

WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY
ACADEMIC SENATE

PROCEEDINGS OF THE POLICY COMMITTEE

June 6, 2022

Present: L. Beale; P. Beavers; J. Fitzgibbon; N. Rossi; B. Roth; N. Simon; S. Schrag

Absent with Notice: D. Aubert; M. Kornbluh; J. Lewis; R. Villarosa

Guest: B. Baltes, Sr. Assoc. Provost Faculty Affairs

I. Proceedings of the May 23 Policy Committee Meeting

The proceedings were approved as revised.

II. Report from the Senate President

Flexible Work Arrangement: Policy members discussed the flexible work arrangement email announcement from Carolyn Hafner (Assoc. VP and Chief Human Resources Officer), which seemed both vague and corporatist. Instead of being reassuring, Beale suggested that the announcement was anxiety-inducing. Beavers agreed, saying it had caused anxiety among Union members. Simon said some academic staff members have begun looking for new jobs. Beale will follow-up with the provost regarding HR's intentions.

Enrollment: As of last week, the numbers were still down. Fitzgibbon thought part of the problem is with the universal application process—huge numbers are applying to the university, but they are also applying to 20 other universities. She wondered if there is information on deposits. Simon said admissions are up, but deposits are down. There are records of who makes deposits and who comes to orientation. Beale thought the admissions office decision, without consultation, not to do the same number of orientations that were done last year was problematic. Simon indicated two more orientations were added, but they will be held much later than they were last year. Feeder high schools have been holding admitted student events, but only two or three people show up for the WSU swag: she interpreted this as a lack of interest. Beale suggested sending more faculty to these schools to talk to students. Simon added that her children received congratulatory phone calls from faculty when they were admitted to other institutions. Roth explained how he has participated in orientations only to find that students could not understand why a faculty member was even there. It's a different student population, so he did not believe it would repay the effort and could be alienating to faculty. Fitzgibbon argued that the university does not have a CRM system capable of engaging students. Her school sent a postcard to admitted applicants, and she questioned if anyone these days would even pay attention to a postcard. It would be better to send personalized text messages. Beale agreed that personalizing messaging is important, so it is hard to understand why admissions cannot figure a way to do that. Rossi has heard from neighbors and colleagues whose children have applied without hearing back: she argued the admission's office needs to act—unless we are more personalized, we will be left in the dust. Beavers raised a further concern about the impact on the budget book—if we have this kind of chaos and declines in admissions, the budget book cannot be finalized without budget cuts. Beale noted that even if the admissions shortfall improved to a 7% reduction, it will mean unexpected budget cuts coming to schools and colleges. Beavers stressed bringing this issue up in the final Budget Committee meeting. Rossi agreed and recommended faculty and staff be engaged to call, text, or email prospective students. It behooves us to respond to applications if we don't want our budgets cut. Beale indicated the minutes would attempt to summarize this

discussion to focus on Policy's view that this is a real problem and it is essential that the university-wide admissions offices focus on personalized, directed, and targeted outreach to students so we have some chance at lessening the decrease in enrollment.

New Administrative Positions: There are two new administrative positions being created: Associate Dean of the Honors College and a new position created under Boris Baltes to take on some of his responsibilities. Beale will share the position announcements when received.

III. Communications and Required Actions

A. Teaching Factors Proposal

Beale reviewed the Promotion and Tenure Procedures and Factors for Teaching Faculty document noting concerns about the use of so many "hedging" qualifiers (e.g., extensive use of "should") to describe the factors. There are also a number of places where the language is so vague that it does not make sense. Baltes noted that much of the problem stems from the fact that this document is based on the current tenure-track/tenured faculty factors that have not been reviewed in quite some time. There is also an expectation that the schools/colleges and departments will be add more specificity. This has more detail than our other university factors do, partly because there was a desire to provide some guidance for departments—particularly those trying to understand what it means to go from associate to full for these new positions. He also pointed out that it was a large committee with many voices and a goal to put together a statement of teaching factors during the academic year. The committee, though, understood that the factors would not be able to be applied until next summer.

Beale suggested that the standards are stated differently in different places within the documents and in ways that make it hard to understand what the standard is. She suggested more work needs to be done on the documents. Baltes agreed that any inconsistencies would need to be addressed, but suggested further discussion about specifics wait until Danielle Aubert and Ricardo Villarosa can join us, since they are more aware of the union side of the issues. Not to dismiss Beale's concerns, Baltes said there have not been any liability issues with our current factors, from which these were adopted, though they could come up. Often the units put in more specifics, so the committee wavered on the amount of detail to include. Beale worried that the lack of clarity would be very confusing particularly because these positions are new: people will talk to each other and uncertainties will spread more easily. Given the problems with the current tenure/tenure-track factors, it seems unreasonable to try to follow that closely.

