

Minutes
Academic Policy Committee, Faculty Senate
Regular Meeting: 9/2/2014

Senators Attending: Montse Fuentes (Co-chair), Derek Aday (Co-chair), Sarah Ash, David Auerbach, Alton Banks, Roy Borden, Harriett Edwards, Richard Spontak.

Guests: Jo-Ann Cohen (Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, COS), Michelle Johnson (Senior Associate Registrar), Barbara Kirby (Associate Vice Provost), and Catherine Freeman (Director, Office of Undergraduate Courses and Curricula).

1. Introductions

Meeting began at 3:15pm with introductions of those in attendance. Montse Fuentes indicated that the APC would be joined each week by a representative from the Associate Deans for Academic Programs; Jo-Ann Cohen filled that role this week.

2. Academic suspensions and warnings

Michelle Johnson, Senior Associate Registrar, led a discussion about policies and regulations associated with readmission of former and suspended students and progress toward degree. UNCGA formed a taskforce associated with these issues in 2012 and in 2013 changes were implanted in the Fostering Undergraduate Student Success policy. Ms. Johnson outlined policy issues and changes that were reviewed by the APC and the faculty senate last spring. She indicated that NCSU formed another working group to consider and review new policy changes, mostly in an effort to avoid changes that would be contradictory. She further indicated that NCSU is in compliance with most sections but that we have some work to do in specific areas and that we need to get certain policies nailed down. The goal is to eliminate the 'stair step' policy of academic warnings and suspensions and to move to a simplified 2.0 overall GPA policy for students to remain in good academic standing.

One option associated with this approach is to create a 'grade point deficit' to provide a buffer for students and an opportunity to continue working to improve. A related issue is how to successfully intervene without waiting too long when students are struggling. Discussion centered around a proposal of using a grade point deficit of ≤ 15 that would allow students to continue as long as they achieved a minimum 2.0 semester GPA every semester thereafter until the overall GPA reached ≥ 2.0 . Concerns were raised about the notion that students could maintain a 2.0 semester GPA every semester and still not make up the grade point deficit.

One option proposed to deal with that would be a degree audit 'check' at some point during each student's academic program, perhaps during the junior or senior year. At this point degree audits could be cleaned up, classes could be moved to appropriate locations in the

audit, and students could be counseled about their status relative to making up the grade point deficit as they approach graduation.

Michelle Johnson indicated that two other changes under consideration are: suspended students would not have the ability to take Distance Education courses and that a new appeal process would be in place with the hope of providing better intervention strategies than have been provided in the past. Discussion about these issues centered around timing of the appeals process and the volume of appeals that would have to be handled.

Status of this issue: Open.

Action: The APC will continue consideration and invite Michelle Johnson back for additional discussion.

3. Progress toward degree

Michelle Johnson indicated that our academic progress policies have to adopt federal financial aid standards and that changes are underway associated with a renaming of the policy to “Satisfactory Academic Progress”. Federal regulations require that students pass 2/3 of hours attempted and NCSU will adopt this standard.

There was considerable discussion about whether those passing classes must be associated with progress toward degree (the federal policy does not explicitly indicate that courses must be associated with progress toward degree, but clearly this is something we hope is happening). Questions were raised about whether our policy should be explicit and discussion for and against this approach ensued.

One significant concern was that the structure of our degree audits and other course and programmatic options complicate the simple notion of progress toward degree (and tracking that). In other words, students could be making satisfactory progress toward degree (or toward a minor or similar program) but Registration and Records (and students and advisors) may have difficulty tracking that progress.

One item of discussion was the possibility of including a progress toward degree check for each student, perhaps during the junior or senior year. At the same time degree audits could be cleaned up and effort could be made to ensure that progress is being measured correctly. Without the progress toward degree component there was concern that students might game the system by simply taking ‘easy A’ classes to increase the overall GPA without making any substantial progress. The associated complication is that students could be making progress toward a minor or meeting ROTC requirements or similar issues, which would be appropriate, without making specific progress toward degree.

A suggestion was made that the policy might instead rely upon Major GPA, which might provide a better way to track progress toward degree. Concern about this approach was that students may have good reasons to take courses outside of the degree program.

Status of this issue: Open.

Action: The APC agreed that a good approach to consider would be instituting some sort of degree audit check, but that additional discussion was necessary. Senators Aday and Fuentes will relay information to the Executive Committee and discussion on this topic will continue when Michelle Johnson attends a later APC meeting.

4. Academic integrity and independent study courses

Catherine Freeman and Barbara Kirby discussed academic integrity and reviewed associated policy. One important issue for discussion was the need to create separate section numbers for each student enrolled in an independent study course to track student participation and faculty activity and workload. Catherine Freeman discussed the creation of a registration form and associated instructions for students enrolling in independent study courses. Barbara Kirby discussed the form and indicated the need for a common processing document for the purposes of registering students and reporting enrollment. Departments and colleges could add their own requirements, if desired, to the common form. The form would be scanned into the student's permanent records and would be used for registration purposes.

Discussion focused on administrative oversight. In particular, issues were raised about the involvement of department heads. There was concern about whether department heads should be actively involved in overseeing the process and signing each form or whether the department head (or designee) signature was simply a 'check box' that had to be taken care of. The suggestion was made to get department head feedback about the best approach for monitoring and tracking independent study courses.

Barbara Kirby indicated that another important piece was that there must be supervision and evaluation of faculty and faculty administrators associated with these independent study courses. She indicated the need for a campus-wide discussion about what number of independent courses or course sections that might be appropriate for individual faculty to teach. She pointed out that UCCC will make recommendations but that what is appropriate will need additional consideration.

Continued discussion focused on how independent study courses were named and labeled. At present the diversity of names associated with independent study courses makes monitoring and oversight difficult. A proposal is in development that would create a standard course naming and numbering system to address this issue, and that proposal will be forwarded to the APC. It was also noted that independent study courses are different than special topics courses.

There was also discussion about the implications of the new policy to faculty teaching loads. The APC decided that additional thought was required and that input from department heads and undergraduate program coordinators would be valuable.

Status of this issue: Open.

Action: The APC will continue to consider these policy changes. Barbara Kirby and Catherine Freeman will return to the APC for additional discussion and may present similar information to the full Senate. Senators Aday and Fuentes will make the Executive Committee aware of these issues.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00pm

Submitted by Derek Aday