

UHD Faculty Senate Meeting

October 5, 2010

Minutes

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

R. Beebe, R. Chiquillo, D. de la Pena, A. Eliassen, G. Evans, J. Jackson, J. Johnson, P. Kintzele, N. LaRose, M. Moosally, W. Morgan, A. Pavelich, R. Pepper, L. Spears, N. Sullivan, F. Williams, K. Wright, V. Zafris, Z. Zhou

Absent: C. Bedard, A. Gomez-Rivas, K. Jegdic, O. Paskelian, N. Rangel

Lyons commended the university academic planning process developed by Interim Provost Dressman, which Dressman sent to the chairs and deans for a meeting last Friday (October 1) and then distributed to all faculty. The planning process ensures that departments will be in close communication with their chairs and deans and allows opportunities for input from all parties. The Planning Process also mentions that the BHAG “high impact experience” will play an important role in curriculum and criteria. Senate has been approved by the Leadership group to take the lead in implementing the BHAG.

Lyons requested senators get their phone contact sheets back to him this week. If you are opting out, let him know so that he can redistribute the student phone numbers. He will have a conversation with Faculty Senate prior to sending out the next list of student contacts. He also called Senate’s attention to negative press accounts of UHD’s low retention rates and said editorials and blogs could be responded to.

Report from Interim Provost Mike Dressman

President Flores has asked Dressman to develop a plan for an online winter term to be implemented this academic year. The term would begin the last week of December and end the second week of January. Departments should solicit possible classes from their faculty. The goal is 20 online courses for a total of 1000 credit hours, with the purpose of increasing enrollment during this base year of academic funding.

Schmertz asked how the term would impact a professor’s 3-4 courseload. Dressman responded that the winter courses would be taught as overloads at adjunct pay rate and could also be taught by adjuncts.

Evans was concerned about the level of IT and library support that would be available, especially as the university is closed the last week of December. Dressman responded that the IT Help desk works through break, although they will hire extra help to get Blackboard Vista up the Sunday (Dec 26) before school starts. The Library will not be able to offer “live” support the last week of December, but Dressman assumes that the online students taking classes will not be coming in for “live” library support. Dressman anticipates that registration would start Dec 1 and be wrapped up by December 23. Drop/Add would stop on the second day of class. There would be a one-course limit for students. Other issues are still being investigated: tuition/fees and working with cashier and registrar offices.

Sullivan asked about how the winter semester would be numbered in Banner, expressing concerns about potential confusion for Banner users. Dressman replied “Fifteen.”

Sullivan asked if any studies had been done to ascertain if there was demand for a winter term, and suggested a May-mester might be more effective, as it would not interfere with students’ (and teachers’) holiday plans. She suggested that a three week online course over a holiday season might set students up for failure. Dressman said that no study had been done. If classes don’t make, the program will be

canceled. In the interest of ease of implementation, Dressman negotiated with Flores to restrict winter term to online classes.

Moosally expressed concern about where caps would be set, and that faculty would get very short notice if their courses did not make. Dressman replied that most online classes fill within seven days; he can imagine a situation where if most classes fill, a low-enrollment class would be allowed to stay open. However, if the overall enrollment numbers do not justify the winter term, the term will be cancelled.

Evans defended the concept of winter term, saying community colleges have done it. COB has many online courses delivered over the summer; it would simply be a matter of compressing a 5 week course into a 3-week course.

Lyons asked if Dressman had consulted with faculty on this issue. Dressman said he had mentioned it to FSEC. Lyons said what he meant by his comment was whether any faculty had expressed interest in teaching a winter term. Dressman said yes.

Moving to a new topic, Dressman announced there would be a ten-minute presentation on faculty-student research at the November 17 Board of Regents meeting. He is interested in hearing about any work faculty are doing with their students that might make for a good picture and story. Lyons asked if Khator would interact with faculty. Dressman said he would look into this.

Schmertz asked for approval of the minutes. Sullivan moved to approve, Johnson seconded, and the motion carried.

Ombuds Position

Lyons announced that FSEC and Interim Provost Dressman had decided to recommend Dr. Bill Gilbert as Faculty Ombuds. He asked for the senate's approval. A motion to approve was made and seconded, and the faculty voted unanimously to approve Gilbert's nomination. Lyons mentioned that he had yet to discuss the possibility of Gilbert stepping into the role before Jan 1. Dressman asked if he could inform President Flores of the Senate's decision, and Lyons said yes.