Baltes reviewed some of the changes for which Policy's feedback is important, including the question of sources of reference letters. Fitzgibbon noted that the candidates can submit up to two names, but the document says that the administrators/committees are not required to use those names. Baltes responded that under current policy the P&T committee generates a list of names, and it has never been required to use the candidate's suggested names. Beale thought it was concerning that only one letter was required from outside the candidate's department: that makes it highly likely that the references will be slanted in favor of the candidates and also creates a real problem for small departments or fields, in that it would be difficult to maintain confidentiality about reference letters or avoid conflicts of interests (e.g., friends of the candidates writing letters on their behalf). Baltes noted that the teaching faculty on the committee were concerned that teaching faculty would have trouble getting external evaluators who would be willing to write letters. We do have some problems getting external letters for clinical faculty. On the other hand, AAUP and Provosts generally recommend having more external letters. Roth commented that getting letters outside the department but internal to WSU on teaching would be very different from getting external letters on evaluation of scholarship—hard to picture an engineer evaluating a literature

class. Baltes clarified that for external teaching evaluations, like scholarship evaluations, one would expect someone in the same field from outside the university.

Beale referred to the section stating “excellence consists in contributions to knowledge and creativity that reach at least the same levels of magnitude, quantity, and importance as is expected of teaching faculty at other national research universities.” She noted the difficulty in assessing what that means: it is not really a standard but purports to rely on matching data that is not actually available. Roth added that at research universities teaching often does not count for much--it merely has to be better than zero.

Rossi commented that this document likely will cause major confusion for the School of Medicine. The factors as written in the SOM for clinical educators look very similar. They are not tenure track, and the primary job of clinician educators is to teach. From her understanding, Rossi said these would be university guidelines and any school or college can have stricter guidelines. The clinician educator faculty may resent the considerable difference in standards between SOM and other schools/colleges: clinical educators must have 10 different external names, whereas the teaching faculty under this document could have exclusively WSU names (with only one being outside their home department). If guidelines in one school are measurably more difficult than in another, faculty will feel like they are being required to do more. At the least, the document needs to make clear to whom it applies. Beale agreed that a defined term for covered faculty was necessary, and suggested that perhaps consideration should be given to whether there should be the same standard for the new “professors of teaching” and “clinical educators”. Baltes agreed it should be clear.

Beale said she would try to edit the document to add clarifications along the lines discussed and share it with Policy members for their feedback so that it could be the basis for discussion at a later Policy meeting. Baltes recommended Policy also invite co-chair Christine Knapp to the meeting when it is discussed.

B. Policy Interviews with General Counsel Finalist Candidates

Beale asked Policy members for their availability to attend the upcoming interviews with the General Counsel finalist candidates. Because several members would not be available unless there could be a Zoom link, Beale said she would look into making that possible. She emphasized the importance of attending these interviews in person if possible.

C. Fall Break Document

The ad hoc fall break committee concluded there are two options: start earlier to accommodate a two-day (MT) break or do not add an earlier break. Starting earlier creates problems for bench sciences, orientations, and students in terms of summer jobs and money earned, as well as affecting faculty who will need to prepare syllabi and other materials earlier. Before Policy arrives at a definitive view, Beale suggested inviting the Student Senate president and up to three representatives to discuss their view on the break. Simon shared Michigan’s fall schedule and said they start a day before us and don’t have every class meet the same number of times. Beale pointed out the difficulty for us in regards to accreditation purposes as well as a workload differences in terms of meeting one or two fewer classes than someone else because it creates animosity amongst faculty. Rossi thought it was an issue of DEI: we are trying to bring in students that are diverse, underrepresented, and disadvantaged yet diminishing their ability to get the education they are entitled to. In her experience with accreditation bodies, elite programs can get away with one less class but it becomes a problem for institutions like WSU. It is important to adhere to the required standards. Fitzgibbon questioned why the day off could not be a Friday because it has the fewest number of classes, but Roth questioned whether anyone would appreciate getting a Friday off when most already have it off. Policy members agreed it is the concept of getting a day off that makes a

difference. Beale noted that Michigan appears to have a condensed schedule of 13 weeks without taking all of the individual holidays that Wayne does. By taking a M-T earlier and the W-R-F for Thanksgiving, Michigan provides a full week of breaks. Wayne has a 14-week schedule, and takes Election Day as a campus holiday. Beale said Michigan's number of full weeks make it quite different from our calendar, and it is unlikely that we could move to their calendar. Faculty would object to shortening the semester to 13 weeks of classes, and ultimately students would suffer from more compression of coursework. Fitzgibbon said pushing up the start date of contracts would also likely be an issue. In her department, faculty members' children start school the day after Labor Day, making child care arrangements already an issue that would be exacerbated by earlier starts.

