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Faculty Senate

4-14-2009

April 14, 2009

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Recommended Citation

University of Mississippi. Faculty Senate, "April 14, 2009" (2009). *Meeting Minutes*. 89.
https://egrove.olemiss.edu/facsen_minutes/89

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Senators in Attendance:

Deborah Barker, Robert Barnard, Steve Brewer, Allison Burkette, Joe Turner Cantu, Bill Chappell, Yixin Chen, Ben Cooper, Lucien Cremaldi, Donna Davis, Melissa Dennis, Allison Ford-Wade, Judy Greenwood, Erin Holmes, Elliot Hutchcraft, Brad Jones, Jason Klodt, P.T. Krantz, Joel Kuszmaul, Elise Lake, Laurel Lambert, John Lobur, Soumyajit Majumdar, Tyrus McCarty, Jessica Minihan, Chris Mullen, Tim Nordstrom, Cesar Rego, Jason Ritchie, Angela Rutherford, Paul Scovazzo, Jesse Scott, Zia Shariat-Madar, Ken Sufka, Durant Thompson, Laura Vaughn, Doug Vorhies, Mark Walker, Karl Wang, Jay Watson, Jordan Zjawiony

Senators absent with prior notification:

Thea Williams-Black, Jan Bounds, Mark Bing, George Dor, Ricky Burkhead

Senators absent without notification:

Mary Hayes, Charles Eagles, John Neff, Carmen Manning-Miller, John Williamson, Debra Moore-Shannon

- Meeting opened by Senator Sufka at 7:00 p.m.
- First order of business: Approve March meeting minutes
 - Motioned & seconded; approved unanimously with no abstentions
- Second order of business: Resolution 1: Plus/Minus Grading
 - Based on the discussion at last month's Senate meeting, Senator Lobur added language to the resolution to allow faculty and departments the option of using plus/minus grading, such that no school would be forced to use this scale
 - Senator Shariat-Madar asked if students would have the option of choosing plus/minus grading
 - Senator Lobur responded that students would not have the option to choose the grading scale, the professor would choose the scale. Since certain schools are committed to the four point system, professors could continue to grade ABCD
 - Senator Vorhies asked how other universities would convert the UM plus/minus scale to their own grading scales
 - Senator Lobur responded that most universities already use plus/minus grading
 - Senator Sufka added that an conversion would only be needed when a particular university was using a four point scale (ABCD)
 - Senator Lambert asked how long the process would take to transfer UM to a plus/minus grading scale
 - Senator Richie responded that Cathy Gates needs one year lead time, but that it would involve no extraordinary costs
 - Senator Brewer asked about the implications of passing this resolution
 - Senator Sufka responded that if passed the resolution would go to chancellor, and may go to other academic administrators

- Senator Brewer observed that Senators were not able to give their faculties the details of this resolution prior to tonight's meeting; the details were hypothetical at the time when senators were presenting the idea to their colleagues
- Senator Wang asked if it were possible for individual professors in a department to use plus/minus grading while others within the same department would not? Would it create a problem of consistency?
 - Senator Burkette added that professors in the same department grading on different scales might give different grades for similar work
 - Senator Lobur responded that each department should decide whether or not to implement the plus/minus grading scale
 - Senator Sufka added that, according the registrar at the University of Oregon, it is better for all schools to have a common grading scale. However such discrepancies already exist among different sections of the same course
 - Senator Watson added that such discrepancies actually serve to make the case for a plus/minus grading scale
 - Senator Wang said that the plus/minus grading scale could cause students to become upset if two students received different grades for a perceived similar amount of work
- Senator Cremaldi observed that the faculty in his department were polarized, with roughly half in favor and half opposed to the plus/minus scale
 - Senator Lobur added that he has heard that the hard sciences were also polarized
 - Senator Thompson mentioned that since it would be optional, professors could continue to use the old system
- Senator Vaughn said that from her personal experience in graduate school, students do work harder to earn the higher plus grade in contrast to programs that did not use the plus/minus scale
- Senator Majumdar asked whether transcripts would indicate whether a professor was using the plus/minus scale
 - Senator Lobur responded that such an indication would likely not appear on a student's transcript
- The text of Resolution 1:

