Academic Standards and Policies Committee Meeting

MINUTES

FEBRUARY 17, 2015  3:30 @ 623 So. Shepler

Present: Travis Childs (Chair), Teresa Morales (Secretary), Suzanne Crawford, Hyunsoon Whang

Absent: Gary Buckley, Justin Walton

I. Meeting was called to order at 3:37 p.m.

II. Chair explained the need to address difference in CU policy regarding Honor designations of *Summa Cum Laude, Magna Cum Laude,* and *Cum Laude* compared to other Oklahoma universities. Cameron University allows for a 5% and 10% ranking to be included in the designations even though GPAs do not fit within the parameters. Mr. Childs explained that this allowed for students to delay May graduation in order to allow for a smaller pool of graduates thereby upping the chances for Honors designation. No one knew of any other school that allowed for this kind of exception for the Honors designation. After discussion, Dr. Crawford called to move to delete the 5% and 10% exceptions in the CU Academic Regulations of the University catalog (see page 27) so that Honors designation will be solely based on the GPA requirement of *Summa Cum Laude* – 4.00, *Magna Cum Laude* 3.80-3.99, and *Cum Laude* 3.60-3.79, and not percentage of graduating class. Dr. Whang seconded the motion. Vote supported the motion.

III. Committee discussed the proposition to place all late withdrawals into the authority of the Office of Academic Affairs (a.k.a. Lani Malcolm). Concerns have been raised by faculty that students who chose to act proactively by going through the withdrawal process after the deadline, but before finals, had to go to each professor and other entities to get individual signatures. Students often run into problems catching people in their office. Yet, students who delayed the withdrawal process until the following semester could simply go to the Office of Academic Affairs for authorization to withdraw. Discussion clarified that this mattered only to students with extenuating circumstances such as illness, death in the family, etc. Dr. Whang moved to allow for the more simplified process of putting authority in the Office of Academic Affairs to handle with each professor rather than put the burden on students. Dr. Crawford seconded. Vote supported the motion.

IV. Mr. Childs informed the committee that we had been charged by Faculty Senate to consider creating a University policy regarding excused absences for religious holidays and University-sanctioned events.

a. Using the University of Oklahoma’s example of religious holiday statement, the committee discussed the need for CU to have a formal statement. The OU statement reads:
“It is the policy of the University to excuse the absences of students that result from religious observances and to provide without penalty for the rescheduling of examinations and additional required class work that may fall on religious holidays.”
(Approved in 1978)

Discussion covered matters such as the need to require this permission upfront at the beginning of the semester so as not to be abused. Some professors already allow for this type exception. Mr. Childs shared his syllabus that has the following verbiage:

“Students must have a documented excuse for missing an exam in order to be eligible for a make-up. If ill, students must provide a doctor’s note to qualify for the make-up. Students who miss an exam or quiz to attend an official, university-sanctioned, or non-social event, must provide the necessary documentation from the university. Lack of a validated excuse will disqualify students from taking a make-up.”

He also noted that with our growing international student population, there are greater chances that conflicts regarding religious observances will eventually occur even though they have not yet. The need to be proactive in the policy was determined important by the committee as was the need to have a University-wide policy. Dr. Crawford moved to use OU’s policy statement verbatim for CU. Dr. Whang seconded. Vote supported the motion.

b. Concern was also raised regarding University-sanctioned events and make-up policy. This does not include medical circumstances. Mr. Childs shared OU’s policy on University-sanctioned events which states:

“Only Provost-approved university-sponsored activities such as scholarly competitions, fine arts performances, intercollegiate athletics competitions, and academic field trips, and legally required activities, such as emergency military service and jury duty, are covered by these guidelines.

“Faculty, if given notice two class periods or one week (whichever is less) before an exam (including final exams with two weeks’ notice) or quiz (excluding pop quizzes), should make every effort to find a reasonable accommodation by (a) giving a makeup exam, an early exam, or quiz, (b) changing the exam schedule; (c) dropping the exam or quiz and increasing the weight of another exam or quiz or other agreed upon approaches acceptable to the instructor and the student; or (d) by identifying a certified testing center. Students missing an exam on account of jury duty must be allowed an accommodation.”

Discussion revealed that OK students are not allowed exemptions from jury duty. The need to formalize University policy, especially regarding University-sanctioned events, both athletic and academic, was felt pertinent. Dr. Crawford moved to use OU’s policy statement verbatim for CU. Dr. Whang seconded. Vote supported the motion.
V. Finally, Mr. Childs raised the issue of a particular Title IX issue regarding pregnant students. All faculty should have received notice of this in their department meetings. This policy, which CU does not formally have, states that pregnant students cannot be discriminated against based on their pregnancy, having given birth, or having sustained an abortion. A professor cannot penalize a pregnant student on the basis of attendance and professors must allow pregnant students to make up all work while out due to pregnancy or any related conditions, including recovery from childbirth.

Discussion ranged from “Of course not” to this might be a step in the wrong direction. On one hand, the policy serves to end a discrimination; while on the other, it places pregnant females in a separate class chosen for exception. There was also concern that exceptions, such as (but not limited to) transgendered students undergoing sex-changes could be considered in the same category. Mr. Childs informed the committee that he and the VPAA will be meeting with legal teams in the coming weeks and would be discussing this issue further. No vote was taken. Discussion left with the need to further discuss this issue within departments.

Meeting adjourned at 4:18.