Shared Governance Concerns

The issue of shared governance was added to the Senate's agenda a few days ago as a response to the announcement of two signed "emergency" policies distributed recently. Lyons explained that this notification raised questions about procedures for developing policy, as neither FSEC nor the responsible shared governance policy committees had been informed that these policies were needed. Shared governance procedures as outlined in PS 1.A.03 are the mechanism that ensures that academic issues are addressed jointly by faculty and administration. PS 1.A.01, the "policy on policies," states that procedures for developing policy must be followed unless there are "clear and compelling reasons" to do otherwise. Lyons believes that with a new crop of senators, this is an opportune moment to engage in the topic of shared governance. Lyons has already addressed concerns about the issue with President Flores and Interim Provost Dressman, and Dressman quickly followed up with an email to faculty promising that these policies would go through the appropriate committees and stating his regret that this was not done in the first place. Lyons stated that shared governance is "one of the cornerstones of academic practice at the university level."

The first policy was the Credit by Exam policy that was revised by addition of a section on acceptance of International Baccalaureate credit. The policy was created because Dressman noticed we were not in compliance with Texas statutes.

The second policy was a new policy on substantive changes for SACS reporting. The Associate Vice-President for Institutional Effectiveness (and chair of the SACS committee) developed this policy. Any “substantive” changes in an institution’s curricula or modes of delivering these are to be reported to SACS. We had neglected to report on Cy-Fair and the Northwest initiatives and did not have the required substantive changes policy in place. Neither faculty leadership nor the university committee responsible for the SACS five year report were informed that this policy needed to be written.

Pavelich noted that when he was chair of the Faculty Affairs committee, at least two “emergency” policies were written that should have fallen under his committee’s purview but were not funneled through it. He thinks that administration “gets” that they should consult with academic leadership about changes in academic policies but he doesn’t have the feeling that this is thought of as anything other than a courtesy, nor are the appropriate standing university committees consulted. The ORC (later termed ORCA) policy on Senate’s agenda for today was made necessary because of an “emergency” Office of Sponsored Programs policy that displaced the original ORC guidelines. Pavelich thinks the “emergency policy” should be changed to require that the relevant standing university committees be consulted prior to any action being taken. (It was later established that there is in fact no reference in any policy to “emergency” policy changes and that if changes were to be made in the way we revise policies without the full process, the changes would have to be made to PS 1.A.01.)

Sullivan stated that we need a definition of “emergency.” She said that there have been four years since our last SACS report for us to discover we were non-compliant: who was responsible for pushing this policy through so suddenly? If our definition of emergency is elastic, it can lead us down a slippery slope where anything can be justified, especially in times of budget crunch. She remembers summer pay being cut as the result of an “emergency.” Our 3-4 courseload could disappear if “emergency” is not defined. Moosally noted that, in fact, the 3-4 policy was delayed a year because Faculty Senate needed to ensure removal of a clause permitting the President to rescind the course reduction for economic exigencies.

Schmertz asked if there was in fact any such thing as an “emergency policy” in any of our policy statements, or is this just a term we use/hear when these things happen. Moosally: There is only the language in P.S. 1.A.01 (the “policy on policies”) referring to “clear and compelling reasons” for bypassing shared governance procedures.

Pavelich said that whether we define emergency or not, the question is how policy can be enforced if there is not a culture in place that honors policy. He appreciates Dressman’s efforts at transparency.

Dressman said that what is written in policy is one matter; another is whether policy is followed, and there are policies that have been ignored. An example is when UPC recently learned that a policy requiring Advising to evaluate transcripts of transfer students had been ignored for years due to inadequate staffing in Advising. The emergency with regard to the International Baccalaureate policy was that we did not have the Texas-mandated “credit by exam” language in the existing policy. As a result, the state mandate was in some cases seen as overriding university policy and in some cases not. Being out of compliance with state law invites potential lawsuits. Also, UHD was losing potential students because we could not accommodate their degree plans.

Spears stated that “shared governance” is seen as a relative term; when administration adopts a top-down system of management, “where is the sharing”? He was part of the original team who put our policy system in place. It was meant to ensure top-to-bottom, bottom-to-top communication, but in particular, that academic decisions would be initiated at the academic level. The intent was to develop policies that were exact, without using legalese that laid out procedures, responsibilities, and timelines. The policy system took years to pass, and was viewed in microscopic detail, but in the end, we had a system that has been recognized statewide.

The only time the shared governance system “goes to pot,” Spears says, is when policies aren’t followed. We have a policy system that works but now needs a little tweak. The issues we are discussing were not “emergencies,” as it is likely we are not in compliance with external bodies in other ways. Therefore, he agrees with Sullivan: we need to define “emergency.” Faculty Senate needs to make a strong statement that we believe in shared governance, that we have policy statements that support it, and that only “obvious” emergencies can be seen as justifying shortcuts.

Moosally stated that shared governance is about communication, and communication has become problematic due to the university’s growth. We all need to own the shared governance policies. Timelines allowed for informing Senate leadership and the policy committees to be informed; none of these revisions was made overnight.

