WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

ACADEMIC SENATE

PROCEEDINGS OF THE POLICY COMMITTEE

October 11, 2021

Present: D. Aubert; L. Beale; P. Beavers; K. Dormer; M. Kornbluh; J. Lewis; N. Rossi;

B. Roth; N. Simon; R. Villarosa; A. Wisniewski

1. Report from the Senate President.
2. An upcoming agenda item is selection by the Provost and the Policy Committee of 4 faculty to serve on the Centers and Institutes Advisory Committee-I (CIAC-1). There was a slip in the process last year, so these will need to be staggered terms.
3. Faculty continue to report problems and confusion in the schools and colleges as the result of the centralization of IT support in the Division of Computing and information Technology. Having a central backup system has raised concerns about privacy and confidentiality, while the rationale for computer migration and the options available for retaining personal backup of files have not been well explained.
4. An article in the Chronicle of Higher Education reported that the board of a university in Georgia plans a statute that would allow them to fire faculty without providing adequate due process.
5. Faculty concerns about modality of classes continue, with reports coming to the Senate President as well as Provost Kornbluh and AAUP-AFT President Danielle Aubert.
6. For some time, Policy Committee has raised concerns about the function of campus police oversight. When the State of Michigan adopted a statute in the early 1990s calling for the establishment of campus police oversight committee with specific makeup and responsibilities, the Board of Governors decided that the pre-existing Campus Police Advisory Council would fill that role, even though that group is run by Michael Wright, includes the police chief as an ex officio member, has a number of other appointed members, and serves a passive role hearing update reports with no actual oversight responsibilities or procedures. The Michigan statute requires that the oversight committee have a specific elected membership, purpose and function. Beale had hoped that the Social Justice Action Committee policing subcommittee process would lead to a clear recommendation for an independent campus police oversight committee or a subcommittee of the current campus police advisory committee that would be elected and given responsibilities to fulfill the requirements of the state statute. While it did include a recommendation about complying with the Michigan statute, there has been no further discussion. Provost Kornbluh expressed interest in the topic, and Beale indicated she would provide documents on the Michigan statute and the Senate representatives’ recommendations for change.
7. The State Hall Working Group, which was formed to provide a faculty perspective on the remodeling of State Hall, developed a survey to send to Senate members. Several years ago when the fourth floor of the building was redone, a list of 30 faculty who use State Hall was given to Facilities Planning and Management to consult about the technology needed, but many felt that faculty views were not fully taken into consideration in the design. Kornbluh noted that members of a consulting firm and members of a design firm had multiple meetings with faculty. Beale responded that while faculty were consulted about the redesign of the fourth floor, it appeared somewhat perfunctory and most of the input was apparently disregarded. renée hoogland, who chairs the working group, thinks consultation was not broad enough. FAC, FSST and Policy should also be included in requests for comments. Kornbluh will send the current documents back to the working group for comments and suggestions for the entire building.
8. The current course registration system allows students to put their name on the wait list for every section of a course. Faculty had commented that the registration system did not provide sufficient information about hybrid courses, including whether the remote part is synchronous or asynchronous, and Kornbluh requested that Naida Simon look into the matter. Kornbluh had the Registrar increase the number of students who could be waitlisted for any course. Simon indicated that it is possible to see the total number of students on the wait list and the number of unique names on the various lists for the same course. Schedulers in departments generally determine if a hybrid course is synchronous or asynchronous, but schedulers need more information on registration options and that same information should be shared more broadly with faculty.
9. A Senate member who was assigned to a standing committee and to the ad hoc Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee asked that he be removed from the DEI committee. Policy Committee agreed with his request.
10. Commencement. Policy Committee members volunteered for times they could be available to speak on behalf of the Senate to graduates at the various December commencement ceremonies. Beale will provide a final list later.
11. Final Report from the First Day Pilot Committee. When the program was introduced, it was not clear how it would work so Policy Committee asked that a pilot program be carried out to assess it. Paul Beavers, Coordinator for Assessment, WSU Library System, and Tim Michael, Associate Vice President for Student Auxiliary Services, co-chaired the First Day Pilot Committee. Beavers reported on the First Day Committee’s work to Policy Committee. The committee found that a fairly large number of faculty already were utilizing electronic editions of textbooks and courseware prior to Jodi Young, manager of the Barnes & Noble Bookstore, and Tim Michael proposing that Wayne State adopt the first day program. Beavers said that if a large number of books are purchased this way they might be able to offer a discount to students. At registration students can opt out of the program and purchase the product themselves. If it’s a textbook-only class students may be able to purchase the text cheaper elsewhere. If the instructor uses courseware, however, the student needs to purchase the textbook with the courseware because the assignments, homework, extra credit, and tests come through the courseware. This is an advantage for the publishers, but Beavers added that the offer of courseware with open education resource textbooks provides what some faculty saw as the missing element for OER. Kornbluh noted that the university has to participate in the first day program in order to be able to supply books to students due to the current supply-chain problems. The bookstore was able to service our classes this fall primarily because of the first day program.

