

WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY
ACADEMIC SENATE

PROCEEDINGS OF THE POLICY COMMITTEE
August 29, 2022

Present: D. Aubert; L. Beale; J. Fitzgibbon; M. Kornbluh; J. Lewis; N. Rossi; B. Roth; S. Schrag; N. Simon; R. Villarosa

Guests: Carly Cirilli (Sr. Dir. Institutional Research & Data Analytics), Darin Ellis (AVP Academic Affairs)

I. Curriculum and Instruction Committee Report on DFW Hurdles

Lewis thanked Policy for making time on the agenda to follow-up on the Curriculum and Instruction Committee (CIC) discussion of high DFW rates in some courses. The CIC was especially concerned about first-year students with DFWs because it presents a frequently insurmountable obstacle. The data reviewed was incomplete but nonetheless helpful: Professor Robert Harr from CLAS provided an extensive presentation and AVP Ellis from the Provost's Office provided a helpful dashboard of courses with DFWs. Lewis shared a statement from the CIC meeting minutes, noting that this is a multidimensional issue and areas needing improvement include advising, placement, instruction, preparing students, and providing better support. It is a serious problem that is not located in just one area of the university, so it deserves serious attention.

Kornbluh noted that, as a dean, he had told his chairs that freshman classes must be taught so that students can succeed or else the curriculum should be changed. Our deans may not have been paying sufficient attention to this issue, so it is one that he intends to draw to their attention. In many cases these are multi-section classes where students succeed in some of the sections but there is one in which they typically do not. When he has seen this pattern, he has refused to renew department chairs.

Lewis suggested that some department chairs still appear to view certain classes as intended to weed people out of the discipline. Kornbluh noted that students that are accepted to Wayne State must have a program in which they can succeed. No class should be designed to weed out students. This issue will be emphasized in dean's council and a dashboard used to verify student success. It may be that some instructors simply should not teach freshmen courses. It will be important to review multiple years of data, given the pandemic as an intervening variable. Economics, however, has clearly been a long-term problem that may require a review of the curriculum to determine appropriate entry courses.

Beale wondered whether the primary cause is faculty teaching introductory classes (especially in disciplines like Economics) at too high a level—i.e., expecting students to have certain foundational knowledge before entering the classes—or faculty using pedagogical methods that are turning students off. Kornbluh responded that it is likely both, pointing out that the Wayne culture considers that the lower level the course, the more insulting it is for an instructor to teach it. Part of what is needed is an understanding that we want our best teachers to teach across the curriculum for all students: the first-year students are important.

Beale explained that the problem is not new. In the past, Policy looked at what was happening in math and discovered there was a confusing curriculum that created several hurdles for students. The ultimate solution (which included a significant period when students had no math competency requirement) was introducing a quantitative experience (QE) course that could fulfill the Gen Ed requirement. Kornbluh noted that quantitative reasoning courses that help students understand fractions are good, but the other part of the problem is ensuring that STEM students have the preparatory paradigm that they need. He hopes to build a cohort of faculty that care about these students being successful.

Kornbluh noted also that our tuition model of charging on a credit-hour basis has hindered us in dealing with the need for more attention for these more advanced STEM issues: other universities can use discussion sections to turn three-credit classes into four or even five credits without creating additional costs for students. Kornbluh has proposed block tuition to address this: then we could follow the American Mathematical Association suggestion that all pre-calculus and calculus classes have discussion sections. Past data shows that STEM classes were more successful when they were taught at five credits rather than three credits.

Rossi agreed that having smaller groups where students work through problems together is important, especially in STEM disciplines. On the other hand, making a poor grade in a five-credit course can cause a student's GPA to plummet. Beale added that she recalled a part of the Gen Ed discussion several years ago that included pressure from the Gen Ed Oversight Committee and administration to discourage existing four or five credit STEM classes that faculty wanted to retain specifically because of the importance of those separate discussion sessions. Kornbluh responded that he had only heard about the tuition costs. AVP Ellis added that the number of credits is also a problem: many STEM degrees require more than 120 credits. Lewis thought the STEM model of more credit hours and more lab hours was an obstacle for some students that could be solved having more smaller sections paralleling the QE course limit of 25 students per class.

