

Minutes of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences
The College of William and Mary
May 4, 1999, Millington 150

The meeting was called to order at 3:40 p.m. by David J. Lutzer (presiding in the absence of Dean Geoffrey Feiss)

I. Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the April 6, 1999 were approved.

II. Reports of the Administrative Officers

Provost Cell reported that the Board of Visitors had approved the College's draft non-academic leave policy, and that it will be included in an updated version of the Faculty Handbook.

She also noted that the Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Higher Education would meet at the College on May 10, and that students were among those scheduled to give a presentation.

David Lutzer reported that the Strategic Plan Update Committee had postponed its public session until the fall semester. He also congratulated Professor Barbara Watkinson on her appointment as the new Dean of Undergraduate Studies. Finally, he proposed modifying the agenda for the meeting to make it possible to hold elections; the motion was approved by unanimous consent.

III. Nominations and Elections

Gene Tracy presented the following slates of nominees [X denotes elected].

APPOINTMENTS:

One year replacements

Faculty Assembly (Area II)

Larry Ventis (Psychology)

Don Baxter (Government)

Board of Faculty Compensation

Bob Welsh (Physics)

ELECTIONS:

Faculty Hearing (vote for one)

X Roy Champion (Physics)

Jim Axtell (History)

Board of Faculty Compensation (vote for two)

X Don Baxter (Government)

Gary DeFotis (Chemistry)

X Alan Fuchs (Philosophy)

Ken Kambis (Kinesiology)

Chair of Educational Policy

X Bill Cooke (Physics)

IV. Faculty Affairs Committee

David Dessler introduced FAC's proposal for a new undergraduate grade review procedure, amending Section II/A/9 of the Faculty Manual. Current policy allows a student who feels that he or she has received an unfair grade to submit a written statement requesting that a chair set up a three-person committee to review the matter and make a recommendation, which the instructor is free to accept or reject. Dessler stated FAC's view that this procedure is fundamentally flawed in allowing the instructor, in effect "the accused," to serve as judge and jury in a grade review.

The proposal includes what he called three minor changes in existing policy: a) a time limit for resolving cases (normally by the end of the semester after the semester in which the grade under challenge was issued); b) a department/program chair must respond to a student's initial statement within three weeks; and c) a stipulation that the committee have access to any relevant materials, and that both the student and the instructor have the right to meet with the committee.

Dessler noted that FAC's proposal also included two more significant changes. One is to guard against frivolous challenges: the draft stipulates that a student whose written statement has been dismissed by a chair may not automatically bring about creation of a three-person review panel, but must first seek a decision by the Dean of the Faculty to do so. The second change is to ensure that the faculty member whose grade is being challenged not be the final arbiter: the draft version stipulates that the three-person review committee may recommend changing the grade and, if the faculty member rejects that suggestion, may then appeal to the Dean, who would in turn have two options (only)-either to accept or reject the committee recommendation.

Dessler also showed an (unscientific) survey of policies at other schools: none of those contacted left the final decision up to the faculty member whose grade was being challenged.

Objections centered on the following issues: First, a committee is not qualified to decide the merits of a particular course grade. Second, the Dean is also not in such a position. Third, there are too few indications that the current system is not working such to justify changing it. Fourth, the committee and/or chair may not be impartial. Fifth, manifestly unfair grading practices by a faculty member can be better handled through other policies or procedures.

Dessler and others advocating the proposal responded that the current policy already involves a committee and that bringing in the Dean acts as a check on lack of partiality; they added that few cases actually require a judgement as to the substance/quality of graded material, but rather concern procedure (clarity of deadlines, adherence to syllabus, etc.). Moreover, it was pointed out that other key policies, such as on tenure and promotion, already involve colleagues and Dean without assuming that the latter have expertise in the teaching/research area of the faculty member under review. Several participants argued that if the College is to have a grade review procedure, the faculty member whose grade is being questioned can not be judge and jury.

The proposal passed on a voice vote.

