

## **FACULTY SENATE**

Minutes of May 6, 1998 - (approved)

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The Faculty Senate met at 2:00 PM on Wednesday, May 6, 1998 in Talbert Hall 107 to consider the following agenda:

- [1. Report of the Chair](#)
- [2. Approval of the Minutes of March 4 and April 8, 1998](#)
- [3. Resolution on Universal Student Access to Computing \(Third Reading\)](#)
- [4. Resolution on Grade Replacement](#)
- [5. Report of the President](#)
- [6. Resolution on Mid-Semester Progress Reports](#)
- [7. Report on the SUNY Senate meeting at Brockport](#)

### **Item 1: Report of the Chair**

Professor Nickerson reminded the Faculty Senate of the special meeting scheduled for next week in order to provide for second readings of the resolutions by the Faculty Senate Grading Committee. He had also sent letters to all senators reminding them of their duty to attend. No quorum was present at the past two Faculty Senate meetings; for this reason, he referred the issue to the Faculty Senate Bylaws Committee for examination and possible revision.

On behalf of the faculty, the Chair thanked Professor Hoeing for his two years of service as Secretary, Ms. Anna Kedzierski for her continuing outstanding service as administrative assistant, student assistant Robert Carlsen, and web-site developer James Giardina. He welcomed Dr. Bill Coles as newly-elected Chair of the Professional Staff Senate.

## **Item 2: Approval of the Minutes of March 4 and April 8, 1998**

The Minutes of March 4 and April 8, 1998 were approved.

## **Item 3: Resolution on Universal Student Access to Computing (Third Reading)**

Professor Nickerson opened the floor for any new discussion on the resolution, mentioning briefly that "students would now be incorporated into the process", the beginning of which is reflected in the resolution. In addition, the Provost had agreed to address the question of costs and resources this coming Fall semester.

Professor Benenson proposed an amendment stating that each faculty member "be provided with a personal computer, together with appropriate accessories and software" and furthermore that "this hardware and software should be upgraded on a timely basis".

Professor Meacham suggested that the sense of the proposed amendment is already implied in the wording of the resolution; although not as direct, it allows wider latitude in the implementation of the resolution; furthermore, the amendment as proposed would pose an "excessive cost" to the University. Professor Schack argued that the entire discussion is premature, since the resolution merely espouses a certain plan; therefore we should be mindful of the issue, but leave the resolution as it stands. Professor Lawler doubted that students, many of whom work off-hours to make ends meet, would welcome the resolution, since they are to bear the primary costs involved. Professor Benenson countered that, if indeed UB plans to implement the policy by Fall 1999, then we are obligated by our commitment not only to consider the costs now, but also to "do it right" --- i.e., "not on the cheap".

The proposed amendment was defeated in a voice vote.

Professor Schwartz pointed out that the resolution "does not commit us to anything", nor does it endorse any specific matter in principle.

The Faculty Senate approved the unamended resolution.

#### **Item 4: Resolution on Grade Replacement**

Professor Schroeder, Chair of the Faculty Senate Grading Committee, presented two draft resolutions on grade replacement and on the assignment of mid-semester grades. The purpose of the first proposal is primarily to encourage students to repeat courses which they feel they have not adequately mastered. Such a policy of grade-replacement should increase a student's self-confidence in their chosen subject. It would improve student recruitment and retention, and also increase a student's employment opportunities. The Committee felt this would represent a fair way of calculating grade point averages as well. Finally, he reminded the Senate that the resolution is mainly concerned with how grade point averages are calculated.

The proposed policy was modeled after similar ones at other universities, and seems to be workable, despite two main objections: First, students complain if they receive an F the second time they take a course; secondly, faculty complain that students who fail the first time due to academic dishonesty are allowed to take the course again.

Professor Harwitz asked the Committee why it considered a grade in the C range to no longer indicate satisfactory mastery in a course. Professor Schroeder replied that, while recognizing that the grade of C is in general "satisfactory", the members of the Committee considered it an indication of inadequate preparation for further courses in a sequence in a particular field of study; a C grade is particularly damaging to a student wishing to go on to graduate study.