Plus/Minus Grading Resolution

Whereas the University of Mississippi is committed to being a great American public university, and desires to foster the highest levels of academic achievement; and

Whereas the faculty of University of Mississippi widely feel that the current letter-only grading scale (A, B, C, D, F):

(1) Inadequately and unfairly assesses the level of student academic performance, due to the large range of scores per grade, and because there is no way to distinguish those of a

given grade who appreciably outperform those who receive the same grade, and perhaps just miss the next higher grade, and

(2) Discourages the highest levels of achievement by impairing the ability of students to improve their grades, and only provides an incentive to achieve the bare minimum score necessary to advance to any given higher grade; and

Whereas the current letter-only grading scale hampers academic freedom by constraining instructors to use a scale they widely consider to be clumsy, unfair and imprecise; and

Whereas, on account of their authority, qualifications and experience, it is the prerogative of the instructors to determine a scale most appropriate for the assessment of student performance; and

Whereas a shift to the adoption of a plus/minus grading scale would entail but minor and temporary inconveniences far outweighed by the long term, or rather permanent benefits;

Therefore be it resolved:

That the Faculty Senate recommends that the University of Mississippi adopt a grading system that enables the option of assigning a + (plus) or a – (minus) letter, and that in keeping with the notion of academic freedom, faculty (and colleges or schools) are free to use the system in a manner that best suits their needs.

- The senate voted in favor of Resolution 1: 33 in favor, 7 opposed, and 1 abstention
- Third order of business: Resolution 2: Shared Governance Reaffirmation
 - The resolution was proposed by Senators Bing, Burkette, Cantu, Dennis, Jones, Nordstrom, Ritchie, Rutherford, Sufka, Vaughan, Vorhies, and Williamson
 - The resolution is directed to the new chancellor, who will be asked to respond to it when s/he addresses the senate in the Fall
 - The text of the resolution:

SHARED GOVERNANCE REAFFIRMATION RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, The University of Mississippi Faculty are the critical resource for implementing the tripartite mission of Research, Teaching and Service of this university;

WHEREAS, shared governance is the hallmark of the American university system and is essential to the institution's success in achieving the highest level of distinction in academics;

WHEREAS, shared governance rests on principles of mutuality and collaboration, transparency, representative participation, mutual accountability and clearly defined boundaries and roles between, among and across all levels of university life from the department, to the college or school, to the university and to its governing board;

WHEREAS, The University of Mississippi Faculty, its Provost and Chancellor and its Governing Board have long embraced a commitment of shared governance;

WHEREAS, The University of Mississippi Faculty Senate is the elected and representative body of the faculty and help to establish and implement governance essential in operating a flagship university;

WHEREAS, the economic events during this academic year have provided the administration an opportunity to welcome Faculty Senate input in budgetary decisions in order to embrace the values embodied in shared governance that promotes excellence in Research, Teaching and Service without compromising the core values of this university;

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THEREFORE, LET IT BE RESOLVED, that the Faculty Senate welcome the new Chancellor and urge continuity by a renewed commitment to open, honest and shared governance between faculty and administration where our input has long been an essential and excellent source of expertise and leadership.

