

Ad Hoc University-Wide Governance Committee - Minutes: October 1, 2004
Ad Hoc
University-Wide Governance Committee
October 1, 2004
Minutes

Present: J. Acker, R. Bangert-Drowns, M. Fogelman, R. Geer, T. Hoff, J.

Pipkin, L. Schell, G. Singh, B. Via
Minutes: The revised versions of the minutes of Sept. 17, 2004 and June 23, 2004 were approved.

The revisions requested by Professor MacDonald to the September 3, 2004

minutes relating to her report were reviewed and approved.

Research Subcommittee Report:

Professor Hoff reported that the Research Subcommittee is revising its initial report to reflect discussion from last week's Committee meeting and it will be distributed within the coming week.

Tenure and Promotion Subcommittee Report:

Professor Acker asked that suggestions for the Tenure and Promotion Subcommittee report be forwarded to him by e-mail. The suggestions will be incorporated and a revised report will be circulated.

Discussion on Graduate Curriculum and Academic Standing:

Professor Bangert-Drowns reported that much of the Subcommittee discussion centered on the approval process regarding courses and programs. The Subcommittee members felt comfortable recommending that course approval, revisions, and deletions be devolved to local levels, rather than being considered at the university level. The Subcommittee identified different approaches regarding program approval: (1) review of all program approvals should be conducted at the university level; (2) program approvals that are internal to a particular unit should be decided locally, with program proposals that affect more than one unit being reviewed at the University level; (3) local units should have responsibility for all program review approvals, including those that are interdisciplinary. The subcommittee additionally recommended that IT be used more extensively to disseminate information throughout the University regarding proposed changes involving courses and academic programs. It was suggested that making such information publicly available would allow interested

parties to comment on them before they became effective and would be useful for informational purposes, enhancing the democratic nature of the process of course and program approvals. The subcommittee further announced support for an Ombudsperson to facilitate discussion and resolution of academic grievances and related matters. The subcommittee reported that it had researched analogous issues at several other institutions and found several different approaches to governance involving course and program review and other graduate curriculum matters. This research did not locate any institution that is as highly decentralized as CNSE proposes. SUNY Stony Brook has what is perhaps the most highly decentralized governance model. SUNY Buffalo and the University of Michigan, each of which has a school of graduate studies, also have relatively decentralized governance structures. The Rackham School at the University of Michigan examines specified programs and nominally examines course proposals, although in practice its approach is decentralized. Buffalo relies on a clusters model. The Subcommittee examined several institutions that are similar to UAlbany, including Florida State, Georgia Tech, and UMass-Amherst. Although program approval does go "all the way to the top" at these institutions, other curriculum matters may not. UMass makes use of a "hold harmless" policy whereby any faculty member can teach a course for three years before the course must be reviewed and approved beyond the departmental level. Rutgers, at least in theory, uses a much more centralized approach. Every course (in theory) must be voted on amidst a meeting of the entire faculty. Subcommittee members unanimously concurred that matters of overarching policy regarding the graduate curriculum should be considered at the university-wide level. Such policy matters include formulation of university-wide academic standards and also matters such as the requirement that students have earned an undergraduate degree before admission to graduate school, compliance with state regulations and law, TOEFL policies, and Homeland Security issues. The subcommittee reported that academic grievances at most other institutions

are initially considered by ad hoc, lower-level groups. An option may exist for aggrieved parties to appeal for final review at a higher level. At all other institutions consulted except Rutgers, individual course proposals are not reviewed centrally. It was suggested that the UAlbany GAC need not sign off on individual course proposals. An alternative approach is to create a "triggering" mechanism that would allow parties concerned about a course proposal (e.g., because a proposed course might overlap with already-offered classes or because a class might not meet appropriate standards) to invoke higher-level review on a case-by-case basis. The most disagreement was generated within the Subcommittee about proposals for new programs. Some members are of the opinion that program proposals should be considered at the university level, while others disagree. Academic grievances at other institutions rarely appear to be taken up at the university-wide level. They usually are taken care of by ad hoc committees, rather than through governance committees. However, it was suggested that benefits attach to University-level review of grievances, such as taking pressure off of local units, and achieving greater procedural consistency and more detached judgment, which may enhance the appearance of fairness. Discussion turned to the present Senate Charter provisions involving the Graduate Academic Council (GAC). It was suggested that the Charter provisions are not clear, and should be rewritten to achieve greater clarity. For example, SX.4.7.1 is unclear ("[The Committee on Admissions and Academic Standing] shall review changes to standards and procedures for admission to graduate study recommended by the schools, colleges, and departments."). It additionally was suggested that present Charter provisions diverge from actual practice and should be rewritten so that regulations and practice are in conformity. Discussion ensued about the significance of the whole UAlbany faculty retaining symbolic ownership of the entirety of the University's graduate curriculum, as opposed to ceding some authority to faculty within individual units. The Subcommittee considered a model for course and program proposals in which a new proposal would be posted on a web site for review for a particular period of time. Following such posting, interested individuals could send comments to the

