

**Faculty Senate Minutes, Penn State Worthington Scranton
January 24, 2011
Sherbine Lounge**

Meeting called to order at 12:03 pm by Dr. Gail Keating, Faculty Senate Chair

Approval of Minutes

The December 2010 minutes were approved.

Administrative Reports

1) Chancellor:

Chancellor Dr. Mary-Beth Krogh-Jespersen reported the following:

- Previous Faculty Senate Chair Dr. Parminder Parmar received a Nittany Lion statue as thanks for her service at the end of the last semester.
- The Chancellor thanked the faculty for participating in the DAA search by attending meetings with the candidates and also thanked the search committee for its work.
- This year's Commencement speaker will be Terry Pegula. Due to his popularity, faculty and staff might receive requests from people who want to be invited to Commencement. However, the Chancellor asked that no such invitations should be issued.
- The Faculty and Staff Activity Reports will be due soon; everyone should ensure the reports are completed by January 31.
- Currently the campus is working on a draft of the new budget. Faculty should now work with Program Coordinators to estimate funding needed during the next academic year.
- Nominations are currently accepted for the Campus Advisory Board. Dr. Krogh-Jespersen encouraged the submission of candidates' names, especially from underrepresented areas such as Wayne or Pike Counties, as well as the nomination of candidates who are providing internship opportunities to our students.

2) Interim Director of Academic Affairs:

Dr. Molly Wertheimer reported the following:

- The FAR's are due on January 31, and all faculty members should set up appointments for a February meeting with Dr. Wertheimer by contacting Mary Lance or Althea Kent. The meeting will be an opportunity to develop strategies for the next academic year. Therefore, faculty should use the goals section of the FAR to specify what they would need for next year, e.g., funding for travel, equipment, or supplies.
- Academic Affairs is currently "spot-checking" faculty syllabi to ensure that they contain all sections needed and do not feature erroneous information. Faculty are encouraged to visit the University's website on how to create a proper syllabus.
- Dr. Wertheimer has been attending Vice Provost for Academic Affairs Blannie E. Bowen's Academic Leadership Forum. The last meeting focused on the University's family leave policies; the next meeting will focus on academic bullying.
- Currently there are workshops offered on promotion and tenure for tenure-line faculty. Workshops for instructors on promotion to Senior Instructor are forthcoming.
- Faculty are encouraged to run for seats on committees involved in promotion and tenure

decisions.

- In response to Fred Aebli's call about a neighbor's son who died in a traffic accident due to the weather, Dr. Wertheimer encouraged faculty to start thinking about alternate delivery systems of courses during inclement weather.

Questions:

Dr. Dale Holen asked if there was still a mentoring system for new faculty members. Dr. Wertheimer said that the Hazleton campus still had a system in place. Faculty members choose mentors with the help of the DAA and the PC. There are two documents on the mentoring of new faculty members available on the University website. The new trend in mentoring was to encourage new faculty members to see several mentors as a team whose individual members were experts in different areas.

University Faculty Senate Report

No report at this time.

University Faculty Council Report

No report at this time.

Committee Reports

No reports at this time.

New Business:

Nominations:

Faculty Senate Chair Dr. Gail Keating solicited nominations for the positions below. Nominated were the following faculty members (listed in alphabetical order):

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| Faculty Senate Chair Elect: (to begin serving SP12) | Dr. Joseph Fennwald Dr. Bill Sciacca Dr. Kelley Wagers |
| Faculty Senate Secretary Elect: (to begin serving F11) | Dr. Russel Casey Prof. M. Suzanne Harper |
| University Faculty Senator: | Dr. Pat Hinchey Dr. Durell Johnson Dr. Alan Peslak |

Dr. Keating will meet with Robert Notari to set up an electronic ballot.

University Attendance Policy:

Assistant DAA Dr. Durell Johnson discussed the University's attendance policy in light of recent grade adjudication complaints filed by students. Prior to the Faculty Senate meeting, Dr. Johnson had emailed the following documents to all faculty members:

- Senate Policy 42-27: Class Attendance;
- Senate Policy 47-20: Basis for Grades;
- Procedure R-4: Religious Observances;
- Excerpt from the University Undergraduate Advising Handbook;
- The Office of Undergraduate Education's Associate Vice President and Senior Associate Dean Jeremy Cohen's "Frequently Asked Questions."

A number of faculty members asked several questions and offered comments. Dr. Johnson's explanation follows here in sum and substance. He addressed questions and comments at various points in his discussion, sometimes with necessary overlaps and repetitions of definitions and explanations. To avoid repeating information, the questions and comments are listed below the summary of Dr. Johnson's explanation.

