

Ad Hoc University-Wide Governance Committee
Ad Hoc University-Wide
Governance
Committee
Aug. 25, 2004
Minutes

Present: J. Acker, J. Bartow, B. Carlson, P. Eppard, M. Fogelman, R. Geer, G. Goatley
(substituting for R. Bangert-Drowns), J. Pipkin, L. Schell, G. Singh, B. Via, J. Wyckoff

Minutes: The revised minutes of Aug. 11 were approved, as additionally revised by the inclusion of two more institutions (Florida State and Rutgers) consulted by the Graduate Curriculum Subcommittee. The minutes of the Aug. 18 minutes were not considered because they had been distributed only shortly before the meeting; those minutes will be considered for approval at the next scheduled meeting. Professor Carlson offered clarification about two issues in those minutes relating to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). She noted that the IRB aspired to have a membership reflecting a generally proportional representation of academic units based both on fairness and the desire for relevant expertise. The number of proposals from the School of Education suggested that increased representation on IRB from that School would be desirable. With respect to the reference in the minutes about faculty being "deputized" to review students' research proposals, she explained present and proposed procedures governing IRB review of in-class research assignments that rely on particular sources of data.

Discussion then ensued about whether the committee's minutes should be publicized. It was pointed out that the invited guests who had appeared before the committee had not had a chance to review minutes relevant to their appearance, and it was suggested that it would be appropriate to allow those individuals to review the minutes for accuracy if the minutes are to be made public. It also was pointed out that individual committee members might have been operating under different understandings about whether the minutes would be publicly available, since there had not been prior agreement about this matter.

It was agreed that individual committee members would be polled and that the minutes would not be distributed publicly if any member objected to their dissemination. No committee member present at the meeting expressed objections about having the minutes publicized. Members not in attendance at the meeting will be consulted before action is taken. It additionally was agreed that the minutes of all committee meetings would be compiled and distributed to all committee members for further review before action is taken. Jayne will be asked to collect and distribute the collection of minutes. It was agreed that the invited guests should be given the chance to check minutes relevant to their appearances for accuracy before action might be taken to distribute the minutes publicly. It was contemplated that the minutes would be posted on the Senate web site if no objections are raised.

Anticipated Committee Report. Professor Acker expressed his opinion that time constraints almost certainly will not allow the committee to issue a draft report, circulate it for review and comment, and then issue a final report after considering feedback, by October 1. He suggested that the committee should attempt to have its draft report prepared by Oct. 1, and thereafter have the draft report distributed for review and comment. He additionally suggested that the committee meet on Friday mornings after the academic semester begins, assuming all members remain available at that time, and inquired whether extending committee meetings beyond two hours duration would be productive and feasible.

Committee members agreed that meetings should be scheduled to begin Fridays at 10:30, starting Sept. 3. There also was agreement that meetings could extend beyond two hours, and that the first meeting tentatively would be of three hours duration (if necessary).

More extensive discussion then ensued about the process and timing for developing a committee report. It was noted that the committee's charge contemplates that the committee's report should be delivered to the Senate

rather than the Senate Executive Committee (or its equivalent).
Committee members agreed that a draft or preliminary report should be distributed to faculty, deans, department chairs, and other constituencies for review and comment before the committee prepares a final report and submits such report to the Senate. Members also agreed that it was unrealistic to complete that process in advance of Oct. 1. It was suggested that October 1 be established as the target date for the committee to complete its draft report, which then would be circulated to faculty, deans, department chairs, and others for review and comment. It additionally was suggested that a faculty forum might be scheduled for discussion of the committee's draft report. Professor Acker was encouraged to confer with Professor Carolyn MacDonald in her capacity as the Chair of the University Senate regarding such plans.

Different formats for the committee's report were discussed. One style involves listing alternative models or approaches with respect to the issues and sub-issues considered, without expressing views about which model/approach a majority of the committee prefers. The other style involves listing alternative models or approaches, along with the committee's recommendations or preferences (majority and minority viewpoints). Preliminary sentiment appeared to favor identifying majority and minority views about issues, although it was considered prudent to withhold judgment about a specific style or format pending preparation of the subcommittee reports and the draft report. It was anticipated that different approaches might be appropriate for different issues.

Research Subcommittee. As anticipated, the Research subcommittee had not completed a written draft report. Brief discussion ensued about the scope of the committee's charge within the general area of Research. In response to a question, Professor Geer reported that the College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering had been especially interested in research-related issues including oversight and review of research centers and institutes. In contrast, other issues related to research (e.g., human subjects review, FRAP awards, Indirect

Cost Return funds) had not been contemplated within the context of increased autonomy in faculty governance. Other committee members expressed their opinion that Faculty Bylaws and Senate Charter provisions relevant to research issues would be useful to help define the scope of issues relevant to the committee's charge concerning "Research."