Professor Schack objected to the fact that a student receiving a C+ could repeat a course, then receive a B or B+, and secure a better grade on the transcript than a student who receives a B- the first time but is not allowed to repeat the course. The resolution is thus unfair by penalizing students who do reasonably well in a course. He pointed out further

that certain terms --- such as grade point average, C (=satisfactory) --- have meaning; the resolution is "misguided" in neglecting what these terms are meant to represent. He suggested that, instead of grade replacement, we simply average all the grades assigned, regardless of how often a course is repeated. Professor Schroeder replied that a failure to adopt the resolution would leave several students with "huge deficits to work out of"; giving them a second chance makes it possible for them to do this.

Professor Adams warned against a possible misuse of the resolution, such as intentionally lowering grades so that students would need to repeat the course, thus paying twice and enhancing departmental enrollments and University revenues. Furthermore, allowing students to repeat courses can have "significant consequences", especially in classes where grading is curved --- "the playing field is not even". Professor Winsky-Mattei thought the resolution only encouraged students to find a strategy to "fix" an unfavorable --- yet fair --- grade.

Professor Benenson decried the resolution as "no more than a continuation of our downturn in academic integrity", and would only aggravate UB's already lowered admission standards, grade inflation, and the "dumbing-down" of first- and second-year courses. We cannot, he argued, allow this trend to continue. Otherwise, UB will graduate unqualified students, with inevitable dire consequences for the University.

Professor Cowen found the clause allowing students to repeat courses at other institutions "particularly pernicious", since UB students could transfer to another institution for easier courses, have the credits transferred, then return to UB to finish up with a better GPA, in effect "revising their transcripts upward". Vice-Provost Goodman explained that both transfer and UB QPAs are calculated, and that the intent of the wording in the resolution is to maintain that distinction. He agreed that the effects of the resolution would dilute the "credentialing function" in the Undergraduate Program; yet the educational function is at least as equally as important. The intent of the resolution is to encourage a student to do well in this course, so that he/she may do well in courses that later build on it.

The danger of the proposal, Professor Ram argued, is that it would encourage students to craft a solid transcript not through study or intellectual merit, but through manipulation; the resolution does not address this problem. He noted furthermore that very often, computers read transcripts, and then only the GPA; thus it would be meaningless to record all the grades --- only those which count will be counted.

Professor Malone pointed out that a grade of C does indeed mean that a student is capable of proceeding to the next course in a sequence, and therefore should be indicative of satisfactory mastery. Nor does it benefit any student if we allow a C achieved at a lesser institution to replace a lower grade at UB. Professor Sridhar qualified his concern about the same issue, since it would be entirely appropriate for a student to transfer credit for a UB course from an institution such as Berkeley or Stanford. Were the Committee to word the resolution more carefully and explicitly, he would be more willing to support it.

Although he agreed with the goal of mastery, Professor Doyno commented that UB already has a larger number of lower-qualified students, bigger classes, and fewer advisors; it is a difficult time --- particularly at the end of the Spring semester and for so contentious an issue --- to reach a final decision on the resolution. He suggested postponing the final decision until the Fall.

Professor Batt proposed, in the interest of "keeping the playing field level" and as an alternative to retaking a course, allowing a student to attain mastery through auditing the course, "not for credit, but for content".

Despite the fact that several students try to manipulate the system, Professor Frisch suggested we attend to the "better angel on one side of us" who tells us that some students are genuinely trying, under difficult circumstances, to learn something. The Grading Committee, he continued, deserves the Senate's respect for having wrestled with so difficult a problem which is of so much concern to a lot of our students.

Professor Harwitz characterized the resolution as an attempt at a structural, formal solution to an educational problem, and suggested that perhaps a structural solution is not what is

needed. Rather, the problem should be solved through conversation --- between student, instructor, and advisor --- about whether the student should continue in a certain field of study.

### **Item 5: Report of the President**

Addressing the foregoing debate, President Greiner mentioned that "this institution is not, on the undergraduate level at least, in the business of open admissions". What is more of an issue is the fit, or match, between the capabilities and interests of the faculty with those of our student body. To deal with this, we should establish an admissions process that narrows the gap between the two; this requires us to make an effort to move the profile of our first-time full-time students "up the scale". We have already taken steps to influence the yield among our top applicants. The University is concerned not with having open admissions, but rather to attract top-quality students who choose to attend other institutions.

He reported that a number of campus improvements are scheduled for this summer, designed to make the University not only more attractive, but also safer. He added that these improvements are not one-time face-lifts, but are to be continued over the next ten years. In addition, ground will be broken for the first on-campus student housing project, and planning will begin for the conversions of South Campus housing into apartment-style units.