The committee agreed the program was working well enough to move forward with it. Nonetheless, the committee was concerned about the issue of student data privacy that was raised in the pilot group’s memo. Separate from the first day program, the committee recommended that a joint faculty-administration task force be formed to look at how much information about our students leaks out of our systems. Whether we have first day or individual choice of textbooks and courseware, the campus is at the mercy of the vendors who have a quasi-faculty role that provides access to information about our students in our system. We need to be aware of this in order to follow what is happening and protect against any problems. Kornbluh thinks C&IT would be happy to work with faculty on the issue. Beale proposed forming an ad hoc committee to deal with the concerns about privacy and the members agreed on nominees for the ad hoc committee.

Kornbluh also noted that Wayne State, unlike some universities, does not restrict faculty from profiting from the sale of their own texts for classes they teach.

1. Student Code of Conduct. Brad Roth explained the articles in the Student Code of Conduct statute that should be changed to clarify the actions that should be taken when an instructor accuses a student of academic misconduct. Policy Committee decided to forward the report to the Curriculum and Instruction, Faculty Affairs, and Student Affairs Committees for consideration with a request that they submit their reports by the end of February.
2. Agenda for November Plenary Session. Policy Committee reviewed the draft agenda for the November 3 plenary session. The draft was approved, pending agreement by the two invited for presentations. Of concern is also the completion of the report on the future of higher education post pandemic. Beale asked the chairs to submit their committees’ reports prior to the Thanksgiving break so it could be discussed at the December plenary session.
3. Capital Outlay Proposal: Every year by October 31, the university submits a request to the state legislature for funding for capital programs that includes a broad discussion of priorities and issues. The administration is in the process of developing the proposal (of which we received a very early version without any of the priority items included). Traditionally, the Budget Committee, the Facilities, Support Services and Technology Committee, and the Policy Committee have seen the proposal prior to its being submitted to the state. Beale asked Kornbluh to help ensure the practice continues so the Senate can comment on it before its submission.
4. Research Issues and Grants: Rossi mentioned concerns expressed by faculty in the Medical School. Extramural funding is flat if not declining. There is unrest among the faculty and some are planning to leave for other institutions, some of which are in close proximity to Wayne State so moves do not require home relocations. The declining number of faculty puts a burden on those who remain. One key appointment is in obstetrics and gynecology because the perinatal research branch is up for renewal. Faculty are very concerned about their ability to function. Furthermore, Rossi noted that there is a lot of negative chatter on social media that is detrimental to the Medical School. The number of students who have applied for admission has decreased. The potential medical students do not feel they will get the support here that they will get at other institutions. This makes it difficult to recruit individuals of the quality that we want. Rossi added that the combination of many faculty openings, declining student performance, and the decline in the number of applications for the school likely would not bode well for the LCME accreditation in 2023.

Kornbluh responded that the Medical School has been authorized to hire a significant number of faculty. The searches from last year were carried over to this year, and a large number of additional positions were authorized this year. Several searches for department chairs are being conducted. It may be helpful that the university just made its presentation to Standard and Poor’s, noting specifically that the last report from the LCME was completely clean.

Rossi noted another concern around the treatment of grant proposals. Grant proposals are being returned to faculty who are being told to increase the amount of the grant that will cover their salary.