Subcommittee on Graduate Curriculum and Academic Standing. Jon Bartow distributed a handout providing information about a booklet prepared by the Council of Graduate Schools: CSG Task Force on Organization and Administration of Graduate Education (Washington, DC: Council of Graduate Schools, 2004). He explained that the report includes a discussion of the role of faculty governance in graduate curriculum development and oversight. The committee was reminded that the Council of Graduate Schools is an organization that includes graduate school deans and that the report is likely to reflect perspectives shared by those deans.

The Subcommittee on Graduate Curriculum and Academic Standing has consulted several institutions and has discovered diverse practices regarding faculty governance in matters of graduate curriculum. Institutions with graduate schools and active graduate deans appear to have somewhat more centralized faculty governance structures regarding graduate curriculum issues, although there is considerable variation within institutions of this general nature. Other institutions have more decentralized, or distributed faculty governance approaches. Greater centralization may be more typical of larger academic institutions.

Issues of academic standing (and how academic standing relates to admissions) appear to be more complex at institutions that do not have graduate schools and graduate deans to act on such matters.

A broad spectrum of practices is followed at other universities. For example, at Rutgers, in principle, every course proposal is considered and voted on by

the entire graduate faculty, after having undergone two prior levels of review. On the other hand, UMass-Amherst appears to follow a "hold harmless" policy whereby a department can offer a class for three years without prior review by a graduate school or council.

It was observed that, in practice, GAC review of individual course proposals at UAlbany almost never has produced significant problems, with the recent exception of course proposals made by the School/College of Nanoscale Sciences. It was suggested that it might be fruitful to study this situation more closely to learn what factors contributed to the more difficult GAC process.

One member posited a hypothetical situation in which three separate academic units—e.g., the School of Criminal Justice, the School of Social Welfare, and the Sociology Department—all proposed to teach similar courses in an area such as deviance, or delinquency, or drug policies. A question was raised about problems that might be encountered in such circumstances if no mechanism existed for centralized review by a body like GAC. It was suggested that the hypothetical situation more directly implicated fiscal concerns than academic ones. Presumably, each unit would have defensible academic reasons to make the respective course offerings. It additionally was suggested that GAC concerns itself with curricular rather than fiscal issues. On the other hand, EPC or the new UPC is concerned with economic/fiscal matters, as are deans. It was pointed out that deans would be positioned to prohibit a course from going forward if it taxed scarce resources and duplicated offerings available elsewhere in the University. However, it also was suggested that the committee should point out that there might be fiscal implications associated with overlapping or highly similar courses being offered by more than a single academic unit. Deans and others should be alerted to this potential consequence of decentralized decision-making regarding graduate course approval (although it again was suggested that GAC has not been charged with considering fiscal, as opposed to curricular implications of new course proposals).

From a more "philosophical" perspective, it was suggested that academic departments could be characterized as discrete silos for purposes of channeling resources. In contrast, disciplines intellectually have considerable overlap and interconnectedness. The competing models for resource-investment and intellectual interdisciplinarity present challenges for governance in curricular matters. It additionally was suggested that issues of academic freedom are closely associated with course offerings.

Questions were raised about the implications of moving toward a more decentralized model of faculty governance in the area of graduate curriculum when "major" curriculum and programmatic changes are considered (as opposed to individual course proposals and offerings). A reminder was offered that the State Education Department (SED) reviews major programmatic changes following whatever review occurs at the University level. For example, when a proposal is made to create a new program, SED is required to invite comment from throughout the SUNY system. On the other hand, it is not likely that "major changes" in programs or curricula would receive such consideration by SED. "Major" curricular issues are presented when a new graduate program is created, and in theory by the termination of a program or degree, as well. It was suggested that the termination of programs may depend principally on fiscal considerations, although there also may be substantive implications regarding the University's educational mission, academic freedom, and consequences for faculty lines, including those occupied by tenured faculty members. Other academic units within the University also could experience curricular ramifications by the termination of a program—for example, the Philosophy Department could be directly affected by dissolution of the German Department.

It was suggested that it is important to define the critical point at which a decision that most directly affects one department or school/college also has significant implications for other academic units or throughout the University generally.

Next Meeting. All subcommittees were encouraged to complete and circulate their

reports in advance of the committee meeting scheduled for Sept. 3. The reports hopefully can be discussed so the committee can progress toward its goals of (1) identifying important governance issues within Research, Graduate Curriculum and Academic Standing, and Promotions and Continuing Appointments; (2) identifying alternative models or approaches with respect to the various issues; (3) ascertaining whether there are approaches/models that garner greater/lesser committee support; (4) identifying specific implications for Faculty Bylaws and Senate Charter provisions; and (5) preparing a draft report.