

MVCC Senate Faculty Caucus
Tuesday, October 27, 2015 Minutes
2:00pm :: PH300

Present: C. Miller (chair), J. Baumann, C. Bolton, J. Brown, E. Bush, L. Charbonneau, N. Chrisman, A. Doughtie, A. Haines, D. Kelly, R. Mink, A. Radlowski, J. Roberts, N. Rosero, R. Shulman, R. Thomas, T. Thomas
Guest: K. Merrill

Opening & Minutes

The meeting was called to order, and the minutes of the Sept. 22nd meeting were approved.

Chair Remarks

Christine Miller stated that she will meet periodically with VPLAA Eannace to discuss pertinent issues raised during Faculty Caucus.

As an update on the FCCC memorandum on the Emerging Trends in Education and Campus Governance, it was reported that D. Kelly, R. Labuz, and C. Miller are on the Emerging Trends listserve. Since our last meeting, Tina Goode had requested a list of our top 3 or 4 emerging trends, with a deadline before this meeting. The trends we sent were **1.** Performance Based Funding, **2.** Competency Based Education, **3.** Applied Learning, and **4.** Seamless Transfer. This last trend is already in progress (so not “emerging”), but is still important. Tina Goode will amass the emerging trends from across the colleges for further discussion.

Although it seems most issues with the bookstore have been addressed, the chair asked if there was anything else to discuss on this matter. A discussion did follow, revealing concerns that the changeover happened quite suddenly, and the question was asked whether the Facilities Committee had been contacted before the decision was made. Some were also surprised that T. Squires was surprised (albeit pleasantly) by faculty involvement in book prices and other bookstore matters. The discussion then turned to book order deadlines, which was on the agenda for later in the meeting, and so the conversation on that issue was paused for a moment.

Rome Furniture Revisit

Kristen Merrill showed the new furniture for the Rome campus. She noted that they do come with casters, and that the top of the podium will incline. The assumption is that this furniture will also become the “new standard” on the Utica Campus, although it’s uncertain what roll-out in Utica will be like, if at all. It is likely that the furniture will be installed in Rome in the summer. It was requested that Rich Pucine & Tom Squires discuss classroom furniture changes with faculty before they happen.

Academic Freedom Policy Statement

D. Kelly commented that the committee revising the Academic Freedom Policy is nearing a finished draft, although the full statement isn’t yet completed. They do believe that the

existing Board of Trustees Statement needs to be updated, and are considering adopting the SUNY policy or a revised version. A current concern with the SUNY policy, for example, is that it refers specifically to the classroom, but academic freedom should extend beyond the classroom (for example, if one is speaking at a conference). In an effort to create a clear and concise statement, there will be a longer rationale document written to support the Statement. The Bill of Academic Rights will be included as part of the supporting documents and the Employee Handbook will need to be updated. The protection of the right to assessment will be preserved.

J. Brown also gave a brief history of the Academic Freedom Statement for context, indicating that it was initially written in conjunction with the Student Academic Complaint Policy, in which a procedure for students who had complaints was being written, and so a statement about student rights was needed. It followed that a statement about faculty rights was also needed. This was not created in a response to faculty request, but more about what faculty were already doing.

Book Order Deadlines

Picking up from the conversation earlier in the meeting, there was significant discussion over the timeline and process for requesting books. There seemed to be a general assumption that the book order deadline is in response to a state law, which indicates that students need to see how much their books will be when they enroll in classes. However, the finer details of the law were unknown by those present. Questions that were raised included: **1.** Did we violate that law when the bookstore changed ownership, since book prices changed? **2.** Is the bookstore deadline the same as the law's deadline? **3.** How does this mesh with our current advisement process? C. Miller will contact the bookstore to get more information.

There was an additional concern that some faculty schedules were not yet finalized by the book order deadline, and how can book requests be submitted without knowing the courses being taught? The deans can't simply "rollover" book orders, since faculty could change the materials used in their classes semesterly if desired. It was stressed that faculty need their schedules before the book order deadlines so that we're realistically able to meet them.

It was also revealed that there are differences in how requests are submitted. For example, some faculty submit their requests electronically while others use paper forms. Some submit their requests to their center office while others submit them directly to the bookstore. Some disciplines (such as math or the sciences) use a common text across sections, while others (such as English) vary from section to section based on instructor preference.

A general consensus as a result of the discussion is that better communication among the bookstore, deans, and faculty is needed.

Copiers

At the beginning of the semester there were numerous issues, although hopefully they have now been resolved. There were three remaining concerns: **1.** There was a rumor about a low

number of repair people in the state. Could this be confirmed or disproved? **2.** At an earlier Caucus meeting it was mentioned that being able to email jobs bumped people at the copier out of their current job. Is this still a problem? **3.** Access to the copier in the STEM office is limited, especially before/after hours. It is inconvenient, and should be accessible to all faculty. D. Kelly stated that he could raise this concern at Senate next week.

Trigger Warnings

This issue was brought to Faculty Caucus by D. Kelly and R. Labuz, and concerns situations when there is content in a class containing subjects that can trigger a negative response in students. It was mentioned that another college has passed a resolution essentially indicating that a request to be excused from a class in which there is controversial material being discussed does not excuse them from the material/assignment. C. Miller also sent an article about trigger warnings via email prior to this meeting.

This is a new face of a long-standing concern, and present faculty shared stories of students walking out of a class or film that was about a controversial topic, as well as students who refused to complete assignments about those topics. Different methods of handling these situations were also discussed. For example: including a statement in your syllabus that controversial topics will be discussed in your class; a discussion with students about needing to come out of your comfort zone in order to learn; not showing war films in classes in which there are veteran students (unless they give the OK); offering a non-objectional alternative, if possible.

Much discussion was had over academic freedom in conjunction with controversial topics, as well as the fact that exposure to controversial issues is a key part of learning and the college experience. However, there is a difference between students who walk out of class because of political/religious views and those who walk out of class due to PTSD and other anxiety disorders. There is a concern about pandering to students, but wanting to be sensitive to their needs. Other questions and concerns that came out of the discussion include: How do we balance this with the growing number of medicated students and students with anxiety/mental health disorders? What is the role of the disabilities office? counselors? faculty? student services? An official policy will limit class far too much, as it will need to vary from course to course. Do the rights of one student outweigh the rights of the rest of the class? Do we have an obligation to provide trigger warnings for assignments?

Anyone with information about trigger warnings was encouraged to pass it along, and it was suggested that this could be a topic of conversation at the Summer Institute.

Adjournment

The meeting was then adjourned by general consensus.

Respectfully submitted,
Anna Radlowski