

Minutes of the Meeting of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences The College of William and Mary  
March 3, 1998 Millington Hall 150

The meeting was called to order at 3:34 p.m., Dean P. Geoffrey Feiss presiding. With the faculty's unanimous consent Dean Feiss amended the agenda in order to ensure time for the reports of the Educational Policy Committee and of Dean Gross.

I. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of February 3, 1998 were corrected, deleting the word "female" from section V., #2. A survey of the learning climate for all graduate students was conducted. The minutes were approved as corrected.

II. Reports of Administrative Officers

Provost Cell reported that we are waiting for budgetary news from Richmond to become firm. Things look hopeful for both the Swem Library renovation and faculty salary increases. In regard to future funding, the state is moving toward funding guidelines for higher education. Discussion pointed out that our method of calculating the sixtieth percentile for faculty salaries combined with our December date for pay increases creates a time lag of a year and a half between our salary increases and the "peer salaries" to which ours are linked.

IV. Nominations and Elections

Steve Knudson presented the following slate of nominees, which was approved without further nominations from the floor: Chair of Faculty Affairs Committee

X David Dessler

Academic Status Committee

Area II

X John Gilmour (Govt)

Constance Pilkington (Psyc)

Area III

Bruce Grant (Bio)

X Robert Pike (Chem)

Educational Policy Committee

Area I

X Maryse Fauvel (MLL)

Daniel Gutwein (Mus)

James Kornwolf (A&AH)

X Richard Palmer (T&S)

Area III

X Eric Bradley (Bio)

Hugo Woerdeman (Math)

International Studies Committee

Area I

X Talbot Taylor (Eng)

Terry Kleeman (Rel)

Area II

X Edward Pratt (Hist)

Michael Faia (Soc)

Area III

Norman Fashing (Bio)

X Morton Eckhause (Phys)

Candidates whose names are marked "X" were elected.

#### V. Educational Policy Committee

Larry Ventis presented the committee's recommendation that we establish a new concentration in African Studies in the International Studies Program. Merits of the proposed concentration include strong faculty in the field, strong interest in the field, a commitment on the part of the requisite programs to ensure faculty coverage of courses, a sufficient range of courses, ten years' experience of a minor in African Studies, modest funding needs, and the potential for enriching existing programs without excessive overlap with those programs.

The question was raised as to whether other institutions offering such a concentration offer indigenous languages. Answer: The large universities include African languages in their curriculum. Smaller universities offering this concentration do not offer these languages. The European languages and Arabic, which are widely spoken and are official languages in many African countries, are sufficient to sustain undergraduate studies. The establishment of a concentration in African Studies was approved by unanimous voice vote.

Professor Ventis led discussion of a proposal for a change in continuance requirements. EPC will not bring this proposal for a vote until the April meeting; comments and email are welcome in the interim. The proposal derives from the work of an ad hoc committee responding to the concerns of, among others, the Academic Status Committee. Currently, some students who stand no chance of graduating are allowed to continue; meanwhile,

many students are not alerted to problems with their progress soon enough for effective intervention to take place. The proposed revisions consist of two parts:

1. Midsemester reporting. Faculty would be asked to report on students in academic difficulty at the midterm. Faculty would report electronically on first year students and on those already on probation; students identified as being in difficulty would then be referred to the Dean of Students' office for advising.
2. New continuance standards. William and Mary's standards are among the lowest in Virginia, a fact that seems to jeopardize rather than protect students, since we often intervene too late to be of real assistance to students in trouble. The new standards are based on the assumption that at least 12 credits per semester at a 2.0 QPA constitutes normal progress. The new standards require that students earn 12 credits per semester beginning with the first semester of matriculation, but do not require the 2.0 QPA until the end of the fourth semester. A student failing to maintain either the requisite QPA or credit load is placed on academic probation, with one semester to meet the minimum standards.

The proposal calls for the midsemester reporting procedure to be implemented in the fall of 1998 and the new continuance standards in the fall of 1999.

Discussion clarified that advisors will be notified of students in difficulty through the advisor on-line system. Concerns were raised as to which students are most likely to be put on probation, and whether probation might adversely affect these students, creating an early experience of failure. It was stressed that the goal of both the reporting system and the revised standards is to protect those students who are at highest risk by providing an opportunity for early intervention. Concern was expressed that the midsemester reporting system identifies certain students to the professor as "poor students," a stigma that can result in their being graded down. Why not report all grades at midterm? Additionally, the wisdom of imposing the 12 credit standard from the first semester was questioned. No meaningful projections regarding the results of the new standards can be made, since the midsemester reporting system is expected to change patterns of student performance. EPC will report back on the effect of the midsemester reporting system before the implementation of the new performance standards. EPC was urged to use the Faculty Digest to clarify precisely which problems this proposal solves.

## VI. Old Business

Dean Gross reviewed the summary (previously distributed to the faculty) of findings on gender issues from the Learning Climate survey of graduate students. The summary included interpretation of the survey data and possible responses. A gender climate problem clearly exists. Possible solutions include meeting with graduate students to discuss the problem; holding discussions with all faculty, department-by-department; holding gender climate workshops; appointing a university-wide ombudsperson or ombudspersons from each program; gathering statistics more actively; appointing a task

force to follow up on the issue. Above all, we all must take responsibility for the climate, including calling one another on inappropriate comments.

Wide-ranging discussion raised the following points: The data make it clear that many students did not understand the policies and/or did not trust the system. Students need to understand the procedures and be encouraged to use them. Confusion exists as to what constitutes a "formal" complaint. "Informal" complaints are written and signed, and so may be described by students as "formal." Meanwhile, the outcome of complaints is confidential, and so data on the resolution of such complaints is not available. Consideration of gender climate ought to include undergraduate as well as graduate students. Dean Fowler suggested that EPC form a subcommittee to look into the question. Concerns were raised regarding ambiguities in the consensual amorous relations policy: one person's "consent" may be another person's "harassment." Regarding options for using ombudspersons, a university-wide ombudsperson might be perceived as safer than one from within a department, and a person with formal training might be more effective than someone with minimal training.

Provost Cell offered a correction to her comment that she had not seen the report prior to the February, 1998 faculty meeting; she had seen the report on the entire learning climate survey in October, 1997. Affirmative Action does keep statistics; to her knowledge only one formal complaint has been filed during the past five years. That complaint was badly handled, an experience that adversely affects perceptions of the system. The provost does know of some informal complaints to Affirmative Action and to deans. The consensual amorous relations policy is a difficult issue, as there is a fine line between a reasonable policy and a policy that infringes on rights of personal association. The problem is our problem, not one that any individual can solve but one that all of us must take on within our smaller communities.

It was pointed out that we have carefully worked-out sexual harassment policies, and we need to know them. The difference between the legal category of sexual harassment and the existence of gender climate problems was noted, but also the fact that "hostile environment" comes under the rubric of harassment. Dean Feiss stressed that this is a serious problem, a problem that affects the ability of our students to learn, and a problem that cannot be put off onto the administration or onto students who perceive themselves to be at risk.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:22 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Julie Galambush  
Assistant Professor of Religion