Rossi asked Lewis to elaborate on the last two bullet points of the confidential document stating that instructors do not have formal training and value is not placed on teaching. Lewis responded that some thought Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) have insufficient education in pedagogy—they merely teach the way they were taught. Even those who have had some teaching experience are not equipped to handle the challenges students face—especially for teaching online and having students work together. Instructors are the first line but may not know how to connect with students. Kornbluh noted that better connections with each field's professional society is an important way to address that, rather than attempting to 'train' for teaching at the university. Some professional societies, such as the American Medical Association, run summer workshops on STEM teaching: the university should be sending GTAs to these transformative development opportunities. Those who attend such workshops are able to change their departments. This is best done through deans and department chairs. Lewis noted that there was significant impact when the math department sent seven first-year math instructors to the Mathematical Sciences Research Institute at UC Berkeley last spring.

Kornbluh noted that while DFW grades are problematic in many places across the curriculum, DFWs for first-year students are the main problem. The Provost's Office is developing a different first-year experience: grouping students together by interest through first-year interest groups (FIGs). Ellis explained he was charged to find a feasible schedule. They have worked mainly with academic advisors to determine what a typical first semester

schedule was like. That allowed creation of a set of schedules that worked for different groups of students over 24 programs. Advisors have reached out to faculty teaching cohorted students to invite them to participate in FIGs. In Business, for example, activities include first-year career counseling and coffee with the dean. He noted that 30% (418) of Business' incoming first-year students are in approximately 23 FIGs. His first outreach of this academic year has been to invite faculty to create their own FIGs: Assoc. Prof. Jeff Grynaviski (CLAS) and Sociology Chair David Merolla (CLAS) may create a social justice FIG for the fall. The idea is to use this as a recruiting and on-boarding tool for first-year students. Many of our students do not register for classes at orientation so this may help them register earlier with purpose rather than just placeholder courses. A number of faculty are interested in this idea.

Rossi questioned what was happening in the arts and literature: it seems like most of these FIGs are in STEM or quantitative disciplines. Ellis responded that there is at least one in Art and Art History and one in Music and possibly also in Communication. Kornbluh noted the failure rate is not as high in those courses. Lewis pointed out the high failure rate in English 1020, a required introductory writing classes that had been offered online, and Ellis confirmed that course will only be in person.

Villarosa asked about how FIGs are interfacing with the Learning Communities. Ellis said that is not yet coordinated. The Learning Communities program director (Darryl Gardner) is using some of those resources to support peer mentors to help the advisors and the faculty coordinate the FIG cohorts. Kornbluh added that he intends to move to coherent first-year programs by bringing all of these efforts together under Ellis. There is also a separate program run by residential life (FIRE), so we put most freshmen living on campus in one dorm for that program.

Fitzgibbon asked if there was any consideration for transfer students. Lewis said CIC was focused on first year students, since transfer usually finish their Gen Ed requirements elsewhere. Kornbluh noted that our transfers include those with associate degrees who have completed their Gen Ed requirements and have a higher graduation success rate than our freshmen. It's the students who do just a short time at a community college and then transfer here that encounter more problems. Fitzgibbon said she gets transfer students in an upper-level course she teaches who often have severe problems—especially those from Wayne County Community College (WCCC). Their skills are poor, but it is difficult to talk to them about seeking help with some of the resources available. Lewis suggested we may need to work more closely with our community college partners. Kornbluh confirmed we work with Schoolcraft, Henry Ford, Macomb and WCCC, but turnover of administrators at WCCC has been a challenge. Simon noted Michael Quattro (Dir. Edu. Outreach & Trans. Initiative) may come to Student Affairs Committee and CIC might also want to invite him to speak.

Roth asked whether there is a transfer-student version of FIGs. Ellis noted Quattro and the Transfer Students Success Center is creating a parallel group—Transfer Warriors Interest Groups (TWIGs). Because transfer students come with such a heterogeneous course mix, it is a harder to identify a common schedule, so they will work more with majors. Since many transfer students enter as business majors, the Business School will be able to set these up quickly. He welcomed suggestions of other majors. Kornbluh pointed out there are more incoming transfer students in Business than incoming first-year students: that is dramatically different from CLAS or Engineering.

