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Faculty Senate meeting minutes: 04/12/2006

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TO: FACULTY SENATE
FROM: STUART S. PETERFREUND, SECRETARY, FACULTY SENATE
RE: MINUTES, 2005-06 FACULTY SENATE MEETING, 12 APRIL

Present: (Professors) Alper, Bannister, Bobcean, Bruns, De Ritis, Futrelle, Glod, Hall, Hansberry, Herman, Janikian, Kane, Marshall, Melachrinoudis, McKnight, Peterfreund, Reynolds, Robinson, Sanchez, Strauss, Willey
(Administrators) Abdelal, Falcon, Finkelstein, Greene, Moore, Onan, Sridhar, Soyster, Stellar, Zoloth

Absent: (Professors) Krishnamoorthy, Morrison, Powers-Lee, Ramirez, Reucroft, Ryan, Schaffer, Sherwood, Wiseman

Provost Abdelal convened the meeting at 12:02 PM

I. Approval of the minutes. Minutes of 29 March were approved as amended.

II. SAC report. Professor Glod reported that SAC met two times in regular session. She announced that the final Senate meeting will be held on 26 April from 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM. There will be an organizational meeting of the 2006-07 Faculty Senate at 10:00 AM on the same day. Those Senators who are continuing will need to attend both meetings.

Professor Glod scheduled a meeting next week with Senior Vice President Mucciolo to discuss the Faculty Center and will report the outcome at the next Senate meeting.

As Senate liaison to the University space planning committee, Professor Glod report that the committee met for first time this past week. The next step is for eight or so task groups to begin their work. Each of those has faculty representation. The committee expects to produce a draft of the next ten year plan in September.

III. Questions. Provost Abdelal opened the floor for questions as he had nothing to report.

Professor Marshall pointed out that a Senate resolution passed on 18 April 2005 has been in President Freeland's office for one year and asked if the Senate would consider implementing a timeframe for consideration of resolutions. The resolution in question is 0405-56, Master of Arts in Communication, Media and Cultural Studies (26-0-1). Dr. Onan clarified that a revision had recently been received regarding that particular resolution and that there is no requirement that the President respond within a timeframe or at all.

Professor Alper asked about the process for ensuring consistency in the graduate and undergraduate handbooks in terms of academic policies. Provost Abdelal responded that he'd met with Dean of Admissions, Ronne Turner, and Vice President of Student Affairs, Ed Klotzbier, who indicated that they would welcome working with the Senate to review issues regarding academic policies. The Provost's Office is responsible for the graduate handbook and will review it. The Graduate Council reviews it as well.

Professor Glod noted that SAC is in the midst of appointing an Ad Hoc Senate Committee to Review Handbooks. Suggestions for a chair and committee members are welcome. Professor Herman reminded the Senate that there is an SPCS Handbook as well.

Professor Bruns asked what was being done about the resolutions passed by the Senate concerning the Faculty Handbook, noting that some seem to have disappeared in the President's office.

Provost Abdelal noted the complexity of the Handbook resolutions adding that it is not in the best interest of University or the Senate to try to resolve different perspectives in a defined time span. Some of the resolutions will require significant discussion.

Professor Peterfreund noted for the record that the SAC has been willing to resolve the issues and has met several times with President Freeland, beginning in July 2005, in an attempt to bring closure. He went on to say that he, too, had noticed substantive changes in the Handbook that had not been debated, i.e. the dismissal procedure where the Senate was asked to vote on it without comment as part of a package. He suggests an extensive editorial review.

Professor Glod added that a final version of the Handbook was sent to President Freeland in October 2005, and then subsequently 23 specific resolutions to ascertain how far apart we are. She has been in touch with both the Provost and the President since then. If there are discrepancies, they do not apply to the 23 resolutions which have, in fact, been debated and voted on in the Senate, and on which there hopefully would be forward momentum before the Senate adjourns in two weeks. Professor Peterfreund referred to meetings with President Freeland around seven pages of Bylaws which were not subsequently approved.

Professor Herman agreed with Professor Glod. He reminded the Senate that there was never a more assiduous individual working on this handbook than Professor Ellis and that no changes were made to the Faculty Handbook that were not presented to the Faculty Senate. The 23 policies do contain changes which the Resolutions address. The Handbook Committee expected that they would require analysis and it is not an inordinate amount of time to wait considering other priorities and a truncated academic year. It would be useful to implement those where there is substantial agreement this year.

