

FACULTY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE MINUTES – 2/16/12

The Faculty Affairs Committee met at 2 pm on February 16, 2012 in 2070 FAB.

The following members were present: L. Alexander, P. Beavers, M. Cooney, N. Datta, J. Fry-McComish, J. Potoff, M. Sengstock. Others: M. Winters. Absent with Notice: L. Beale, E. Golebiowska, K. Skillin, J. Sondheimer

The meeting was called to order by the Chair at 2 pm. The minutes from the January 20, 2012, meeting were approved as circulated.

REVIEW OF COMMITTEE REPORT: “ENHANCING STUDENT ACADEMIC SUCCESS”:

The bulk of the meeting was devoted to a discussion of the report by the Student Success Committee. This Committee had been charged with the task of seeking mechanisms for improving bachelor’s level graduation rates and enhancing undergraduate student success. The Policy Committee had charged several Academic Senate committees, including the Faculty Affairs Committee, with the task of reviewing the committee report and forwarding any comments to the Policy Committee.

In general, committee members thought it was a wise idea to seek new options to improve student success. They believed that referring students with severe academic limitations to community colleges was appropriate. They also thought it wise to establish effective bridge programs for those deemed appropriate for conditional admission to Wayne State University, but who had a need for such assistance. They also considered the addition of more advisers to be appropriate. Listed below are other ideas they believed should also be considered.

Advising:

The planned programs seem to depend mainly on general advising. This may be appropriate in some instances, but general advising may miss some problems, particularly issues specific to the student’s intended major. General advisers may not be aware of the specific dimensions of every individual major, some of which may require specific courses, such as advanced mathematics or statistics. Furthermore, some members suggested that the development of an early bond with a faculty member in the major often leads to better retention. Hence it was suggested that assisting new students in selecting a major at an early point and developing a connection to faculty in that field would be advantageous.

It was pointed out that this also suggests a need to test students at an early point and guide them into appropriate fields. It is inappropriate to allow students to waste time and money investing in a program for which they show little promise or need much remediation. For example, students whose math skills are considerably below college level are not likely to improve their skills in time to complete an engineering program within six years. It is counter-productive, both for the students and the University, to allow them to move in that direction. It was also noted that there is a need to consider both skill level and the student’s motivation.

Problems with the University Mission:

There was considerable disagreement among committee members concerning the apparent conflict between the need for rapid progression through the baccalaureate program, as opposed to the University's traditional commitment to disadvantaged students in the Detroit area. Those who stress the retention/graduation issue believe we should simply admit that an ACT score equal to 21 or above is essential to success in college; admission of students below that level is essentially dishonest. In contrast, others were disappointed that the University was abrogating its long-term commitment to disadvantaged students, many of whom lack adequate preparation at the high school level and/or have family responsibilities and the need to work. The six year limit disadvantages not only poorly prepared students but those who are forced to attend school part time. Several members were reluctant to see Wayne State abandon this mission. Concern was also expressed for seeking to improve Detroit public schools.

Structure of Programs:

Members noted a need to review general education requirements in reference to student abilities and the necessary requirements for certain academic programs. Why continue unnecessary mathematics requirements for programs where they are not needed? It was suggested that revising these requirements in terms of the demands of specific programs might be helpful.

Members also expressed concern about the increasing number of programs requiring greater than 128 credit hours to achieve a Bachelor's degree. (Highly technical or artistically related programs were examples.) In some, there is no possibility of finishing in 4 years, sometimes not even in 5 or 6. It seems counterproductive to continue to approve such programs, which are included in the University's evaluation status, when they only detract from perceptions of the University's overall effectiveness. There is only so much that can be taught in four years. Continued expansion of programs may be inappropriate.

The committee was aware that the MACRAO Agreement has never been accepted by Wayne State University. However, some concern was expressed regarding the University's decision to require a 2.5 GPA for Associate degrees. Why is there a reluctance to accept Associate's degrees with 2.0 GPA?

Financial Issues:

Concern was expressed regarding financial assistance for bridge courses and other additional courses students may need. For students who are performing well, numerous options were listed. However, it is not clear what WSU will do for students whose performance is adequate but not outstanding. There is a continued need for student funding after the bridge period. It is not fair to use their funding in bridge programs unless funding will be available for completion of the bachelor's degree.

Faculty Issues:

Questions were raised about who would be assigned to teach bridge courses, particularly in the summer term. Use of part time faculty may present problems. Full time faculty would be preferable, but this presents an added expense. Would these courses be taught within load? How would faculty be evaluated? Would equal "credit" toward promotion and tenure be awarded to faculty who teach these remedial courses? We should not allow a two tier faculty, with those

teaching bridge courses in a lower category. Furthermore, adequate quality control in these courses would be essential.

Evaluation Of Remedial Programs:

Finally, members believed it was essential that there be interim assessments and formative evaluations throughout the remedial programs, in order to determine whether the conditional admission programs are working. Determination of program effectiveness should not wait until the end point of the entire 6 year period. Interim assessments could include gathering interim statistics and conducting student interviews throughout the program.

STUDENT PUBLICATION ISSUE:

The committee also briefly discussed a draft of the "Statement on Student Publication," developed by the Committee Chair. A few suggestions were made. The Chair indicated she would circulate a corrected draft and further comments will be sought.

The meeting adjourned at 3:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Mary C. Sengstock, Chair