II. Data on Test-Optional/Test-Informed Students

Ellis and Cirilli were invited to share data on test-optional and test-informed students. They provided slides and spreadsheets with numbers pointing out the differences between the test-informed and the test-optional data. It was not clear how the COVID pandemic impacted the data since there is only one solid year of data to review. Cirilli explained there are two views of the data: i) how students perform with their DFWs and ii) what the student population looks like for test-informed and test-optional from the admissions standpoint. There was not much difference in terms of total applications from the two groups, but yields were slightly higher for test-optional. The DFW rate (counted for any student with a single DRW) disparities for our Black students do suggest an equity issue. There was a bigger difference in gender between test-optional and test-informed. It is difficult to determine how severe these issues are because of the limited data at this point in time.

Roth noted that the bulk of the non-accepted applications were incomplete so that the actual rejection rate is much lower. Cirilli confirmed that the data (DFWs, GPAs) for the two groups is against overall applications. Fitzgibbon wondered what the most common reason is for rejections. Cirilli explained that the data doesn't specify exact rejections and she would have to go back to the group to get more specifics.

Beale pointed out the test-informed applicants' average GPA of 3.54 from high school and test-optional applicants' average GPA of 3.21 from high school is a significant difference, which is part of the reason Policy thought it would be useful to have this information by various groups (male, female, Black, Latinx, White). Lewis considered most of this data as not providing much difference between test-optional and test-informed but rather indicated, generally speaking, that our Black students need more support.

Rossi commented on the race, ethnicity and gender cumulative GPA at Wayne ranging from 2.5 and 3.3, also indicating a significant difference. The DFW rate is provided, but it would also be helpful to have the DF rate and the W rate indicated separately: knowing whether it is a DR or a drop matters. Beale explained that one of the reasons Policy has been requesting this cohort data with GPAs and DFW rates was to understand whether the demand begun couple of years ago that students take 15 credits in their first semester was reasonable or not. It may well be that some students should be encouraged by their advisers to take 12 credits a semester and then take 6 in the summer to give them a better chance to engage in the FIGS and succeed in their foundational Gen Ed courses. To determine that it may be necessary to have D/F data separate from W data.

Cirilli noted other data that would be informative. How many of these test-optional versus test-informed students are reaching out for help? How many are going in for advising appointments? How many are taking advantage of tutoring? She will try to get such information for test-informed and test-optional. We already know from information available now, for example, more women tend to go to advisors and tutors compared to men—especially Black men.

Kornbluh commented that it would be difficult to return to requiring tests for political and recruitment/budgetary reasons. The competitive environment will remain test-optional, so that means our energy should be on determining how to help the students we accept to succeed. Beale agreed but noted that we should be aware how the test-optional admissions affect what we need to do to ensure students succeed. This data should reveal whether there

are students who are failing in the first semester because they are taking too many credits or dropping courses in the second semester because there are some courses taught “to weed them out.” The data may suggest that either the way test-optional admit decisions are made or the support provided to students must change.

Simon suggested writing a second admit letter telling students about the various support resources available, so that they know about those resources before they run into trouble. It is hard when a high school student is top of the class but comes here and struggles. Having never had to ask for help, the student can find it very hard to do so once at the university or can feel that the need for help simply means success is beyond reach.

Kornbluh stated his approach to required support services relies on Stanford Emeritus Professor Claude Steele’s work on stereotype threat and the implications of bias. We want to build our classes so that everyone can succeed rather than singling out people who need extra help. That is the logic behind adding a discussion section to the math class rather than requiring supplemental instruction. We will support them all and build peer support networks. Rossi commented that students who come from smaller schools, whether they're private or charter, may have had more personalized attention at that place. Then they come here and are basically on their own. It’s a big culture difference to come from a small high school—or even a large high school, but a high school where the teachers are after you all the time—to a college where the freedom can be scary. The culture of the school is a big transition for many of our students.

