

## 69<sup>th</sup> Session of the NC State University Faculty Senate

### Report of the Academic Policy Committee

April 10, 2023

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The members of the Academic Policy Committee (APC) serving during the 68<sup>th</sup> session of the NC State University Faculty Senate were Ken Zagacki (Co-chair), Greg Tourino (Co-chair), Chris DePerno, Tushar Ghosh, Megan Jacob, Tom Koch, Roger Narayan, Michael Reiskind, Christopher Roland, and Terrell Robinson. The charge of the APC is to review policy, modify and initiate policies related to: undergraduate and graduate academic policy, regulations and reform, for both on and off-campus teaching and learning environments; faculty instructional development; faculty evaluation and assessment, teaching and advising; research; and the academic calendar. APC dealt with four Issues of Concern related to the committee charge during the 2022-23 academic year, one of which was dropped at the request of the faculty member who sent it.

- I. The Academic Policy Committee met on August 30, 2022, to address an issue of concern sent by Professor Alexander Kemper. He requested that faculty not "schedule large assignments/tests on/near election day" in order "to help our students participate in the civic process." While generally sympathetic to Professor Kemper's concern, after deliberating the APC determined the administration should not impose an "official" university policy that would require faculty to refrain from scheduling such assignments/tests near election days. However, the APC also thought it might be helpful for the administration to issue a memo, a couple of weeks before elections, to notify faculty of upcoming election days and to ask faculty to accommodate students who wish to vote if such accommodations are necessary. It was also suggested that, as part of this memo, the administration should remind faculty of early voting days and of (possible) university voting locations. (Some committee members thought that perhaps such memos had already been issued before past elections. As it turned out, nothing was issued by the upper administration prior to the 2022 fall "midterm" elections. The APC did not know if any such memos will be issued in the future. )
- II. The Academic Policy Committee met on November 8, 2022, to discuss recommendations sent by Professor Gary Comstock (Philosophy and Religious Studies) concerning DVF input on department, college, and university searches. The APC found the recommendations reasonable and suggested they be taken up by the Faculty Senate Personnel Committee and perhaps the entire Faculty Senate. However, soon after the APC's deliberation, Professor Comstock asked that his issue of concern and his recommendations be tabled so that he and his colleagues could discuss the matter with CHASS faculty and administrators. I, therefore, asked Faculty Senate Chair McGowan to stop the review, which she did. The Faculty Senate has not been asked to take any further action on Professor Comstock's recommendation. But the issue of ranking candidates by search committees, which Professor Comstock recommended, did arise during a later Faculty Senate meeting. In my capacity as a

Faculty Senator and Co-Chair of the APC, I asked the Provost to address the question. He did so but showed no inclination to make ranked candidate preferences a standard part of future search committee deliberations.

- III. The Academic Policy Committee met on January 17, 2023, to discuss an issue of concern raised by two faculty who said they were increasingly frustrated with the administration's revised and last-minute changes to the university attendance and absence policy. The faculty members perceived the messages sent about this policy, along with the policy itself, as deeply problematic. The late nature of the new policy instructions coming down notwithstanding, these faculty were particularly troubled by potential disclosure issues and actual disruptions caused by the new policy. One faculty member questioned the practice of "requiring students to divulge their health and mental information to the instructor that are mitigated by using an absence verification officer." This faculty member also worried about the faculty's lack of training in identifying mental health issues. The other faculty member claimed the new policy was so disruptive that it could only be described as "a real debacle." The APC discussed these issues and found the faculty members' concerns valid. It charged the committee co-chairs with drafting a memo, the final draft of which was to be shared with the Faculty Senate. The memo, which appears at the end of this report, posed a number of questions to the university administration. The APC did not receive notice of whether the memo was ever distributed to the Faculty Senate (to my recollection, it was not read during any Faculty Senate meeting) or to the concerned faculty members. However, the Provost publicly announced to the university community his desire to work with the APC to revise the said policy. Hence, we assume he was alerted to the presence of our memo and its queries.
- IV. On February 9, 2023, I circulated by email an issue of concern sent by Charles Clift (Assistant Vice-Provost and University Registrar) about problems associated with the scheduling of Wellness Days. I asked for (email) feedback from the APC and received a message from one committee member, who reported the concerns expressed by a faculty member in his unit. These included issues with how Wellness Day scheduling had negatively impacted "rehearsal engagement, student morale, and concert preparation." This faculty member also wondered whether any evidence had been gathered to illustrate the effectiveness of Wellness Days and whether future Wellness Days might be scheduled on a Monday, Wednesday, or Friday. I sent these and other concerns raised by the APC to Chair McGowan and Charles Clift.

### **APC Memo to University Administration Concerning Attendance/Absence Policy**

*The Academic Policy Committee met on Tuesday, Jan 17, to discuss an issue of concern raised by two faculty who reported being increasingly frustrated with the administration's revised and last-minute changes to the university attendance and absence policy. Faculty were especially concerned with that part of the policy no longer requiring students to provide documentation for excused absences. The faculty perceived the messages sent about this policy, along with the policy itself, as deeply problematic. The late nature of the policy instructions coming down notwithstanding, the faculty were mostly bothered by potential disclosure issues and actual disruptions caused by the new policy. One faculty member worried about the potential problems inherent in "requiring students to divulge their health and mental information to the instructor that are mitigated by using an absence verification officer," and the fact that faculty "are not*

*trained, equipped, or capable of identifying mental health issues in students and asking us to do this is a disservice to the student." The other faculty member claimed that the new policy was extremely disruptive and borderline disastrous. Both faculty hoped that, at the very least, their concerns could be aired at an upcoming Faculty Meeting so that the university administration would better understand the severely troublesome nature of the late policy change.*

*The general sense of the APC was that, for these faculty, the new policy places additional stressors and responsibilities on faculty already heavily burdened in the classroom. The APC, after deliberating, found the faculty members' concerns to be valid.*

*In light of the faculty members' concerns, the APC would like to raise a number of questions pertaining to the new policy, which it hopes the University administration will entertain and to which it will provide a quick response:*

- 1. Is this, in fact, a newly established policy or merely a suggestion or set of guidelines for how faculty should address student absences while the university community is dealing with student mental health issues?*
- 2. Can the administration provide additional guidance concerning how faculty are to move forward with the policy?*
- 3. Does the policy reflect a single term way of dealing with the problem of student mental health as it relates to classroom activity and attendance? Or does the policy represent a more ongoing and perhaps longer term effort that will completely change how faculty address student absences in general?*
- 4. Will students be notified about the new policy as it was described to faculty in the letter from the Provost's office?*
- 5. Might addressing student absences be best left to the faculty who teach them?*

*Any additional information or clarification the University administration can provide would be greatly appreciated and will help to reduce the current level of confusion and frustration that some faculty are experiencing with how the new policy was introduced and is presently being implemented.*

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