

FACULTY SENATE

Minutes of April 6, 1999 - (approved)

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The Faculty Senate met at 2:00 PM on April 6, 1999 in Room 330 of the Student Union to consider the following agenda:

1. Second reading of No Confidence in the Board of Trustees

2. First reading of Resolution on Undergraduate Independent Study

Item 1: Second reading of No Confidence in the Board of Trustees

President Greiner began the discussion of the proposed SUNY Senate/UUP Statement of No Confidence in the SUNY Board of Trustees speaking both as a member of the UB Faculty Senate and as President of the University. First he suggested that as a matter of process before passing an expression of no confidence, the UB Faculty Senate should communicate its concerns directly to the Board and the Chancellor. The New Paltz affair and the manner in which the Board adopted the General Education curriculum are issues about which the Faculty Senate has expressed deep concerns. Those concerns should be shared with the Board and the Chancellor, who should then be given time to respond.

Second, he suggested that the UB Faculty Senate should express only its own concerns. In particular the Statement lists as one of the Board's failures of responsibility its attempt to remove the State University of New York's teaching hospitals from the University. The President believes that is an issue on which reasonable people can and do differ. UB has managed without owning a public hospital, and the Board is looking at a model closer to ours for the other medical schools. It would be unwise for UB to express no confidence based on this issue. Furthermore, this issue is a matter of collective bargaining which in the past the UB Faculty Senate has been careful to avoid. Additionally SUNY has before it very serious fiscal issues arising from the hospitals. Colleagues in SUNY Central Administration are working very hard to find a solution based on SUNY wide considerations. They will

see action taken on the basis of this issue as hostile and ill informed. The President concluded by saying that he spoke to the UB Faculty Senate as a matter of conscience and expected that Senators would vote their consciences.

At the March 23rd Senate meeting, the Chair was asked to find out what actions were planned to follow-up on the Statement. The Chair contacted both the SUNY Senate and the UUP Presidents. President Aceto responded that it was important that all SUNY campuses endorse the same statement. He and President Scheuerman will ask leaders of both Houses to pressure Governor Pataki to make changes in the leadership and membership of the Board. They will try to convince the Legislative leadership that the Board's actions are destroying SUNY. President Scheuerman responded that no firm strategy had been planned beyond the April 20, 1999 press conference. The idea is to let momentum build and then decide what to do.

Other SUNY institutions have passed the resolution. Stony Brook and Albany passed it unanimously; Empire State and a number of other Colleges have also passed it.

The resolution was moved (seconded). The Chair then asked the SUNY Senators to comment:

- Statement is a joint product of SUNY Senate and the UUP Executive Board and much of the language is derived from UUP; because UB lacks a hospital we have little standing on that issue; SUNY and UUP feel the Statement needs as much support as possible, but we should vote our consciences; in my opinion the actions of the Trustees have diminished SUNY; the Board's refusal to allow SUNY Senate's representative to speak before its vote on the General Education curriculum was unconscionable; the President suggested that we present our concerns to the Board before voting no confidence, but SUNY Senate did that and was ignored (Professor Malone)
- the Board has done damage to SUNY and it is time to take a brave stand against the Board; the President may believe that the Governor will reward us for not endorsing the statement of no confidence, but we will be in a precarious position with our SUNY colleagues; we may lack a hospital and therefore perhaps standing on the hospital issue, but the statement speaks to the impact on the health care of New Yorkers of removing hospitals and clinics from the University and we should care about that; should support the statement to ensure SUNY's future (Professor Adams-Volpe)

- am speaking as a Senator and a physician; removal of the teaching hospitals from the University will destroy them as centers of medical excellence and jeopardize their mission of teaching medical students and physicians; some staff will lose jobs and those that remain will be without union protection; technology in the hospitals will suffer; question whether state funding for UB's affiliated teaching hospitals might also be eliminated; need a conference of the University hospitals to develop a five year plan; should go to Albany *en masse* on April 20 (Professor Fisher)

Noting that this is the first joint venture of the SUNY Senate and UUP, the Chair asked Jean Dickson, UB UUP Chapter President, to speak. She stated that this joint venture is possible because the actions of the Trustees have both academic and collective bargaining implications. The actions of the Trustees have been disgraceful; for example, they have been conducting closed business meetings in violation of rules. It is urgent to do something about the Trustees.