Subsequently, Dessler turned the meeting over to Dean Gross, for a discussion of Faculty Manual sections on graduate study. First, discussion centered on some final, minor changes: section 11 on Grade Review, modified in consultation with FAC, making it consistent with the undergraduate policy just approved; section 4/B/iv, revised to stipulate that a medical withdrawal be made only upon a recommendation from the Medical Review Committee; and section 4/B/x, revised to stipulate that the date for turning in grades be set by the Registrar in consultation with the Graduate Dean. Straw votes on all three items passed.

Second, a vote on the entire Graduate Section of the Faculty Manual then passed.

V. Committee on Graduate Studies

Dean Gross turned over the meeting to Professor Gina Hoatson, who introduced the Report of the Task Force on Learning Climate for Arts and Sciences Graduate Students. She outlined the approach of the Task Force, defined the terms, distinguishing learning climate issues from discrimination and harassment. She summarized the Report's findings: that the College lags behind other comparable institutions in proactive procedures to enhance the learning climate, in terms of making information available; lacks counseling mechanisms; and lacks coordination (among offices that deal with discrimination, sexual assault, multicultural affairs).

Hoatson summarized the Report's recommendations that the College broaden its stated concern with the effects of discrimination and harassment to include all forms (sexual, racial, ethnic, religious, and sexual orientation); move beyond concern with avoiding legal liability to more proactive policies; expand coordination among directors of offices that deal with issues of Affirmative Action, Counseling, Sexual Assault and Multicultural Affairs; create an ombuds office to deal with issues to provide recourse to students who have concerns but do not wish to press a formal complaint; implement an educational program to make all graduate faculty and students aware of how detrimental any form of discrimination or harassment can be to the learning climate; periodically conduct a uniform survey on climate issues in the graduate program (taking into account faculty criticisms of the earlier survey); include climate issues in the assessment of graduate and undergraduate programs; conduct ongoing training programs for faculty and students to

enhance awareness of and response to climate concerns; create a standing committee to oversee and coordinate all efforts to promote tolerance and diversity.

Some faculty raised concern about what types of behavior would be deemed detrimental to the learning climate, what would be included in education, and how the procedures distinguish between positive encouragement of new norms and items subject to formal sanctions. Hoatson responded that climate concerns extend beyond the more extreme cases of actual sexual harassment to encompass behaviors that create discomfort, and noted that many of the latter could and should be raised with the office of the ombuds-person, which is being set up over the summer. Work of a Task Force on climate issues in the undergraduate program has been suspended pending the appointment of a new Director of Multicultural Affairs this summer.

VI. Educational Policy Committee

Professor Bill Cooke referred back to concerns raised by faculty at the April meeting, that the role of summer school was not adequately accounted for in the newly-revised Continuance Standards. To clarify this issue, EPC moved a statement affirming that William and Mary summer school courses count toward a student's total quality point average, but stipulating that a student on probation would not be removed from that status after a summer school session unless he or she had maintained a 2.0 grade point average while passing at least 12 credits in the (regular) semester immediately preceding the summer session, and that poor performance in summer school will not compel on a student on probation to withdraw from the College. The motion passed.

Cooke then briefly summarized the results of the EPC's GER 3 assessments, noting that most courses designated for this GER met the criteria, that those taught by tenure eligible faculty did somewhat better in this regard, and that the GER program/criteria also needed some clarification (the latter to be done through creation of a GER handbook). The report is on the website.

Finally, Cooke summarized EPC's assessment of the Freshmen seminars, which indicates that the latter are doing well in meeting the goals of encouraging independent thinking, critical thinking, class discussion, and intensive writing. The assessment reports are on the website.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:15.

Respectfully submitted,

Clay Clemens

Associate Professor of Government

Secretary's Note: For those faculty disconcerted by the thought of an entire summer without another Arts and Sciences meeting, minutes for all of this year's sessions are

available on the web; they can also be downloaded and printed for beach reading. Should the desire for something reminiscent of the faculty's lively discussion still prove overwhelming during the three month break, local access cable channels continuously broadcast Williamsburg city council and James City County board of supervisors meetings, a reasonable substitute.