



Senate Educational Policies Committee 19 September 2022

Minutes approved unanimously 13 January 2023

3:00-4:30 pm

Present: Stoner (co-chair), Falcione (co-chair), Wert (co-chair), McCormick, McCarthy (VP), Cecchini, Shaver, Hampton, Kear, Streeter (SAAA), Wolfe (Economics), Schein, Rikstad, ??

Co-chair John Stoner called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m. He then welcomed co-chair David Wert (SHRS) and thanked co-chair Wert for agreeing to serve as the elected co-chair of SEPC. Stoner then reminded the committee that committee meetings are generally open to the public and that the co-chairs looked forward to welcoming new members of the committee once they could attend.

He then moved to welcome Sybil Streeter, co-chair (SAAA) to discuss the Provost's statement on Religious Observances and Student Well-being (emailed through a Read Green to faculty) and concerns raised by faculty to her committee. Stoner also mentioned that one or more members of SEPC had brought the same memo to SEPC's attention.

Streeter walked the committee through some of the concerns raised to SAAA about this memo as well as responses from her own departmental colleagues. Concerns largely revolved around how faculty could reasonably accommodate students who have challenges that don't rise to the level of those justifying official accommodation from Disability Resource Services and how to interpret some of the language in the memo and whether faculty could do so reasonably and equitably. Colleagues also expressed concerns about whether faculty could be punished for failing to respond to vaguely-worded imperatives. Faculty member Katherine Wolfe (Economics) described some of the pedagogical challenges (especially in large enrollment classes) with vaguely-defined imperatives. She also raised (as did Streeter) that the Faculty Handbook contains language which empowers faculty to determined attendance/absence policies for their own courses and whether this new policy contravenes that new guidance.

Stoner than asked VP McCarthy if he wanted to weigh in before opening up the issue for debate. McCarthy noted that he did not think there had been substantive changes within the last year (and thought it was basically consistent since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic). The statement on trauma, McCarthy agreed with Streeter that language on trauma had been added in the wake of the murder of George Floyd and that the policy's intent was to provide grace to students in various moments of potential trauma. McCarthy agreed further that certain alternatives (like makeups) were virtually impossible in large enrollment classes but

stated his belief that students should be supported. He said the memo does not dictate how faculty should accommodate students and stated that he believed that the Office of the Provost would welcome feedback on how to wordsmith such a statement to clarify language.

Senate President Kear noted that the memo had changed dramatically over the prior five years and that it had gone under the radar for those in shared governance and agreed with McCarthy that a dialogue about it would be welcome.

Stoner noted his own attendance policies and expressed concerns that the two seemingly separate topics (student wellness and religious observance) had been lumped together in one memo. He then opened the floor for questions/comments.

Streeter mentioned that this is a potential issue of equity since some students might ask for accommodations and some who might not feel empowered to do so. She also mentioned that students were already aware of the memo and that some had seemingly interpreted it as license to simply skip class in a way that would take advantage. Wolfe also expressed a concern that part-time faculty who only interacted episodically with the University and might not receive the memo if it was only issued annually. She noted too that it wasn't posted as policy.

Stoner noted that Provost announcements were posted online albeit not in a place that housed other academic policies. He noted too that any potential discrepancy with the faculty handbook needed to be addressed if there was language guaranteeing faculty autonomy on attendance/absences and the thrust of the memo and its implications. He then solicited ideas for how the committees might proceed. He asked Streeter if SAAA would be interested in collaborating. Streeter expressed interests in participating in a conversation and Stoner agreed having additional voices and perspectives was often useful and helpful in securing approvals from Faculty Assembly and/or other. Stoner suggested 2-3 members from each committee and guidance from VP McCarthy to suggest the appropriate person/people within the Office of the Provost with whom the joint working group would work to engage on the topic.

Stoner thanked Streeter and Wolfe for bringing the issue to the committee.

Stoner then asked if there were other items of new business. He then asked Vice Provost McCarthy for updates.