Johnson said this issue is not a question of intention or blame, but rather one of concern for the mechanisms through which decisions are made. Lyons said that Interim Provost Dressman has made a significant effort to meet with us and listen to us in a timely and responsive manner. What we need to emphasize is communication. Faculty need to communicate with leadership as well. As the Faculty Handbook states, we are responsible for learning policy. If we don’t, we can’t guard shared governance.

Sullivan asked if the Faculty Senate Executive Committee (FSEC) could follow up on this issue. As Interim Provost, Dr. Dressman is only filling a gap and is trying to pick up slack. We must as faculty work to establish a culture of shared governance, or a new provost could, with the best of intentions, act in an arbitrary manner out of ignorance. We need to establish an understanding of emergency and timeliness.

Lyons asked if Sullivan was making a motion. Senate assembled the following motion:

FSEC will work with the President and upper administration to clarify a definition of “emergency” and “clear and compelling reasons” and set expectations of timely notice to the relevant shared governance committee with respect to the creation and revision of policies, with the intent to include such definitions in policy via appropriate policy review processes.

After some discussion about how the motion might be more clearly focused, and whether the matter should simply be turned over to FSEC, Pavelich stated that the motion was sufficient for its purposes and suggested we vote. Sullivan made a motion to approve the motion, Evans seconded, and the motion carried 18-1.

Discussion of Revisions to Organized Research Policy

Anjoo Sikka, chair of the Faculty Affairs committee, attended to present a new version of the Organized Research Policy to Senate for discussion. The committee has many policies on its plate besides this one to examine. The ORC policy seemed to be one of the simpler policies to work with. ORC was originally

part of an old OSP (Office of Sponsored Programs) “hodgepodge” that contained ORC guidelines and policies for external funding. Its institution as policy left nothing that referred to ORC. The committee is now breaking the components of the old ORP policy down into different policies, of which today’s ORC (now termed “ORCA” for “Organized Research and Creative Activity”) is one.

This proposal is being presented to Faculty Senate because this is the necessary step prior to the policy’s consideration in an upcoming meeting of the Academic Affairs Council. (The latter is chaired by the Provost, and Austin Allen and Phil Lyons are Faculty Senate’s representatives, who will take what is said at Faculty Senate today to the Council meeting.)

Sikka highlighted the language that was new or possibly controversial, which included the following: 1.) Requiring proposals to fit only one of the proposed criteria for evaluation, intended to help level the playing field among disciplines, 2.) Members of ORCA cannot themselves submit proposals during the years they are members of the committee, 3.) a calendar of deadlines that would enable applicants to plan in advance and departments to fill courses left open by any course releases created by an ORCA grant, 4.) incorporating the same procedures for review and evaluation by department committees, chairs, and deans that are currently articulated in the Faculty Development Leave policy, 5.) putting in policy the current practice of requiring funds to be expended within three long semesters of the date of notification of award and 6.) a requirement for awardees to fill out a followup report within 12 months of when the award was received.

Spears suggested the policy be revised to group responsibilities of the grantee into one section. Johnson suggested that the deadlines for ORCA and Faculty Development be staggered, instead of being due on the same day, with the Faculty Development deadline coming first so that faculty who have applied for travel funds under this grant can manage their travel plans and budget allowances effectively.

Moosally suggested 1.) the word “creative” be added in section 2.1.1, 2.) spelling out guidelines for composition of departmental review committees, perhaps borrowing from another policy, 3.) adding the proposal form for ORCA as an appendix to the policy, and 4.) using language to distinguish the departmental review committee for ORCA from the department review committees currently in existence.

Evans suggested the policy needs to make clear whether the department committee evaluates applicants’ proposals, recommends revisions, or both, and what exactly they are to send forward to the university level ORCA committee. She would also like there to be language in the policy that sets the expectation that awards be publicized within the university community. Are the guidelines discussed in 2.4.1 the same as the “criteria” discussed in 2.1? Finally, the word “proposed research” to refer to actions already taken is problematic; research can no longer be considered “proposed” 12 months after it has been funded.

LaRose asked if small departments would be penalized by having small review committees and what policy this year’s applicants should follow.

Sullivan asked if the 18 month award period began in the fiscal year following the award of a grant. Sikka says it has been clear both operationally and in policy that the clock begins the semester one is awarded the grant.

Time was drawing nigh, and Lyons ended this discussion with requests that any further comments on the policy be directed to him, to be passed on to Sikka. He solicited nominations for senators to help complete the Senate’s report on online education. Ron Beebe, Jeff Jackson, and Vasilis Zafiris

volunteered for this Senate subcommittee. Moosally noted that we would still need Faculty Senate input on the direction this subcommittee should take and how the written comments should be handled.

Respectfully submitted,
Johanna Schmertz
Faculty Senate Secretary