FACULTY SENATE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of November 19, 1997 (approved)

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The Faculty Senate Executive Committee met in 567 Capen Hall at 2:00 PM on November 5, 1997 to consider the following agenda:

1. Report of the Chair
2. Report of the University Committee on Tolerance and Diversity
3. Update on DARS
4. Report of the Provost (Executive Session)
5. Charging the Committee on Teaching and Learning
6. Charging the Governance Committee
7. Executive Session

Item 1: Report of the Chair

The Chair solicited nominations for the Alcohol Review Board; Professor Adams, who has served on the Board for several years, will not be able to attend the meetings due to a schedule conflict.

He circulated a resolution on the New Paltz issue, and asked the FSEC whether to refer it to the Academic Freedom Committee before discussion in the full Faculty Senate on December 10. Professor Faran reminded the FSEC that the Chancellor had made a statement that he would deal with this issue, and thus it might not be appropriate for the Senate to act in this matter. The Committee voted 10-0-0 to refer the resolution to the Academic Freedom Committee.

Professor Gates, Chair of the Budget Priorities Committee, had drafted a document on the budget processes at UB; Professor Nickerson asked the members of the FSEC to review it and submit any comments for suggestions and changes. In addition, the Chair announced that the Budget Workshop will be re-scheduled, the availability of Senior Vice-President Wagner being the crucial factor.

The University Bookstore Committee met yesterday to discuss the South Campus bookstore and its returning to that campus. A survey it had conducted indicated that the respondents wanted a variety of services, most important of which is access to Post Office facilities.

Senior Vice-Provost Levy asked for input for a proposed name change: The Department of Educational Organization, Administration and Policy would like to change its name to the *Department of Educational Leadership and Policy*. The proposed change already has the approval of the Department and the dean, and describes the teaching and research of the faculty. The FSEC voiced no objections.

Item 2: Report of the University Committee on Tolerance and Diversity

Associate Vice-President Rice recalled that former UB President Sample had established a Task Force on Intolerance; one of its recommendations which had been carried out was the creation of a permanent committee, which has been meeting since 1993. Its charge was to come up with initiatives on educating the University community on diversity. This committee of 30 members has been meeting on the second Wednesday of every month through 1996-1997. One of its main goals this past year has been to involve the faculty more in the Committee's activities, and to this end it had conducted a panel discussion, "A Seat at the Table", with a wide variety of groups represented to discuss the issues confronting us.

The Committee had developed a video, "Celebrating Diversity", which was presented at Freshman Orientation; the video was especially designed for students from small places, who had never encountered anyone outside their towns, and who are away from home for the first time. In contrast to other videos on diversity, which focus on the problems of a university, this one is more positive in its approach; in it, the President encourages students that, no matter where they come from, if they make the effort, they can use diversity as a tool to enhance their educational experience.

The Committee had also created a Public Relations subcommittee to increase public awareness that this Committee exists; to this end, it is having T-shirts and hats made for the students to wear, as well as hanging posters celebrating student diversity. It is also planning a multi-cultural conference this coming Spring semester, and developing a film series, including "Skin Deep", "Stolen Ground"

(from an Asian perspective), "Blue Eyes", "Early October", "Shattering the Silence", and "Blacks and Jews".

Professor Welch, noting the recent controversy over a poll taken about Asians and Asian-Americans, asked for her assessment of the attitudes revealed in letters published in the student newspaper. He wondered whether all the discussion would prove salutary in overcoming prevailing stereotypes, or detrimental in reinforcing them. Dr. Rice responded that she is optimistic. She observed that most people are normally not interested in diversity unless something happens; the poll and reactions to it did raise student and faculty consciousness of cultural differences.

