

NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY
Office of the Faculty Senate
Academic Policy Committee

October 15, 2019 Minutes

Attendance: Paul Williams (co-chair), Kerry Havner, KL Murty, Russell Finchum, Fikret Isik, Richard Kotek, Min Liu. Guest attendees: Christopher Poteat and Nikki Glenos

The Academic Policy Committee (APC) of the Faculty Senate discussed the following item:

- I. New Business
None
- II. Issues of Concern
 - a. Christopher Poteat, a graduate student in chemistry, was our first guest who came to discuss the issue of graduate student fees. Graduate student fees is an IOC raised by Prof. Jeremiah Feducia. The issue is the rising cost of student fees that produce financial hardships for many graduate students and hardships for faculty who support graduate students with grants. As fees increase the number of students a faculty member can support with his or her grants decreases since grants are not increasing to accommodate the increasing cost of supporting graduate students. Christopher discussed the results of a Google poll of graduate students in chemistry designed to catalogue the kinds of hardships increasing student fees were imposing on students. A particular problem, emphasized in Prof. Feducia's IOC, pertained to students who are just entering the graduate program for the first time. Student fees are due must be paid by August 1 but student stipend checks are not issued by the time the fees are due. Thus, many students do not have the means to pay the fees when they are due and must borrow funds to pay them or they are assessed an additional fee of \$65 -- \$100 to pay the fee on an instalment basis. Another issue is the competitiveness of graduate student stipends. As fees increase and the stipends don't keep pace; NC State loses talented graduate students to other institutions whose stipends and/or fees are more financially beneficial to students. The committee discussed courses of action. In the short-term, the committee will investigate the feasibility of delaying until mid-September, the due date for payment of fees via whatever mechanism is possible in order to relieve the pressure on first year students. The longer-term issue is the adequacy of the Graduate Student Support Plan. What options are available to increase financial support to offset the increasing fees?
 - b. The Committee's second guest, Nikki Glenos (Director of Advising Technology), addressed the IOC of faculty frustration with the GPS system purchased in 2015 and has been employed university-wide starting in 2017. Nikki explained that the GPS is a unified advising platform, which puts information about student advising in one place. GPS provides a unified note-taking platform and provides the capability to identify students in need of assistance earlier so that intervention occurs the student gets into serious academic trouble. The system facilitates the

movement of students from one academic program to another. A structural problem with advising at NC State has been the differences in local rules by programs. If a student wants to migrate from one program to another the coordination of advising can be a problem.

The particular issue of concern, which came from Professor Vincent in the History Department, was the difficulty faculty were having using the system to schedule advising sessions. There is a belief among faculty that they must use the system. However, as Nikki explained, that is not the intent. She acknowledged that there are many different advising models at NC State and that no one-size-fits-all system is the intent of GPS. Nikki emphasized that faculty who do not want to use the scheduling features do not have to do so. Whatever system they are using to arrange to meet with their advisees they may continue to use. The only feature of GPS that faculty need to employ is the note-taking feature. This feature enables the system to provide the early-warning information needed to retain students who are experiencing difficulties. As Nikki explained the professional advisors on campus utilize all of the features of the system, but faculty need only use the note-taking feature and accomplish the rest of their advising tasks with any system that works for them.

Though some committee members expressed the frustrations of having systems imposed from above, we have to acknowledge that the system is in place. The issue is how to make it work for faculty rather than work against them. The issue seems to be one of communication. There is a misperception that faculty are required to utilize all features of the system when they are not. Nikki advised us that she provides custom training on the system so perhaps those faculty frustrated with the system should have their department heads schedule a training session so she can explain to faculty what features would be beneficial to them and what features they do not need to worry about. Nikki indicated that Brett Smith is available to discuss this issue further so we will probably invite him to attend a future meeting of APC.

III. Old Business

- a. The Committee chair asked if there had been any word from Katharine Stewart on the issue raised by Professor Kuznetsov. No explicit word on the issue has been rendered, but as soon as Professor Stewart has something to tell the committee we will invite to attend a meeting of the committee to determine what we have the capability of doing to prevent situations like this in the future.

IV. Adjournment

The Committee adjourned at 4:25 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,
Paul Williams
Co-chair Academic Policy Committee