MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Attendees:

Sam Hardy, Chair        Barry Thompson, Vice Chair        Cathy Slade, Senate Liaison
Ric Topolski            Tom Crute                                  Tamara McKethan
Sajitha Kalathingal (Via Webex)

Sam Hardy called the meeting to order at 12:00 PM.

The minutes of the November 5, 2014 meeting were approved as distributed.

Sam Hardy called the members attention to the correspondence from Scotty Scott dated November 24, 2014 concerning paid parental leave and including articles from the Atlanta Journal Constitution and the Huffington Post on the topic. The Committee discussed: 1) paid versus unpaid but guaranteed parental leave; 2) that currently the University System of Georgia (USG) is apparently in compliance with minimal standards of the Family Medical Leave Act of 1993; and 3) that previous requests to consider paid parental leave had been made to the USG but denied due to budgetary constraints. The Committee discussed whether a recommendation for paid parental leave should be sent to the Faculty Senate and agreed not to pursue the issue at this time due to current budgetary constraints.

The Committee discussed the Academic Rights and Responsibilities Policy Statement that had been forwarded to the FRRC for comment by Carol Rychly. Sam noted that the Committee had been given 14 days to respond, with the deadline of Wednesday, January 21st. The Committee agreed in principle with the idea of academic freedom of faculty in teaching and scholarship and that academic freedom should be protected. It was also agreed that faculty should in general be unencumbered to use the best teaching methods available.

First, the Committee discussed the likely origins of the new policy statement, including student complaints about teachers taking strong political stances during class time. It was noted that teachers being somewhat provocative in their statements can be considered a method for encouraging critical thinking. It was acknowledged that students have access to academic appeals and thus this policy should be definitive enough to support an appeals process.

Second, the Committee discussed some of the mechanisms that might be used in an appeal process, including student surveys and peer evaluation of teaching and they generally agreed that the lack of precision in the language in the policy statement would contribute little to a specific appeal because many of the statements can be arbitrarily interpreted.

Third, the Committee discussed some examples of the vague language in the draft as follows:

- The statement “faculty are entitled to full freedom in research” is a powerful and comprehensive statement that likely has associated caveats, for example professional or discipline standards. For example for human subjects research, the university Institutional Review Board(s) can place limits on research. In addition there are laws and regulations
that research freedom is subordinate to as well. It is important to clarify this language especially since the presence of contradictions (i.e. faculty have full freedom and research, yet their work is subordinate to public and institutional policies) can draw lawsuits.

- It should be noted and faculty freedom of research and freedom in the classroom are tempered with faculty responsibility for consequences that can affect the university such as loss of accreditation, certification, designation, and funding. Though more difficult to enforce, the Committee also acknowledged that harm to the university’s reputation is also a potential negative consequence of faculty action.
- Concerning the statement, “Faculty are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject, but they should be careful not to introduce into their teaching controversial or other matter which has no relation to their subject”, who determines whether topics are related or unrelated to the teacher’s subject and teaching intent?
- In several places in the document “academic standards” are mentioned. This was thought too vague since many other standards apply such as those related to profession, accrediting body, university, college and department.
- The idea of professional standards is even challenging since in some cases accrediting bodies may have contradictory standards.
- In section #3, the statement that faculty at all times should be accurate in their statement is vague. It should be noted that faculty positions, unless stated as opinion, should be supported by empirical data, though data can be used to support several sides to an argument. On the same topic, faculty may disclaim that they are speaking for the university, however, this is difficult to manage when there is media coverage (the media could leave out the disclaimer). Thus this is difficult to enforce.

The Committee acknowledged that representation at the meeting was low and therefore more Committee member input should be sought. It was agreed that the minutes would be drafted and sent to the entire Committee soliciting electronic feedback and comments that can be used to craft a response to Vice President Rychly. Sam agreed to send an email to Dr. Rychly requesting an extension for the Committee’s response to Monday January 26th.

*Secretary’s Note: The request was drafted, shared with members Crute, Topolski and Slade for editing and then sent to Dr. Rychly. Dr. Rychly confirmed via email that January 26th would be acceptable for Committee comments. She commented, “So granted. Thank you for your careful review of the policy.”*

Sam reported that there had been no feedback from Andy Mazzoli on the Work Group for the Faculty Manual. Sam noted that he had received an email from Scotty Scott, the chair of the Work Group earlier in the day and that he would report any relevant news on the Faculty Manual development to the Committee.

After discussing the best day and time to meet, the Committee agreed to tentatively schedule the next meeting for Wednesday, February 25th at noon.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 1:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

*Cathy Slade*