Professor Baier wondered if the Committee's efforts could also help us overcome the segregation between graduate and undergraduate students. Dr. Rice replied that the Cultural Pluralism classes have proven beneficial, and welcomed any suggestions for increasing faculty involvement Mr. Hod, Representative of the Student Association, asked what more can be done to improve student involvement; Vice-President Rice responded that her Committee had recently established a subcommittee on Student Concerns, to be chaired by Michael Stokes; it plans to conduct another poll, the results of which will be used to start discussion in an open forum on December 5 in the Student Union.

Future plans include a "Celebration of Diversity Day", which will culminate with a speech by Retired Armed Forces Chief of Staff Colin Powell.

Item 3: Update on DARS

Vice-Provost Goodman briefly summarized the **Degree Audit Reporting System**(DARS) program as enormous and complex, one which accesses student transcripts and determines which requirements have been fulfilled and which remain. Articulation poses a difficult problem for DARS, particularly at this institution because UB has such a huge number of transfer students.

He noted that the program is run once each semester, after which reports are sent to the students. These reports, which are becoming increasingly central to student advising, are often deficient in certain respects; he noted that any program this large, in such a large and complex institution, is

bound to have problems. For example, there are bugs in the program, which do not acknowledge some of the thousands of exceptions sent in by faculty. Also, although DARS does not allow students to have duplicate credit, the Student Information System (SIS) does; efforts are underway to make SIS accept data from DARS. It also happens sometimes that students think they had received credit for a certain course, but then find out that that course had been articulated otherwise, e.g., for some other area requirement.

Professor Cowen added that, not only is DARS an enormous program, it is "really an enormous, complex programming language that is optimized to deal with student information", thus giving rise to several levels of problems --- with the program itself, as well as with the many department-specific programming requirements. The program is being continually de-bugged by running through it all the student data every semester; although it is unclear whether DARS will ever be 100% accurate, it is presently "95% correct most of the time". Despite its problems, it is "infinitely better" than what we previously used.

Professor Jameson said we owe it to our students to give them a clear sense of how the courses they had taken elsewhere have been articulated, what credit they do or do not receive, and what courses / how many credits have yet to be taken. Vice-Provost Goodman admitted that there were some problematic cases, and agreed that we ought not to "change the rules" after a student enrolls; nevertheless, one must recognize that no other institution using DARS has the complexity and magnitude of our articulation problems. Professor Jameson requested that, before the Vice-Provost and his staff reach any policy decision on what to do about duplicated work, the Directors of Undergraduate Studies be consulted.

Citing specific cases in which DARS reports were not updated after one year, Professor Welch suspected that one additional problem might be that of insufficient staffing to process the reports and all exception forms. He added that the changes and substitutions proposed by a faculty advisor should be accepted generally without question, and urged that these changes be entered into DARS as rapidly as possible. Professor Cowen commented that, no matter how rapidly they are processed, there will always be problems; he reminded the FSEC that, ultimately, it is not DARS that allows a student to graduate, but rather a person.

Professor Meacham noted that students seemed to complain most about the delay in receiving credit for courses they had taken; Professor Schuel suggested that, if there is indeed a problem of delay, perhaps the advisors could enter the data directly. Vice-Provost Goodman said he is quite sure that there is not a data entry problem, but rather some bug in the program. Professor Cowen added that, even with an updated version of DARS (with built-in security checks) which will eventually allow direct data entry, this would still not solve the problems in processing the data.

Item 4: Report of the Provost (Executive Session)

Item 5: Charging the Committee on Teaching and Learning

Discussion centered on student evaluations of instructors and the extent to which students should have access to the evaluations, and more particularly to the students'*comments* in them.

Professor Schroeder felt strongly that it is inappropriate to use information collected for one purpose for other purposes as well, and was generally not in favor of extending student access to the evaluations; he believed that students' verbatim comments ---- because they are highly unreliable --- should be available only to the instructor. Furthermore, it is important that the data be released not only in absolute terms, but in relative terms as well. Dr. Smith concurred, noting that there is an underlying assumption of a uniform standard in the evaluations from one unit to another, which is not the case; the comments should not be made public, since this "invites abuse of the most terrible kind". Professor Meacham agreed, commenting that not only is there no standard evaluation among the units, but that it is virtually impossible to devise one.

