

Report of the Student Affairs Committee

September 2007 to May 2008

The Student Affairs Committee had three major tasks assigned by the Policy Committee:

- The Honors College
- Electronic SET
- Grading Policy

In addition, the Committee addressed the issue of retention and the WSU smoking policy although no action was taken as yet on either of these issues.

Honors College

The Student Affairs Committee was asked to respond quickly to the proposal for the Honors College; therefore, prior to the first meeting of the committee, all members were asked to explore the web sites of those colleges and universities that were listed in the material sent from the Policy Committee to explore similarities and differences in the Honors programs at those institutions. Different groups of Committee members explored a set of institutions and group members self-allocated institutions within their groups. This provided us with initial information that could be used to consider the WSU Honors College proposal. That proposal was discussed at the September 2007 meeting, and an outline for the report was developed. The draft was then distributed to members via the Committee list-serv and revised the same way. The final report was submitted on October 16, 2007.

The final report considers four areas of concern in the proposal for the Honors College- curriculum, resources/space, resources/cost, and timing. Curriculum concerns included the amount of time honors students would be separated from the general student population, admissions requirements, and lack of clarity and detail in the description of the curriculum in the proposal as well as a lack of elements noted in honors programs in other colleges and universities. Problems with space on this campus were also noted. The proposal included a new building to house the Honors College, when this campus needs additional classroom space. Both physical space and cost were of concern here. Financial cost included the potential cost of faculty to teach small honors seminars and the cost of administrative positions as well as funds for the new physical space. Related issues included allocation of credit hours for honors courses and the potential impact on the general population of students of re-allocation of faculty to honors seminars. Given these issues and the lack of detail in the proposal, the SAC felt that the proposal needed additional work and a lengthy discussion of potential impact.

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Electronic Student Evaluation of Teaching

This topic was addressed at several SAC meetings with multiple actions taken. After an initial discussion of the topic, the Committee decided that we wanted information about the SET administration in both paper and electronic format and that we wanted some information from students. To access additional information about SET administration, we invited Tom Wilhelm to the December meeting of the SAC and discussed the SET with him. Prior to the meeting he provided us with some information, which was used to begin our discussion at the December meeting. He also sent additional information in January exploring issues related to the cost and feasibility of administering the SET online.

To gather information from students, several members of the Committee distributed a survey to students asking their opinion of the use of an electronic SET. The survey was not intended to be representative of the entire WSU community, but it did suggest how the students felt about some things. There were 154 students involved in the survey, 76 undergraduates and 78 graduates. The survey indicated that these students had strong negative responses to two items which involved withholding grades or placing holds on students who do not complete the SET for each of their courses. Two other items that received a slightly positive rating (above 3 on a scale of 1-4) indicated that students want access to the ratings. It was interesting to note that students indicated that they were likely to complete the Set (2.5) but felt more strongly that other students would not do so (2.8). These results were shared at the January meeting. The committee worked on the final report on the electronic SET at the February meeting and continued that work via the SAC list serv during March. The final report was submitted on April 10, 2008.

As indicated in the final report, an initial difficulty with the use of an electronic SET is the low response rate. The SAC investigated the use of rewards and penalties, but found that rewards were not successful in raising response. We also considered such things as reminders to students (not effective because students do not check their e-mail or ignore messages from WSU) and penalties raised serious questions about who would track and administer these penalties. Assigning penalties such as placing a hold on registration also would have a delayed impact as most students have already registered for the next semester by the time they SET is completed. Additionally, our survey indicated that students had a negative response to our items about penalties.

Information provided by Tom Wilhelm also raised questions about administration of the electronic SET. We do not currently have the infrastructure to support using an electronic SET for all classes; therefore we would need to develop that infrastructure including expanding our server space. Also the cost of moving the SET to C&IT, which would be necessary for use in all classes, is at this point undetermined. The cost of an electronic SET is also unclear and would include an initial cost from \$40K-\$60K and yearly maintenance fees of \$20K-\$60K for an outside provider and \$60K-\$70K for software purchase with maintenance fees of \$40K-\$50K per year. Additional difficulties related to administration of the electronic SET involve notification to students. The current plan is to notify students via e-mail to complete the SET for a course and to provide the link to do so in the message. However, many students ignore messages from WSU; so many would not read these notices.