Beale asked Policy members what their students thought about the recent mental health days. Fitzgibbon said she canvassed a group of students: The seniors didn't care because it wouldn't change how they did things, and the sophomores liked having a day off. Beale felt that individual faculty generally should and do satisfy the mental health needs of struggling students: if students let the faculty member know, most faculty are willing to work out a solution. Roth said he doesn't see the upside of having a break. He finds it hard to believe that students would be eager to start the semester earlier in order to have a couple days off in the middle of the semester. What they really like is less school. Beale agreed that students want the same schedule minus two days during the semester. That is apparently impossible to do and maintain the idea of consistent credit hours for courses that meet on different days.

Beale will send an email to the Student Senate president inviting them and up to three people from the Student Senate to an upcoming Policy meeting to talk about this issue. Rossi suggested asking the Student Senate what they envision the schedule would look like and have them work out a draft schedule for arranging the fall break, understanding that we would have to start earlier to accommodate it and considering students' need to work in the summer, the need for orientations, etc.

As an aside, Fitzgibbon raised the concern that the Student Senate has been going directly to Rob Thompson for changes they want on various issues when they are supposed to go through Policy and said she would forward Beale an email example. Beale said she will talk to the provost about the earlier agreement that the Student Senate would be asked to bring educational policy proposals to the Academic Senate before approaching specific administrators.

D. Data Breach Policy

Policy members discussed the draft policy and the document responding to initial comments made by a few members of Policy regarding concerns. Beale noted that the original document created a universal duty to report that was very unclear. She had questioned how breaches are addressed: what is the sanction; who applies the sanction; how is it applied. She described the response as remaining rather vague. Roth asked if these sanctions are in place by reference. Beale said they did whittle down the obligation to report and add a provision on violations at the end, but the language remained quite problematic. They essentially allow for total discretion on sanctions (including no imposition at all). Beale suggested this was bad policy: it essentially says you can decide to punish someone that does something awful or not, depending on how well you like the person. Beale said the Union can negotiate specific provisions, if they wish, but Policy can talk about things that comply with the Union contract and can build in suggestions from an academic governance standpoint. The document complies with the collective bargaining agreement, but it is not necessarily written well and can be improved. At this point, the policy seems overbroad and would cause a reporting obligation for a wide array of behavior. Their response improved that in some ways, but perhaps not enough. Beavers described it as a circle trying to limit things but it's not clear what is inside the circle and it appears to be a very broad circle. He also pointed out inconsistency when they tried to define people affected by the data breach and thought the language should be changed.

Beale recommended Policy take the updated version provided and suggest edits. Beale, Beavers, and Roth will act as a sub-committee to come up with some edits they think could be workable to satisfy the law.

IV. Reports from Liaisons

Policy members discussed the DFW information. There were 20-46% DFWs in almost all STEM courses. Roth believed part of the problem is the allergy to gatekeeping at any level, so we either let people fail early on or find a way to pass them through to a later point where they fail at that stage. Simon said there was a course (not on the DFWs list) where 100 students took the class and 83 received a D or below. One would expect there would be some DFWs in a university, Beale said, but you worry if there are multiple courses that typically have 46% or more that fail. That suggests that the courses aren't targeted appropriately for the students who take them. Simon pointed out that the math department has three courses (1800, 1070, 2010) that require a specific grade on the final to get better than a D in the course, regardless of the students' prior grades in the class. Students with As on their instructors' exams have done poorly on the course coordinator's final. The department eliminated that requirement last fall but restored it for winter. The worry is that the course coordinator's final does not represent what was actually covered in the individual courses. Beale suggested bringing the chair and academic vice chair of the department in to talk about how DFWs stats are working in math courses generally and how the current policies are working out. (Note that Policy had discussed the way math courses seemed to act as a hurdle to degree completion several years ago when we dealt with the math competency issue, before Interim Provost Winters unilaterally eliminated the math competency requirement for most students for a significant period of time.) Roth wondered what the impact of the new admissions criteria is on this and thought it would be interesting to see whether anyone is being rejected under the test-free approach. Beale said she will contact Darin Ellis for this data.