Professor Welch distinguished two different purposes of the evaluations, namely, for evaluating instruction and for summing up an instructor's performance for considerations for promotion; the two are unfortunately too often mixed. He suggested that faculty might administer mid-term evaluations, or even different, more personalized evaluations distinct from the others. He noted also that the comments from students often depend on the forms used. He added that we need to re-examine the norms established in 1991 for evaluation percentiles, since these do not take into account several variables, such as type of instruction, size of the class, or whether the course is required or not. Professor Meacham commented that the computer program used for the evaluations has the capability

to discriminate and incorporate this information, and can be updated every semester; they simply have not been utilized.

Professor Churchill noted that the numerical evaluations for instructors tend to fall in the middle; as for the students' comments, it generally holds that only about 25% -- and at most 50% -- of the students offer any written comments at all. Dr. Smith noted that various factors -- such as timing, i.e., *when* the evaluations are given, can skew the results considerably. One problem is that our evaluations try to accomplish too many things; instead, we should design them to be more consistent with a well-defined purpose. This is especially important, he concluded, in view of the plans for future assessment of how well departments and faculty fulfill their stated missions and goals.

Item 6: Charging the Governance Committee

Professor Albini, Chair of the Governance Committee, told the FSEC he strongly favored as the primary charge the development of procedural guidelines to be followed for any proposed changes in the University; he added that several Senators have stated such guidelines would be very welcome. The present academic year offers a window of opportunity to discuss and develop these guidelines in a "neutral atmosphere", in which no active item (such as the debate over a College of Arts & Sciences) is under discussion.

As a secondary charge, he proposed that the Governance Committee reconsider how to enhance communication between the Faculty Senate and the rest of the UB faculty; he had always regarded as a major impediment the difficulty Senators have in communicating to their constituents, and thought that the developments in computerized technology should facilitate improvements.

In response to a question about procedural guidelines for the formation of a College of Arts & Sciences, Professor Albini replied that the guidelines the Committee is developing and proposing provide not only for reviewing proposed changes, but also for keeping track of any changes that have already occurred; armed with such record-keeping, it should be possible to better evaluate any re-organizations before they occur.

The FSEC agreed with the proposed charges.

The public session of the meeting was adjourned at 4:00 PM, after which the FSEC convened an executive session for other matters.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert G. Hoeing

Secretary of the Faculty Senate

Present: Chair: Peter A. Nickerson

Secretary: Robert G. Hoeing

Architecture & Planning: Sherri Wallace

Dental Medicine: Robert Baier

Engineering & Applied Sciences: Ramalingam Sridhar

Graduate School of Education: Thomas Schroeder

Health-Related Professions: Judith Tamburlin

Information & Library Studies: George D'Elia

Management: Ramaswamy Ramesh

Medicine & Biomedical Sciences: Boris Albini, Cedric Smith

Natural Sciences & Mathematics: Melvyn Churchill, James Faran

Nursing: Powhatan Wooldridge

Pharmacy: Nathan

Social Sciences: Jack Meacham

SUNY Senators: John Fisher, Maureen Jameson, Dennis Malone, Claude Welch

University Libraries: Marilyn Kramer

<u>**Guests**</u>*:* Donna Rice, Associate Vice-President

Nicolas Goodman, Vice-Provost for Undergraduate Education

Michael Cowen, Faculty Representative of the DARS Committee, and

Chair, Student Services Committee

Christopher S. Connelly (*Special Interest Housing, Pre-Professional*)

Kevin McCue (*Graduate Student Association*)

Yotam Hod (*Student Association*)

Sue Wuetcher (*The Reporter*)

<u>**Absent**</u>**: Arts & Letters:** Martha Hyde

Medicine & Biomedical Sciences: Ronald Batt, Herbert Schuel