Provost Abdelal agreed that the new semester calendar has substantially affected the timing of academic procedures.

Dean Soyster returned to the issue of student handbooks and wondered why there are three, suggesting that there be one and that an academic enterprise have oversight.

IV. 2005-06 Special Senate Committee for Academic Policy Report: General Education at Northeastern University, Final Report and Recommendations, April 3, 2006. Professor Herman moved the following resolution and it was seconded.

BE IT RESOLVED That the Faculty Senate approve the General Education model contained in the 2005-06 APC Report: *General Education at Northeastern University: Final Report and Recommendations, April 3, 2006.*

Professor Herman explained that the report contains the background of Academic Policy Committee's (APC) process over the past three years which has culminated in this year's review of reports received from each college as well as from non-academic units and individuals within the University. From these, the APC has attempted to produce a General Education (GenEd) model that travels with the students throughout their 4-5 years at NU beginning in September 2008. This model provides learning communities in the freshman year, consistent emphasis on writing throughout the student's education, and math skills. The Committee tried to tie all elements together for a totality of education with outcomes that can be measured so that students graduate prepared for the world after NU. The APC now asks that the Senate to vote to approve this report as a baseline model for General Education.

Professor Alper pointed out that the report contained very little information about what this will cost the University, suggesting that it is inappropriate for the Senate to vote without this knowledge. He further suggested that it is not the right time for implementation as the accreditation process is about to begin again. And finally, Professor Alper cited page 10 and asked if there had been a decision that every student must participate in experiential learning and, if so, was that the wrong message to send. Would this mean that students could not graduate if they do not choose participate or that we will not accept students who do not intend to participate?

Professor Peterfreund proposed a friendly amendment that the wording of the 2nd bullet on page 12, where the Senate authorizes the SAC, should be edited as page 5 of Faculty Handbook states that the SAC is authorized once when it is elected and then it does the authorizing. It is a potentially harmful statement to be in the public domain.

Professor Herman accepted the friendly amendment after further discussion. The wording in the report will be decided after this meeting.

Professor Peterfreund continued, stating that everyone understands this new requirement cannot be an unfunded mandate and no one will stand still for forcible reallocation. However, the Senate should trust the Provost and the President to make it happen or delay it if it is not financially possible to implement by fall 2008. As to accreditation, the GenEd model is being proposed because Academic Common Experience (ACE) is no longer working.

Professor Futrelle pointed out that it is the responsibility of the University to place requirements on the students and that if applicants do not wish to do experiential education perhaps they should not be at this institution.

Dean Zoloth, an APC member, explained that while money is obviously a concern, the committee decided to design first and come to only general agreement on implementation. The rather broad statement made in the 'constraints' section of the report regarding experiential education goes to the foundation of this University. Students come here for experiential education—primarily for coop—but also for a broad range of experience that we would like to provide to each and every student.

Professor Strauss asked whether the proposal impacts primarily those departments and disciplines outside of CAS as it seems to be mostly in place within CAS.

Professor Herman responded that it builds a coherent GenEd requirement throughout Northeastern University. The impact will be greater in some areas than in others.

Professor Strauss then suggested that, in terms of faculty, the impact will be largely felt at the social sciences and humanities where faculty will be responsible for teaching these required courses.

Professor Herman explained that accreditation requirements for most professional schools mandate that a substantial portion of courses be taken in arts & sciences so this proposal does not substantially alter what is already being done. It may, in fact, encourage the professional schools to take up part of the responsibility themselves in respect to learning communities at freshman levels or capstone activities. The APC has tried to integrate learning by encouraging professional schools and CAS to work together.

Professor Loeffelholz addressed the impact specifically upon the English Department by stating that it is not the intention of that department to offer writing intensive courses in every department at the University. Rather, it is the Department's intention to support first-year writing and the AWD program and to offer writing intensive courses for majors when required to do so. Resources to offer much more are not in place although there are seats available in core writing classes that students from other Colleges could attend. However, if the academic investment plan provides several faculty members in the next few years, another 80 seats in core courses may be provided. She pointed out that voting for this proposal means voting to figure out how to teach writing courses to majors across the University.

