the state. UH System found a way to respond that was compliant with the actual legislation yet responsive to faculty concerns. Many universities are taking the same approach we are. If we start tweaking existing practices for our own institutional needs, we put ourselves out of step with other institutions.

She also noted that there is a disclaimer at the top of all e-syllabi that students are responsible for all information provided by their instructor. The e-syllabi are intended for public consumption; they are not intended to replace what we give students who actually pay for our courses. We need to be aware of their public purpose before we implement changes to our current system of posting them. She also noted that the task force recommended tracking how the website was used, in part to determine whether students needed and used the information. Right now, there is insufficient documentation of student need. Perhaps IT will be able to pull that data.

Nowak wondered what he should report back to his department. His department was told Nov 7 was to be the deadline for posting of e-syllabi. Can he now tell them that compliance "isn't that important"?

Allen said he had been told, and his chair had passed on to his department, that "100% compliance" was not expected.

Harned pointed out that other departments had been told the deadline was required. He noted that it was one week before the deadline and Senate would not meet again before November 7. We should not leave things open-ended, but rather encourage the Provost to clarify and/or modify his statement. We should make a resolution to follow the current UH System timelines on posting of e-syllabi.

Preuss said if it was possible to post syllabi 30 days before the start of class, why not 60 days? Moosally explained that the issue was when the syllabi would be made available to the public, not how soon professors could or should get started; the provost wanted the syllabi available to the public November 7 so that students could have access to it before they registered.

Chiaviello called for a second for the "motion" made by Harned. There was discussion aimed at clarifying the motion and whether the System recommendations were policy.

Moosally said they were recommendations that were accepted by the Vice-Chancellor, who sent an email to the provosts asking them to tell their IT departments to work with the task force

members to take the task on. It was not binding, but was accepted by all four universities in the system.

Beebe raised the issue of how adjuncts will be affected. Chiaviello said that posting syllabi for adjuncts violated their academic freedom. Nowak said the issue of syllabus posting for adjuncts was raised in his department after they heard about the November 7 deadline. They were told by IT that it would be possible to post a common syllabus to a section without an instructor being assigned.

Lyons said that the issue of adjuncts exemplifies the unreasonableness of expecting faculty to post their syllabi before the first day of class. He reminded Senate that the provost's recommendations were not policy and called the question.

Preuss asked Hossein Shahrokhi , Associate Vice president of IT, to explain whether the November 7 deadline was for faculty access or public access. Shahrokhi said it was for public access. Preuss asked how long it was editable. Shahrokhi said there was a cut-off point after which changes could not be made, but he was uncertain what that date was. The syllabi would be editable up until that cut-off point.

Sikka said that since the information being passed along is conflicting, the best thing to do would be to follow the timeline laid out by the taskforce. Farris called the question on the motion to follow the System Task Force's timeline. The motion passed 24-0. Sikka asked for Allen to quickly communicate the result of the Senate motion to the provost, so that he could inform the chairs.

Allen asked if we should begin compiling a list of issues to raise, mentioning a number of issues of his own, including the necessity to incorporate new research into one's teaching. Harned brought up book costs, Kintzele noted that department websites like English already provide information on courses and teaching materials, and Preuss mentioned new changes to the core curriculum proposed. Sikka said that changes involving all faculty should not be handled through deans and chairs. Administration should communicate with faculty directly, as was done with the provost's recent email on the Coordinating Board's changes to the statewide core curriculum. These communications should contain clear deadlines and procedures, and state who faculty should go with questions. Discussion was closed so that the remaining agenda items could be discussed.

Old Business: Search Committees

Schmertz referred to a 2008 resolution from UFEC (University Faculties Executive Council) that Allen had sent to Senators. The resolution stated that faculty should be involved at every stage of the process for searches at or above the level of dean. Unfortunately, UHD has no policy in place that would allow for this level of faculty input. Rather, there is a newly signed hiring policy (02.b.14) into which the hiring of academic administrators falls by default. Important decisions

such as the staffing of committees, whether a position is seen as external or internal, and where/how ads are advertised and posted are all handled under this policy by a so-called “hiring manager.” This means there are no real provisions for academic searches, and therefore meaningful faculty input, for positions of this nature. This is a serious problem. Without searches, there will be no faculty “buy-in” to the leadership. There have been situations at UHD where faculty have been appointed to “screening” (not search) committees at the last minute and handed a job description and set of job applications and been told “Go screen.” Schmertz made a motion that the president and the president-elect of Faculty Senate take up the issue of the absence of a policy governing the hiring academic administrators at Academic Affairs Council, with the goal of creating a new policy to fill the gap. Pavelich seconded.

Chiaviello moved to close the question and go to a vote. The motion carried, 23-0 with one abstention.

New Business: Honors Committee Task Force

Anjoo called Senators’ attention to a handout containing the Honor’s Task Force committee’s charge and its members. The task force is currently investigating honors programs at many universities but also wants to know what experience faculty within the university have with honors programs. Toward that end, they are developing a survey monkey to solicit faculty input. The committee hopes to have a draft report to give Provost Chapman by the timeline outlined in the charge--the end of Feb 2012. They will then present the report to Senate, with the hope of implementation of the program in Fall 2012. Sikka asked faculty to communicate with her and the other committee members with questions or suggestions.

Faculty Handbook

The final issue on the agenda is the faculty handbook. We currently have one, but it is problematic: it is outdated and was prepared by Academic Affairs. As the meeting was running out of time, Allen proposed we defer discussion of it to the next meeting of Senate. Sikka added that what we have now is not a “faculty handbook,” it is a “handbook for faculty,” which means it did not go through shared governance procedures. A “faculty handbook” is generally written by faculty on behalf of faculty, and it includes more than just a listing of policies. It can help protect and defend our ability to speak up on issues of interest to the public and the university community.

Respectfully submitted,
Johanna Schmertz, Ph.D.
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Faculty Senate Secretary