The Chair invited further discussion:

- am concerned that not every avenue of communication with the Board has been explored; UB's affiliated teaching hospitals are funded through the Graduate Medical Education Act which is not an issue here; many universities are examining the wisdom of having their own hospitals so shouldn't condemn the Trustees for doing what others are doing (Professor Yates)
- my colleagues are talking about the Board of Distrustees; it has not been a blessing to operate without our own hospital, and it won't be a benefit to lose the existing University hospitals (Professor Albini)
- critics must answer the questions of how to deal with a \$100 M shortfall in the teaching hospitals' operations and whether we are prepared to contribute \$15 M out of next year's operating budget as UB's share of the deficit; the only item which can support is the Board's failure to follow its own procedures and policies (Professor Baumer)

Professor Baumer moved to strike the first five bulleted particulars from page 3 of the Joint Statement of UUP and Faculty Senate, leaving only two bulleted particulars. The motion failed for lack of a second.

- am also uncomfortable with the language about the hospitals but it's not worthwhile to amend the language which can be parsed as focusing on the disruption of their public mission of health care delivery; this is the time to make a statement (Professor Harwitz)
- Roswell Park just became a public benefit corporation to survive; the arcane rules of the state bureaucracy prevent the hospitals from responding to the rapid changes in health care delivery; care for indigent patients will not be affected by the change in hospital status (Professor Yates)

Professor Boot called the question. By resounding voice vote, the motion carried.

Item 2: First reading of Resolution on Undergraduate Independent Study

Professor Meacham introduced the report of the Educational Programs and Policies Committee. The Committee is concerned that the potential exists for some undergraduates to abuse Independent Study by enrolling in an excessive number of credits for which it may be relatively easy to earn A's. The Committee reviewed selected transcripts of students who had taken 30/50 credits of Independent Study for which they typically received A's. Some of these students graduated cum laude on the strength of these credits although their other course work fell in the B-/C+ range. These students were no more common in one department than another; a typical pattern was to take Independent Studies from various departments. Many departments limit the number of Independent Study credits that count toward the major. The Committee is recommending a University policy to limit the total number of credits taken as Independent Study that may be counted toward the 120 credit graduation requirement and an even tighter limit on the number which can be taken for letter grades. It would be more desirable to monitor what students are actually doing, but that would be an enormous task given the number of students and faculty participating in Independent Study across a range of disciplines and expectations.

The Committee is recommending three provisions which are the heart of its report:

1. (item 4) that no more than 18 credits of Tutorial course work count towards a bachelor's degree

2. (item 5) that no more than 12 letter graded credits of Tutorial course work count towards a bachelor's degree

3. (item 6) that students be permitted to petition for permission to have more than 18 credits of Tutorial course work and/or more than 12 letter graded credits count towards a bachelor's degree

The 18 credit limitation is based on two factors. First it is a compromise of the various limits favored by Committee members; second it allows a student to take three credits of Independent Study each semester after the freshman year. The 12 letter graded credit limitation is also a compromise figure between no letter graded credits to all letter graded credits. The limit on letter graded credits will remove some temptation to load up on courses which typically are graded A. Recognizing the value of Independent Study, especially in a research institution, the Committee would allow more credits to count if a description of the proposed course work, the student activities and the relationship between hours of student activity and instruction and hours of credit to be awarded is submitted.

There were questions from the floor:

- easy A's can occur in any course, not just Tutorials; whatever the number of Tutorials that may be taken, they should all be able to be taken for letter grades; the rationale for 18 credits seems reasonable, especially considering that 30 hours of Independent Study can be taken at the graduate level (Professor Sridhar)
- what is the rationale for lifting the restriction on the number of Independent Studies a faculty member may supervise each semester? seems that would result in looser supervision of Independent Studies (Professor Harwitz)
- this rule has not been enforced and it is not clear how it could be enforced; in some disciplines it may be reasonable for a faculty member to have larger numbers of students doing Independent Studies (Professor Meacham)
- resolution only addresses one side of the problem; it's not just the student who is abusing Independent Study, but the slack faculty member who signs off on a course without doing much work; the role of the faculty

member in Independent Study should be defined more clearly, including the issue of receiving course equivalency for teaching Independent Studies (Professor Wickert)