Cirilli clarified the action items with Policy members: the rejection definition and common reasons for rejection from enrollment management; high school GPAs; withdrawal numbers separate from DF numbers; adding gender to race and ethnicity data. She will gather this information and share the results with Policy within the next week.

I. Report from the Chair

Student Success. Kornbluh believed student success is an important issue. Coming to Wayne from the outside, he sensed that improvement in student retention and graduation grew from two things: (i) building advertising and (ii) moving towards four-year schedules to completion. That means reducing the number of required credits and making sure needed courses are offered. That has not been fully realized, but it is in process. The Provost's Office has not paid enough attention to who is teaching which classes, so that is a high priority this year. The Gen Ed changes removed a math hurdle. We have different first-year programs, tutoring and advisory support and are now working to determine how to put these pieces together and make them work. Classes are being structured so students can succeed. Peer tutoring in classes helps everyone, not only the students who particularly need it, but also the students that tutor. Beale suggested that peer tutoring does not happen as organically as it used to—i.e., it seems to require more faculty and administrative leadership to instill that collaborative culture among students. Kornbluh stated that some of the departments have done well, particularly Physics. Economics, on the other hand, is creating problems for the Business School because of the way the macro and micro courses are taught: Business may have to take over those requirements for its students.

Enrollment: We will need to discuss enrollments in more detail when the final census numbers are available, but clearly Wayne must be more aggressive. Not only did Michigan and Michigan State do well this year, but Western, Central and Grand Valley also gained

significantly. Through the pandemic, we held our own, but we have not recovered this year. Nearly all the declines are in CLAS and CFPCA. We increased admissions significantly but failed to get a higher yield. As a result, we are barely within the parameters we set for this year because master's enrollments surprisingly increased by 30%. That was not due to Provost Office or school/college dean efforts but rather sheer luck. We had projected better undergraduate enrollment and declining master's enrollment.

Fitzgibbon noted the concern that there are faculty who view recruitment as an administrative job and not a faculty member's job. Rossi added that faculty at those other schools are more involved with recruitment. Kornbluh suggested that our faculty will help if we provide the right leadership. He pushed hard in April and May to focus on yield but did not provide any guidance to the colleges and the faculty on how to do that, so clearly, we need to do more. It is unclear how impactful finances were on the result: a well-respected consultant will arrive soon to review our financial aid program. For example, a student who dropped from 15 credits to 12 credits the week before school started received a poorly written letter stating the loss of the planned financial aid that was based on taking 15 credits. Hopefully a block tuition method will prevent that result.

When asked how easy it is for a student to contact financial aid, Kornbluh said it is almost impossible. Rossi said that is the main problem—if they cannot contact financial aid, they will look elsewhere.

III. Approval of the Policy Committee Proceedings of August 15 and August 22

The proceedings were approved as amended.

IV. Communications and Required Actions

A. Academic Senate September 14 Plenary Session Update

Policy reviewed a draft of the agenda. President Wilson has been informed of the 20-minute time block. Approval of the Senate proceedings will be moved to follow the Policy Committee election: the election may take longer this year since at least eight people are running. Beale was not able to confirm the attendance of a Board of Governors member and will move the additional time to Laurie Clabo so there is sufficient time for a Q&A session.

B. Academic Senate Standing Committee Chairs for 2022-23

Policy members determined the chairs of the CIC, SAC, RES, BUD and ELE. Beale will contact several Senators to determine their interest in chairing the FSST, FAC and DEI.

C. Board of Governors Committee Representatives for 2022-23

Policy determined faculty and academic staff representatives for the BOG committees:

Academic Affairs Committee
Jennifer Lewis (Representative)
Brad Roth (Alternate)

Linda Beale (Representative)
Jane Fitzgibbon (Alternate)

Budget and Finance Committee

Personnel Committee
Noreen Rossi (Representative)

Ricardo Villarosa (Alternate)

Naida Simon (Representative)

Brad Roth (Alternate)

Student Affairs Committee

D. Charges for Senate Standing Committees

Policy members discussed potential charges for the Senate standing committees.

Approved as revised at the Policy Committee meeting of September 12, 2022