### **Item 6: Resolution on Mid-Semester Progress Reports**

Professor Schroeder then presented the resolution on mid-semester progress reports, based on the idea that if advisors have more information at their disposal, they will be better prepared to intervene early enough to help students in academic trouble. Admittedly, it is a little more extra work for faculty advisors; yet the benefit for the students will make it worthwhile. He explained that the proposal left open the question of how a faculty member

would comply with the request for a mid-semester progress report, since courses vary widely across the University spectrum.

Two senators pointed out that a mid-semester "P" grade (for "Pass") could be misleading, since a student could still fail the course by the end of a semester. Professors Spaulding and Schack proposed reporting in quartiles, since, regardless of what grade the bottom quartile represents, a quartile indicates unequivocally where a student fits among the rest in the class. He pointed out that already four faculty referred to the mid-semester reports as "grades", and warned that students would interpret these as grades also, and moreover interpret these grades as predictive of their final grades in a course. To avoid this, we must avoid using grade notation. Professor Doyno suggested advising students about what grade "track" they are in before mid-term.

#### **Item 7: Report on the SUNY Senate meeting at Brockport**

Professor Fisher distributed a detailed written report of the SUNY Senate meeting (April 23-25) at Brockport and briefly summarized the highlights. Among these was an initiative, proposed by President Aceto, for the creation of a "civil compact" for all members of SUNY that would outline "what we would do when we disagree or disapprove of actions or activities of others in SUNY. We should express our concerns within the family of SUNY and not use the mass media or other external organizations to express our discontent".

The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert G. Hoeing,

Secretary of the Faculty Senate

PRESENT:

University Officers: W. R. Greiner, T. Headrick, W. Fischer, N. Goodman

Faculty Senate Officers: P. Nickerson, R. Hoeing

Arts & Letters: V. Doyno, M. Frisch, N. Grant, J. Holstun, M. Hyde, J. Ludwig

Dental Medicine: R. Baier, M. Easley, G. Ferry, M. Neiders

Engineering & Applied Sciences: D. Benenson, R. Sridhar

Graduate School of Education: L. Klenk, B. Johnstone, L. Malave, T. Schroeder, L. Yang

Health-Related Professions: L. E. Gosselin, S. Nochajski, J. Tamburlin

Information & Library Studies: G. D'Elia

Law: L. Swartz

Management: J. Boot, J. Newman, C. Pegels, R. Ramesh

Medicine & Biomedical Sciences: M. Acara, B. Albini, D. Amsterdam, R. Batt, W. Flynn, S. Gallagher,

R. Heffner, B. Noble, A. Saltzman, H. Schuel, C. Smith, M. Spaulding, A. Vladutiu



Natural Sciences & Mathematics: J. Berry, M. Churchill, J. Faran, C. Fourtner, M. Ram, K. Regan, J. Resnick,

S. Schack

Nursing: P. Wooldridge

Pharmacy: R. Madejski

Social Sciences: J. Gayle Beck, H. Calkins, M. Harwitz, J. Lawler, P. Luce, J. Meacham, C. Sellers, S. Singer,

B. Smith, L. Winsky-Mattei

SUNY Senators: J. Fisher, M. Jameson, D. Malone, C. Welch

University Libraries: J. Adams, C. Densmore, W. Hepfer, M. Kramer, D. Woodson

GUESTS:

Faculty Senate Computer Services Committee:

Joseph Tufariello, Dean of Natural Sciences and Mathematics

Robert Straubinger

Voldemar Innus

Michael Cowen

Michael Tackett

Faculty Senate Grading Committee:

Thomas Schroeder, Chair

Nicolas Goodman

Todd Hennessey

EXCUSED:

Social Sciences: D. Banks

ABSENT:

Architecture: M. Hadighi

Arts & Letters: M.-E Gutiérrez, R. Mennen, J. Rickard

Dental Medicine: R. Hall

Engineering: C. Bloebaum, W. George, S. Mohan, M. Ryan

Medicine & Biomedical Sciences: M. Alashari, E. Fine, S. Greenberg, C. Leach, S. Rudin, F. Schimpfhauser,

J. Sulewski, A. Wakhlo, B. Willer

Natural Sciences & Mathematics: R. Allendoerfer, P. Calkin

Nursing: M. Johnson

Pharmacy: N.

Social Sciences: J. Charles-Luce, P. Hare, P. Zarembka