- The senate voted in favor of Resolution 2: 38 in favor, 0 opposed, and 2 abstentions
- Fourth order of business: University Standing Committee on Elections
 - Senator Davis had sent ballots to the faculty via email and reported that the response rate has been good compared to paper ballots used in previous years
 - The nominations for Strategic Planning Council are forthcoming and Senator Davis encouraged senators to consider serving on the SPC
 - Senator Davis also asked Senators to encourage their colleagues to respond to the ballots
- Fifth order of business: Senate Election Reminder and Update
 - Senator Sufka reported that the following departments have elected senators for the 2009-2010 academic year: Modern Languages, Art, Psychology, Political Science, Chemistry and Biochemistry, Libraries, Management, Marketing, Civil Engineering, Computer Information and Sciences, Pharmacy Administration, and Pharmacognosy
 - Senator Sufka asked Senators to remind their remaining departments to complete the elections for Senate
- Sixth order of business: Administrative Search Updates
 - Dr. Alice Clark sent an email to faculty soliciting nominations for the Chancellor position
 - Senator Nordstrom reported that he and Senator Watson are involved in procedural meetings for the Chancellor search, yet the two Senators are under a privacy clause and thus cannot discuss details

- Senator Watson said that de facto deadline for applications is April 21 and the deadline was set to verify that a candidate's interest is serious
- Seventh order of business: Sexual Assault Task Force Report
 - Senator Barker reported that the policies and procedures in the M-Book will include a section on sexual violence
 - Drafts of the report will available by next Thursday and will be distributed to the Senate before its next meeting
- Eighth order of business: Disaster Planning Survey Update
 - Senator Mullen reported that 25% of departments have no local back up system in place in case of catastrophe
 - The report estimated that between 30 and 120 terabytes of university data is vulnerable to disaster and is worth between \$6 and \$60 million
 - Senator Mullen reported that back up plans would cost between \$75,000 and \$100,000 per year for the entire university, which would include personnel costs
- Ninth order of business: Important Spring 2009 Calendar Dates
 - The Chancellor's reception will be April 30 in the Grove
 - Donations for the Chancellor's gift tree from the faculty should be sent to Wendell Weakley
 - The memorial service for faculty members that have passed will be next Thursday at 5:30 pm
 - The next Senate meeting will be May 5 at 7 pm
- Tenth order of business: Items from the floor
 - Senator Sufka reported that the August intersession was extended to three weeks. There are concerns about how and when faculty should have been notified of this change, since professors likely have already made summer travel, teaching, and research plans based on the original calendar
 - Senator Sufka asked Provost Stocks for the meeting minutes where this change was approved, and there were no minutes of a meeting. Don Howie asked that the intersession be increased to three weeks based on faculty's request for longer intersession courses. The request went to the Registrar Charlotte Fant and the Undergraduate Council approved the calendar
 - However, there is no policy for changes to the academic calendar. The Provost solicited advice from the academic deans on the change, and was approved based on feedback from the deans
 - There used to be a Calendar Committee, but this committee no longer exists
 - The Registrar Charlotte Fant sets the academic calendar based on IHL requirements and the calendar is approved by the Provost
 - The Senate can make a recommendation to revert to the original calendar, and Provost Stocks would likely be willing to approve such a recommendation
 - Senator Scovazzo asked if the calendar was the only area where decisions are made without faculty input

- Senator Sufka said he would solicit wide input (from deans, chairs, and faculty) and stressed that the issue is how to avoid last minute calendar changes in the future
 - Senator Cremaldi asked why the August session was extended
 - Senator Sufka read the response from Provost Stocks citing faculty's interest in longer intersessions
 - Senator Davis said that the issue has to do with faculty governance. The Provost search was made without faculty input, and the calendar change continues a pattern of deemphasizing shared governance. Senator Davis said that until the Senate represents the faculty this behavior will continue. Senator Davis added that faculty representation is more important than worrying about hurting administrators' feelings
 - Senator Davis moved that the Senate write a resolution stating these positions
 - Senator Watson agreed that the Senate request that administrators revert to the original calendar and that the Senate draft a statement of faculty input. Senator Watson added that the summer school coordinator should not have the right to change the calendar for the entire university
 - The Senate voted in favor of writing a recommendation: 41 in favor, 0 opposed, 1 abstention
 - Senator Barnard recommended including a statement that these issues come to the Senate
 - Senator Davis moved that the statement include last year's resolution on shared governance
- Meeting adjourned at 7:55 p.m.