proposing party. This process would allow all interested parties an opportunity to review and comment on the proposal before it is approved. One Committee member commented that people might not review the proposals on a web site, citing similar processes where people rarely appear to pay attention to e-mail alerts. It was observed that course proposals elude university-wide review under present practice, notwithstanding the Charter provisions, and that a notification system at least would allow interested parties the opportunity to provide comments. Much additional discussion ensued about the feasibility and advisability of a mechanism for distributing notice throughout the University about proposed courses and other curricular matters. Absent such notice, and without a requirement for University-level review, it was suggested that changes implemented by some units could have a profound impact on other units, which would have no opportunity to be apprised of or offer comment on curricular proposals. For example, it was noted that a school or college could create a certificate program and list another school's course in the certificate program without consultation. After lengthy discussion, a straw poll was taken. Five of the eight members present expressed support for retaining Senate Charter SX 4.4 as presently worded ("The Council as a whole shall review all proposals for new graduate programs. It shall submit recommended program approvals to the University Senate for consideration."), with the addition of a recommendation for taking advantage of technological capabilities to disseminate relevant information. There was considerable agreement that the university-wide level review process should be available regarding the creation of new programs. A suggestion was made that there might be value in allowing for review by academic clusters instead of at the University level, because faculty from the relevant clusters would be more knowledgeable about the particular area, the process might move more quickly, and faculty would have greater opportunity to participate meaningfully. It also was suggested that GAC could form ad hoc groups on an

as-needed basis to acquire appropriate expertise and receive advice in certain areas. Discussion then turned from review of new graduate programs to the review of specific courses, involving Senate Charter SX 4.6. Questions were raised about how unnecessary duplication of courses could be avoided if the GAC does not continue to review course proposals. It was suggested that inefficiencies could be created, such as multiple offerings of statistics classes. However, it also was suggested that deans presumably would be alert to conserve resources where appropriate by avoiding unnecessary course duplications, and at the graduate level courses that nominally are similar often differ between disciplines in important ways. It also was pointed out that in practice, consideration of course proposals already is highly decentralized, notwithstanding the wording of the Senate Charter. Discussion ensued about both resource and academic freedom considerations regarding course offerings. The argument was advanced that faculty at the local level have principal expertise regarding course offerings and that additional centralized review is neither necessary nor appropriate. One member raised the example of the School of Nanoscale Sciences and NanoEngineering (SNN) course approvals that were delayed due to GAC review, postponing program implementation for an academic year. It was pointed out that this process put faculty from other disciplines in a position of trying to make judgments about the academic merit of courses within the SNN curriculum. It was argued that expertise appropriately resides within the local academic unit, as is recognized at SUNY Buffalo and Stony Brook. It was suggested that review beyond the local level was difficult to justify based on concerns of both efficiency and expertise. It was pointed out that considerations for the graduate curriculum are significantly different than the undergraduate curriculum, where elimination of a class such as MAT 108 might have a dramatic impact across the university. It also was pointed out that the availability of special topics classes allows flexibility at present regarding the offering new courses and that "sunset"

provisions regarding topics classes may not be enforced uniformly across campus.

Support also was expressed for a mechanism that would allow schools and colleges to be able to discuss course proposals. Providing notice might be beneficial to help avoid potential conflicts and overlaps. But providing notice should not imply that other units have a right to preclude a course proposal from being adopted and implemented. One committee member suggested that a new SX 4.9 should be adopted that would provide a mechanism for communication among units with respect to curricular matters, with an opportunity for feedback. It also was suggested that a mechanism might be provided for local units to invoke GAC review before final action is taken on curricular matters in extraordinary circumstances.

The Subcommittee was asked to summarize and continue to advance the discussion of Graduate Curriculum and Academic Standing in anticipation of the next committee meeting.

Discussion on the motion regarding Committee timetable and release of report:

There was discussion about the Committee's motion (adopted at its Sept. 24

meeting) regarding the timing of the submission of the Committee's report. The

contents of the approved motion were transmitted to Senate Chair MacDonald prior

to the Executive Committee's September 27, 2004 meeting. Senate Chair MacDonald

thereafter reported that the Executive Committee did not act on the Committee's

motion including its request for an extension of the deadline for submitting a

report. Some Committee members expressed continuing concern that the Executive

Committee had requested the Committee's recommendations in connection with its

report to the President on the CNSE Bylaws. Committee members agreed that this

committee needs more time to complete its charge, and that the committee had not

been charged with reviewing the CNSE Bylaws. After discussion, it was agreed

that Professor Acker would present the approved Sept. 24 motion to the Senate at

its October 4, 2004 meeting.