- the matter of receiving course equivalency credit should be negotiated with the Department Chair; a summary of SUNY and UB Policies on Contact Hour/Credit Hour Relationship from which equivalency can be calculated is appended to the Committee's report (Professor Meacham)
- uncomfortable with the grade inflation argument; students in Independent Study are self-selected, are working on a project that they designed and are at their peak, so a large number of A's should be expected; there may be structural reasons, i.e., unavailability of courses, that cause students to take disproportionate number of Independent Studies, so limiting Independent Study could delay graduation (Professor Frisch)
- looked at 15/20 transcripts provided by the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education; the pattern was of low grades in regular courses, so these are not the better students being recruited into Independent Study; don't believe it is a structural problem; in fact, this is a minor issue, but we're attempting to close the door before it becomes a bigger problem (Professor Meacham)
- consider retaining the 3 student rule for adjunct faculty, who may be responsible for some of the easy A's; my experience is that students who want to do Independent Study are at the top of the heap (Professor Baumer)
- there are two types of students who want Independent Study, the really good students and the students who just want to graduate on time; consider some provision for looking at Independent Study in a student's last semester; the lack of a formal mechanism for a faculty member to receive credit for teaching Independent Study is a problem since some Department Chairs are not willing to negotiate the matter (Professor Boot)
- need to do a real study on how many students take an excessive number of Independent Studies; 15/20 transcripts doesn't prove a problem when the freshmen class is 3,000; the limitation of faculty to 3 Independent Studies each semester would seem to reflect a concern that faculty might be irresponsible in supervising Independent Studies; by removing that limitation, the Committee is saying that faculty aren't irresponsible, however, imposing a lower limit on letter graded Independent Studies that may count toward graduation seems to reflect the belief that faculty will be irresponsible in grading; need a pair of consistent rules (Professor Schack)
- the right of a student to petition for the suspension of a rule is already recognized, so no need for the petitioning provision; am uncomfortable with allowing a student to expand the 12 credit limit on letter graded Independent Study by petition, though expanding the total number of credits beyond 18 is fine (Professor Pegels)

- the report refers to a 120 credit requirement for graduation, but in some areas the graduation requirements are higher; if an Independent Study is taken in lieu of a course that isn't offered, it might be useful to show on the transcript that the Independent Study was the equivalent of a course; in a joint bachelor's/master's program, would the limit be increased to allow for the graduate quota of Independent Studies? (Professor Malone)
- a program director could request raising the limits on Independent Studies for an entire program; the rule of no more than 3 Independent Studies may have been created to shield faculty from pressure from Chairs to take on more students in addition to a regular teaching load (Professor Meacham)
- limiting the number of Independent Studies that may count towards graduation sends the wrong message to the bright, creative students we want to recruit; a petition to waive the limitation should be handled at the departmental level rather than being sent to the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education (Professor Frisch)
- the abusive student typically takes courses in several departments, so central review would be more effective; it may not be possible to easily get data demonstrating the problem of abusive students; the hallmark is neither large numbers of Independent Studies nor high grades, but rather a pattern in which high grades are earned only in Independent Studies (Professor Meacham)
- likely that the Office of the Provost for Undergraduate Education has already done the research since they were able to provide the Committee with relevant transcripts; if the problem is a small one, may not want to inconvenience a large number of students to solve it (Professor Schack)
- consider adding a title descriptive of the content of an Independent Study to the student's transcript so there is some record of what the student did (Professor Wickert)
- worried about having one solution when Independent Study covers so many different models of course work and students; for example, the Independent Study given in lieu of a regular course probably does not result in all A's while an Independent Study that is used as cheap labor probably requires only that the student show up regularly; not all students earn consistent levels of grades, so it could be that a student who gets mediocre grades in regular courses might do well in a self-structured course (Professor Segal)
- good to remove the limitation of three Independent Studies per faculty member; in Engineering frequently set up projects that require more than three students to complete

- since we are concerned only about mediocre students taking a large number of Independent Studies, set a rule that students with low GPA's in their major courses be limited in the number of Independent Studies they can take (Professor Etemadi)

The meeting was adjourned at 3:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Marilyn M. Kramer

Secretary of Faculty Senate

Present:

Chair: P. Nickerson

Secretary: M. Kramer

Arts & Letters: B. Ault, M. Frisch, J. Ludwig, F. Pellicone, M. Wickert

Dental Medicine: M. Easley, A. Meyer

Engineering & Applied Sciences: K. Etemadi, R. Mayne, S. Mohan, K. Regan, R. Sridhar

Graduate School of Education: B. Johnstone, M. Klenk

Information & Library Studies: G. D'Elia

Health Related Professions: L. Gosselin, S. Nochajski

Management: B. Pegels

Medicine & Biomedical Sciences: M. Alashari, B. Albin, D. Amsterdam, A. Michalek, R. Noble, K. Schwartz, A. Vladutiu, J. Yates

Natural Sciences & Mathematics: J. Berry, M. Bisson, M. Churchill, M. Ram, J. Reineck, S. Schack

Nursing: J. Thompson

Social Sciences: W. Baumer, L. Bian, M. Harwitz, J. Meacham E. Segal, B. Smith

SUNY Senators: J. Adams-Volpe, J. Boot, W. Fisher, D. Malone, C. Welch

University Libraries: A. Booth, C. Densmore, W. Hepfer, D. Woodson, M. Zubrow

University Officers: W. Greiner, President

Guests:

W. Cole, Professional Staff Senate

V. Doyno

J. Dickson, Chapter President UUP

K. Levy, Senior Vice Provost

S. Wuechter, *Reporter*