

Minutes of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences

The College of William and Mary

December 5, 2000

Millington 150

The meeting was called to order at 3:35 p.m. by Dean Geoffrey Feiss.

I. Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the October 3, 2000 meeting were approved with a correction (noting that the Parents Fund has contributed 20% of the Undergraduate Dean's Co-Curricular Fund)

II. Report of the Nominations and Elections Committee

Educational Policy Committee, Spring 2001

Gary DeFotis, Chemistry

Faculty Assembly and Faculty Affairs Committee, 2001-2003

Area II

X David Dessler

Edward Pratt

Faculty Affairs Committee, 2001-2004

Area I

Carla Buck, Modern Languages

X Elizabeth Barnes, English

III. Report of the Faculty Affairs Committee

Professor Will Hausman briefly noted FAC's work with regard to the schedule for committee reports to the Arts and Sciences meetings, and appointments to federal compliance committees such as Human Subjects (in the latter connection, a meeting with the Provost is planned).

Professor Hausman went into depth on FAC's initial reaction to the first year of experience with a single common question asked on all student course evaluations. He reported that the mean course rating across all departments was very similar (4.2, with an effective range of 4.0-4.4). These data for now mix undergraduate and graduate student responses. FAC's conclusion is that this common question thus appears to be a useful standard for assessing merit within departments, among other things, but not for rewarding/penalizing departments for overall teaching quality.

These results raise the question of whether to add more identically-worded questions to the evaluations (a possibility first mentioned during the faculty's original discussion of this proposal in April 1999). Professor Hausman said that FAC sees little to gain by doing this.

One faculty member suggested that FAC consider proposing insertion of an additional question asking students to report how many times per semester a class was called off.

At the suggestion of a member of the faculty, Professor Hausman agreed that FAC would propose removing outdated references to the Area-Sequence requirement on student evaluations.

Professor Hausman also reported FAC's concern about low faculty compliance with mid-semester grade reporting: participation being only at about 50-70% signaled a problem with the system, he said, and the Committee would ask Undergraduate Dean Watkinson to look at the issue.

Faculty members stressed that they find the mid-semester grade reporting a useful advising resource, suggested that the apparently low levels of participation may reflect the fact that labs or one person courses like independent study are included in our total course number (inflating the denominator), and proposing that the reporting be focused mainly on freshmen courses.

Dean Feiss interjected a reminder that mid-semester grade reporting was instituted in conjunction with the raising of the continuance requirement (April 1998 minutes) as a way of ensuring early intervention by advisors, to help minimize risks that the latter change would raise the dropout rate. In that sense low faculty participation is a real problem. For that reason, any concern about the system should not be read as a reason for doing away with it, but for raising participation.

Professor Hausman also noted that FAC continues to monitor progress toward approval of post-tenure review procedures (only 5-6 departments' procedures have not yet been certified).

FAC has also urged the Dean (and received his concurrence) to ensure that increased funds in the research budget will be used to replace faculty on leave with fulltime replacements.

IV. Report of the Committee on Degrees

Undergraduate Dean Barbara Watkinson delivered the Degrees Committee report (originally to have been presented at the October meeting, which was canceled). She indicated that the COD deals with petitions to waive degree requirements, the bulk of which arrive in spring semester. The Committee has delegated many more routine waiver requests to her as Dean and some matters will no longer need petitions, such as requests to count cross-listed courses to both departments. In response to a question she stressed that requests to fulfill GERs through transfer credit are rarely approved. A request was made that the Dean's office provide more information about the number of petitions accepted/rejected—for example, for exemptions from the ten-semester rule--and the reasons. She noted that concerns about confidentiality often makes that difficult, but expressed a readiness to provide more such information. It was pointed out that cover sheets on some petition forms giving common reasons for acceptance/rejection could save time for all involved. She also agreed that this report would be posted to the Arts and Sciences website. Another faculty member noted that some students have successfully petitioned to be allowed to study abroad in their senior year. Both Dean Feiss and Dean Watkinson expressed thanks to Darlene Crouch for her work with students petitioning.

V. Report of the Committee on Academic Status

Professor John Gilmour reported that this committee considers requests for exemptions from academic rules, including for readmission, late drops or adds from courses, and overloads or underloads (for purposes of medical underload requests, it consults a special allied committee). The CAS does delegate some routine requests to the Dean of Students office to handle. Of some 850-900 petitions in a given year, the Committee approves more than half, and rejects somewhere around 100 (the high approval rate reflects the fact that after prior consultation with the Dean's office, many students withdraw requests that appear to have little chance of success).

Professor Gilmour raised two policy-relevant issues: First, he noted that evidence indicates only a very minor increase in the overall number of students removed from the College for academic reasons since the raising of the continuance requirements: whereas in earlier years, an average of 5 undergraduates were expelled for this reason, in 2000 the figure was 18—a jump in percentage terms, but not a large number (and several have since successfully petitioned for readmission).

Secondly, he noted that the CAS has now made it automatically possible for graduating seniors to take an underload of 9 credit hours without petitioning the Committee.

Another CAS faculty member suggested that the number of requests for late drops/withdrawals could be reduced if faculty would find out who is not attending their classes early enough and remind the students in question to be sure that they are removed from the rolls. A second committee colleague added that faculty should not endorse late drop/withdrawal requests without good reason: the fact that a student may fail does **NOT** qualify as sufficient justification.

VI. Report of the Educational Policy Committee

Dean Watkinson returned to the floor, this time in her capacity as chair of EPC. She indicated that with more on-line discussion and voting, the committee now meets "just" twice monthly.

First, she reported that EPC has just received the Assessment Committee's report on GER 1 and expects reports on GERs 2 and 6 soon. Second, it is preparing for upcoming accreditation, for which technology use will be a major issue (EPC is also reviewing the Concentration Computing Proficiency in light of changes since this requirement was adopted with the revised curriculum of the early 1990s). Third, she noted that EPC is overseeing a review of College policy on credit for paid internships. Fourth is the general matter of moving from 3 to 4 credit courses.

A fifth issue Dean Watkinson raised was the lower division writing proficiency requirement. She presented EPC and the Writing Committee suggestions for what to look for in evaluating writing. entitled "Goals and Minimal Skills": it provides criteria for 2A of the Guidelines for W-designated freshmen seminars (Dean Watkinson stressed that these guidelines are meant to help faculty and perhaps also initiate a College-wide discussion of the issue, perhaps in the Teaching Enhancement Program. In reply to questions as to the new document's status, she emphasized that it merely provides informal guidance.

VII. Old Business

On behalf of those on the College's Task Force for the Commonwealth of Virginia Campaign, the Secretary congratulated Arts and Sciences faculty: nearly 33% contributed to the CVC this year. Special recognition to the Chemistry Department, which for the second year in a row had the single highest participation rate in Arts and Sciences (66%). The departments of Computer Science, Geology, Government, History, Kinesiology, and Sociology received honorable mention.

VIII. New Business

Professor John Delos invited faculty to stay on after the meeting for an informal discussion of his proposal for a new Consensual Amorous Relations policy.

The meeting adjourned at 4:50.

Respectfully submitted,

Clay Clemens

Professor of Government

Secretary's Note: Those poring over the archives, perhaps writing a College history, may note the absence of Arts and Sciences faculty meeting minutes for November, 2000. This was not the result of a hidden Y2K bug, let alone any of effort to suppress documentation of deliberations. The official explanation is that, in November 2000, for the first time in recorded history, administrators and committee chairs actually conceded that they had nothing especially important to say. Subsequent minutes will reveal whether this refreshing candor proved habit-forming.