A final issue presented in the final report on this topic related to lack of response from students involves the use of the SET to evaluate faculty performance. Regardless of whether one views the SET as effective data that truly represents faculty performance, it is clear that faculty performance should not be based on responses from a small percentage of students enrolled in a class. Therefore, unless the response rate can be improved to at least 60%, these data should not be used for faculty evaluations.

The recommendation of the SAC was that an electronic SET should be piloted with one or more small programs that include on campus as well as on line courses and that data be collected from students, faculty and administration in the selected department/programs regarding the use of the electronic SET. This would allow us to evaluate the efficacy of the electronic SET but would also provide the opportunity to explore various options such as the use of rewards or educating students about the impact of SET scores on faculty.

Grading Policy

The issue of the grading policy was considered across several committee meetings. At the December meeting we discussed the information provided to the Senate on the change of the X grade and decided to request additional information from Linda Falkiewicz. After an initial contact, Karen Feathers met with Linda Falkiewicz and Robert Berman on February 12, 2008. SAC committee members were informed of the meeting and one additional member, Cheryl Dove, attended. As a result of that meeting addition data

were sent to the Committee and were discussed at the February meeting. Other data requested will take more time to accrue. The final report on the grading policy was worked on via the SAC list serv during March and submitted on April 10, 2008.

Examination of the data provided on the elimination of the X grade indicates that re-enrollment was lower for students who received a grade of F. There appears to have been little impact on undergraduate students and a slight impact on graduate students. However, there is a problem with looking at the following semester to study the impact as students are already enrolled for the following semester at the time that the grade is assigned; therefore the impact of the F may not be visible until the second semester after the grade is assigned.

The SAC also requested additional data that would allow exploration of the issue in more depth by, for example, considering differences in the number of F grades that a student earned (one F grade versus 3 grades of F) or the number of credit hours completed or residential students versus non-residential. The recommendation was that the SAC continue to investigate this issue and delay any final determination until the additional data are available.

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Retention

The issue of retention was addressed at the final meeting of the SAC. As shown in Committee minutes several issues were raised, but no action was taken. This is an ongoing topic that needs additional consideration next year. Major concerns were:

- Students with low GPA or low ACT scores are admitted but not provided sufficient support.
- Support that is offered seems more focused on traditional full time students with little available for non-traditional students (for example advisors are not available in the evening, University offices are closed).
- Non-traditional students can find it difficult to complete in a timely manner because courses are not offered at night and/or pre-requisites lengthen the time frame in which classes can be taken.
- Completion time is extended by the way content material is allocated across courses in some departments causing students to take more courses than are necessary in order to complete licensure requirements.

Electronic Audit

The electronic audit was also discussed and several issues were raised in regard to this topic.

- The date to be used for the degree audit is problematic. Currently two different years are used, one for Gen. Ed. and one for the major. It is currently not clear what date would be used.
- A set date assumes that requirements are static, but programs tied to licensure can have requirements change without advance notice due to changes in licensing requirements.
- The audit currently would require a set of advising procedures for students who drop out for a year. There is no differentiation in those procedures depending on the reason for dropping out (for example pregnancy vs low grades). Questions were raised about who would do this advising, what happens to policies already in place in various colleges and departments, and the number of students who would need this advising.
- An additional question is who would do the Plan of Work? Given that changes in some programs could occur without advance notice, how these sorts of changes would be entered into an electronic audit system is also not clear.
- Some concern was expressed that having an electronic audit might cause fewer students to meet with

advisors as one current problem is that students do not meet with advisors as frequently as they should.

Consensus among the SAC was that the electronic audit, if handled appropriately, had the potential to be a useful advising tool. However, to maximize efficacy, control of the audit, including such things as degree requirements and the POW should be in the hands of the departments instead of a central office such as the Registrar. It was recognized that this will require cooperation across the campus at the departmental level.

Other Activities

In addition to these major tasks of the Committee, the Chair met with the WSU Academic Integrity Committee and provided assistance with the development of the Integrity Brochure and the consideration of plagiarism software. These matters were shared with the SAC and comments brought back to the Academic Integrity Committee. Also, to understand retention issues and bring them back to the Committee, the Chair attended several meetings of the College of Education Retention Committee and talked with members of the University Retention Committee. Finally the Chair had multiple conversations with Harley Tse, Chair of the Research Committee about the survey done by that committee.

Submitted July 3, 2008

Karen M. Feathers, Chair.