Dean Soyster noted that, from an Engineering point of view, there ought to be four communication courses but he is not generally supportive of four writing courses. Surveys of graduates ten years out show that they wish they had a broader curriculum. He asked if the 15 comparative universities require four intensive writing courses.

Professor Marshall asked whether there had been any study of the choices made by students going from introductory courses into upper levels: what path are students most likely to follow? His own experience suggests the choices are somewhat random, particularly with transfer students who are trying to fulfill the CAS core curriculum requirement. They cannot necessarily take a first-year course but must take an upper-level course in that area. He expressed the opinion that a GenEd requirement is a further restriction.

Professor Herman pointed out the footnote on page seven and explained that the Committee had considered this and wanted to create depth beyond the major as well as breadth.

Professor Marshall expressed concern that students might have to take courses in which they have no interest. There are a number of courses offered that produce large numbers but are being taken for the wrong reason. He proposed teaching the courses within the majors rather than for students who don't respect other disciplines.

Professor Peterfreund emphasized an earlier point by noting that professional major's students already take courses in the social sciences and humanities. The GenEd proposal will not increase or decrease that participation but will structure it. When Engineering students take social science or humanities electives, there will be a rationale for it. And as to Dean Soyster's concerns, there is nothing to preclude focusing on presentational skills in an advanced writing course. Engineering should construct the course it wants from the ground up to include intensive writing and presentational skills.

The discussion turned to implementation and Professor Herman agreed with Professor Futrelle's point that this GenEd proposal should not be regarded as where we'll be in 3-5 years and that implementation will be ongoing and sometimes experimental. There needs to be an ongoing mechanism similar to the curriculum committee but at the University-wide level, that reviews proposed changes in light of overall objectives. Discussion continued around issues of cost and intensive writing courses. Dean Stellar added that resources should not be the main issue. Rather, an intellectually focused, robust and challenging core curriculum is the primary goal, particularly for a University in the top 100.

Professor Strauss stressed that it is the responsibility of each faculty member to insist that students write in full sentences and this requires a different way of thinking among NU faculty. Professor Herman added that this program does not require adding any new upper class courses but that present courses be designated writing intensive.

Professor Alper suggested that the first year learning community section could create a nightmare for the Registrar to which Provost Abdelal responded that his office is working with the Registrar to have freshman year community learning implemented into the Registrar's system this fall. The Registrar's Office is working to make it happen. Evidence shows that when students study in cohorts during the first year their learning is enhanced by as much as 6%.

Dean Greene, an APC member, addressed a prior issue by confirming that there are benchmarks to indicate that other universities are implementing four intensive writing courses. The APC spent a lot of time with the Math and English Departments discussing implications and implementation. He pointed out that every College was supportive of the proposal and provided information. The big issues are that accreditation is upon us, ACE is frayed, and NU's student body is changing. There are many things here that we are already doing and we are now codifying those elements into a cohesive program. Core programs are not ceilings but floors. The structure is open and we cannot calculate what will happen but this proposal will allow it go back into the Colleges & Departments to figure out how to move forward.

Dean Zoloth added that, from the professional school perspective, many accreditation agencies are coming back to say that the best education is founded on a strong liberal arts base. The proposal recognizes that professionals of the future will require a skill set that includes writing, a capstone experience with experiential education, and critical thinking.

Dean Finkelstein added that the College of Computer and Information Science had serious discussions on this and remains concerned about implementation but this document is about as good as it gets at this point in time.

Professor McKnight indicated his support of this proposal. He asked if the title—General Education—is used at other institutions. Professor Herman confirmed that other universities by and large use 'General Education' Requirement rather than 'Core Curriculum'.

Professor Marshall indicated that the issues of writing and mathematical skills should be addressed at high school level. We should merely be asking incoming students to exhibit those skills in otherwise focused courses. Is there an alternative tradition that opts for students figuring out their own curricula instead of fulfilling general education requirements? Vice Provost Hill responded that Brown University does not have a formal core curriculum, but that Northeastern will not be introducing that for several years.

Motion to close discussion was seconded.

VOTE to close discussion: PASSED, 21-4-1

VOTE to approve APC Resolution #1: PASSED 19-5-2.

Adjourned at 1:26 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Stuart S. Peterfreund, Secretary
Faculty Senate