Summary of Dr. Johnson's Presentation:

- Due to recent cases of grade adjudication procedures during which students successfully challenged a course grade based on the instructor's phrasing of the class attendance policy, it is important to review the current University policy on attendance and the documents referenced above. Students are increasingly aware of the existing policies and may challenge a grade if a syllabus does not comply with a University policy.
- An instructor may create his or her own attendance policy, but the instructor's individual attendance policy must not supersede the University's general policy.
- The problem: various gray areas are not clearly defined by the documents mentioned above, and several inconsistencies and contradictions exist. These include the following:
 - Students must be given a fair opportunity to make up work missed due to an absence.
 - According to University policies, class attendance is encouraged but not explicitly required. Students are asked to submit absence forms for excused events (e.g., field trips, sports events) one week ahead of time to excuse a planned absence. However, due to privacy laws, they cannot be compelled to submit proof of the legitimacy of an unforeseeable absence, e.g, due to an illness or accident (doctor's note, police report, etc.).
 - At the same time, an instructor is allowed to deduct points for (illegitimate?) absences [not phrased unambiguously in the documents]. However, since no documentation may be required, instructors have no way of deciding what constitutes a legitimate vs. an illegitimate absence, unless the student says so, and at what point a grade deduction is warranted. In effect, therefore, there is no clear way of monitoring absences and classifying them as legitimate vs. illegitimate without the student's voluntary disclosure.
 - While passing an illegitimate absence off as a legitimate one may be grounds for disciplinary action against a student, this rule is very difficult to enforce due to the above privacy policies.
 - Attendance must not be equated with participation, as a student may attend class

without participating and thus cannot earn participation credit simply by being present. Therefore, attendance may not be used as a basis for a participation grade. The difference between attendance and participation must be clarified on the syllabus.

-The syllabus must be written as clearly as possible and should be viewed as a contract between instructor and student. However, instructors may not include policies that equate a certain number of absences with point or grade deductions, one of the most frequent issues found on syllabi at the present.

- The University policy thus includes many gray areas and contradictions and does not allow for a clearer explanation of these issues at the time.

Questions/Comments Addressed (in alphabetical order):

Prof. Fred Aebli: Students in his class sign a memorandum of understanding in which they stipulate the course attendance policy.

Dr. Dave Byman: If a student chose to be dishonest about the reason for an absence, it would be impossible to distinguish between a legitimate and an illegitimate absence. For example, may instructors ask for documentation regarding an accident that occurred on the student's way to campus? (Answer:-No; see above.)

Dr. Russel Casey: Could a committee made up of faculty members of all disciplines come up with a "boilerplate" policy to be used on our campus? (See "Result" below.)

Dr. Matt Halloran: It seems that there are three facts: 1) We may only penalize unexcused absences.; 2) We must allow make-up work for legitimate absences.; 3) The student gets to make up the excuse whether an absence was legitimate or illegitimate. Thus there seem to be no true gray areas, as the decision lies with the student.

Dr. Michael Michalisin: This approach to attendance would make it extremely difficult to grade business group projects that must be completed in class with all team members in attendance. Some work done in class cannot be made up by an individual student after the fact.

Dr. Matt Mutchler: Does an instructor have to excuse an absence due to an athletic event if the student did not mention it prior to the absence (e.g., thus avoiding/missing a presentation)? (Unclear—student should technically provide advanced notice.)

Dr. Éva Tettenborn: Is it possible to stipulate a clear and unambiguous class attendance policy that does not violate the University policy? Is there an example of an acceptable, well-written, unambiguous policy we can use? How can we clearly separate attendance from participation, especially in the humanities, where much of the participation and the learning process occur in class discussions?

Result of Discussion and Questions:

Having been charged by the Faculty Senate with investigating the above issues further, the Curricular Affairs Committee (Chair: Dr Dave. Byman) will attempt to determine current best practices in articulating attendance policies on syllabi. The Committee will solicit the help of

Academic Affairs, since the review of current syllabi may yield examples that other instructors may find useful. The Committee will report its results to the Faculty Senate. Chancellor Dr. Mary-Beth Krogh-Jespersen pointed out that it was not actually possible for a campus committee to write a binding new policy regarding the issue; thus, the Faculty Senate and the Committee Chair opted to investigate current best practices.

Other Business:

Students and ESL Problems:

Dr. Dave Byman brought up the issue of foreign-born students with insufficient English skills who were not able to succeed due to their language problems. He would like to discuss the development of an ESL course and would like to hear from the English faculty.

Dr. Gail Keating mentioned that Prof. Rachel Mercuri might be certified to teach ESL.

Prof. Paul Perrone confirmed that Prof. Mercuri taught ESL for the Scranton School District. He emphasized, however, that the ESL issue on campus was a very complex problem, involving such factors as students who weren't prepared when enrolling on campus, and it could not be adequately discussed at the end of this meeting. Therefore, the issue should be tabled until the next Faculty Senate meeting.

Dr. Molly Wertheimer pointed out that some Teaching Development Grant money was available and that faculty members could apply for it.

New University Libraries Website:

Librarian Tierney Lyons mentioned that she and Dr. Fennwald would be happy to work with faculty who had questions about the University Libraries' new website. She also pointed out that both of them would be available to lead research sessions for students upon faculty request.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 1:00 pm.

Next Meeting

The next Faculty Senate Meeting will take place on Tuesday, February 22, at noon in the Sherbine Lounge.

Respectfully submitted,

Éva Tettenborn
Faculty Senate Secretary