Kornbluh said that academic medicine in the U.S. is different from the other disciplines where the university pays a 9-month salary. No other universities pay more than 6-months’ salary to medical school faculty. The norm is for medical faculty to have a large part of their salary on grants, so the dean of medicine is pushing faculty to put a larger percentage of their salary on their grant applications. It is true that less money goes into research in that case, because that research is less subsidized by the university. If that is not done, the rest of the university is forced to subsidize the medical school. Kornbluh also acknowledged that this change will cause morale issues because researchers have in the past used the grant money they saved from their salaries for supplies or to hire a research assistant. Beale added that several years ago Rebecca Cooke (as chief budget officer in the SOM) said that the total subsidy to the medical school was in the $30 - $50 million range because so little salary was put on grants.

Rossi responded that the worry is that faculty may feel forced to put more time on a grant than actually required by the nature of the research, compromising the integrity of the grant application process. The university is asking that researchers charge 30% of their salary on a grant. The Office for Research and Sponsored Programs has returned proposals to researchers who have put only 20% of their salaries on a grant. If faculty are required to have a certain percentage of their overall time on grants, faculty with a single grant may be putting an unjustifiable amount of their salary on the single grant. That is, many faculty simply cannot put the required percentage of their salary on a grant because they do not spend that much time on that research. It thus seems somewhat draconian to Rossi to require a 30% salary figure if the research only requires 20% of the faculty member’s time. Kornbluh suggested that the issue might be one for the faculty council in the School of Medicine to discuss.

1. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee: Kelly Dormer co-chairs the Senate’s Ad Hoc DEI Committee. She reported that the committee decided to work on three issues: hiring, bias training, and student success initiatives and equity issues. The DEI Committee members discussed the role of this Senate committee in connection with the other such committees in the university. Ricardo Villarosa added that the members spend time discussing the Senate’s jurisdiction in these matters. Beale noted that the Senate DEI committee is not restricted to dealing with recommendations from the university’s DEI Council, but the work of this committee in respect of those DEI Council recommendations is similar to the work the Senate does regarding the General Education and any reform recommendations. That is, any proposals from the DEI Council that involve educational policy should be reviewed by the Senate DEI Committee, then come to the Policy Committee and the Senate plenary for consideration and sending to the Provost, President and BOG, as the general education reform program recommendations did.

Beale also cautioned restraint in use of the word “training.” Faculty prefer to think about “education” surrounding a topic, and the use of “workshops/seminars” over “training.” Training implies a fixed view of all specifics, in which someone with expertise ‘trains’ novices who lack such expertise. Faculty are reluctant to think about training as something that applies to the broad concepts involved in racism and ethnicity biases, constitutional rights, and due process in a state like Michigan that has an anti-affirmative action constitutional provision in place that affects what an institution can and cannot do. Roth agreed, saying that these are contestable matters subject to considerable nuance and discussion, whereas training does not lend itself to dealing with contestable matters. These topics can be discussed, but people cannot be “trained” to think a certain way about a subject that is controversial. Beale added that societal issues such as race and class overlap. Some members of search committees who had to participate in implicit bias “training” to serve on search committees or participate in the Social Justice Action Committees found the simplistic training and materials used problematic. Roth also suggested that people who focus on training tend to use a very limited set of resources, such as the book “White Fragility” by Robin DiAngelo. If someone is insulted by training that seeks to impose a view lacking in any nuance, they are likely to feel negative toward the topic addressed—the opposite of the desired response of opening minds to the problems that exist around bias.

Jennifer Lewis suggested implicit bias training Is valuable as a first step in making people aware of the issues. She defended the DiAngelo book as validated as “helping people see some things that they would not see otherwise.” Beale disagreed, noting that a simplistic approach made up of over-broad generalizations is more likely to turn people off than to help them understand.

Beavers said that whatever system is used, search committees do need to consider diversity and bias. Members agreed, but several suggested that appropriate sessions that are intended to increase awareness and understanding about DEI issues would be better set up as workshops, conversations, or seminars rather than “training.”

*Approved as drafted at the October 25, 2021 Policy Committee meeting*