McCarthy welcomed everyone back and said that there were a number of things happening, some of which could be reported upon at this meeting and some that would be discussed in future meetings. He mentioned the launch of a Civic Learning Distinction (available Fall 2022) which was a collaborative project of a number of units and schools. He then turned to efforts to "clean up" course attributes and said the project had largely been completed with recent updates on instructional delivery modes that included outmoded/outdated language. He noted there was a group of interdisciplinary themes that mostly mapped onto some of the existing and new distinctions. He indicated others could be added if they had relevance. He said it was

useful that students could now search by multiple course attributes for the first time to better focus their interests on specific courses.

McCarthy then indicated that enrollment dates would be postponed slightly at the request of advisors who expressed concerns about having sufficient time to advise students with overlap with the midterm period. He also mentioned his own imperative to have extra time to accommodate students with financial enrollment holds and give them additional opportunity to resolve those without being disadvantaged for registration. He then discussed how much external support (channeled mostly through April Belback) his office had received to support students. He referenced the Kessler Scholars program as analogous to an (year-round) extension of the Provost Academy and provided information to the committee about the potential advantages. He noted Belback had also secured funding for TRIO-McNair Scholars funding and that he would like to make the kind of support and mentorship for imagining and realizing trajectories to graduate education might be made available to all Pitt students. Both programs would be physically located (along with pre-health advising) in the old Langley Library. McCarthy concluded with how there had largely been a moratorium in the first years of the pandemic on suspensions and dismissals. As those policies were returning to normal, he expressed surprise at how many first- year students had been suspended or dismissed and how he hoped to convene a group like the CARS group to support students with external stressors that negatively impact their academic success. He admitted it was not a large number of students but a desire to keep those students from “falling through the cracks.”

Stoner asked McCarthy about the delay in enrollment and whether the advisors who had asked for it had identified any concerns about delaying enrollment. McCarthy noted one school had a single concern but that even they agreed on balance they thought the benefits outweighed the cost. Streeter asked McCarthy if there was any apparent correlation between the struggling first-year students and those who took advantage of test optional admissions. McCarthy said there was not a dramatic difference in retention between test optional students and those admitted more “traditionally.” He admitted he hadn’t looked at that particular element among the students but said the University was examining GPA differentials. McCarthy said there was almost no differential in certain schools and bigger gaps in others.

Co-chair Falcione asked if any of the student support programs McCarthy had described had been rolled out yet and how students would find out about them. McCarthy said there was a communications plan for both the Kessler Scholars Program and the McNair Scholars program. Each had a different timeline and that the initial McNair scholars were already enrolled at the University. He described multiple channels through which students would be notified (advising networks, Pittwire, his own outreach efforts to meet with undergraduate students). He welcomed additional assistance in spreading that news and said a website would be up and running shortly thereafter.

Co-chair Stoner expressed VP Godley’s regrets at not being able to attend because of a prior obligation.

Old Business: Stoner then turned to old business and asked McCarthy if the University still had an “overabundance” of first-year students as had been the case in the class entering Fall 2021. McCarthy noted that the target number for those entering in 2022 was slightly lower than but much closer to the census number (which hadn’t been formalized as of the committee meeting). He noted gratuitously that retention and graduation rates continued to exceed expectations. Stoner asked if there were differentials among schools and McCarthy said the yield was consistent.

Stoner then turned to the Office of the Provost’s pilot with test optional admissions and where the University stood. McCarthy noted peer institutions were extending their test optional programs. He noted he wasn’t sure exactly the date to which the University had committed but that he would be surprised if the University didn’t commit to an extension that would at a minimum allow them to gather retention and performance data on at least one generation admitted under the pilot (so at least four years). McCormick asked if McCarthy was planning to collect data beyond student data, such as anecdotal data from faculty on their experiences. McCarthy noted he was principally focused on student success but that it would make sense to engage broader constituencies (including faculty and students) on a variety of broader metrics/perceptions. He said he would share with faculty colleagues and Student Affairs folks.

Stoner then turned to SEPC’s commitment to look at recording protocols and potential differentials among schools. He noted the group hadn’t met as expected and would do so.

Stoner asked McCarthy if anything had changed with the University’s relationship to Outlier.org of which SEPC should be aware. McCarthy said little had changed vis-à-vis the University’s immediate relationship but that Outlier had developed a more structured relationship with Golden Gate University to offer associate’s degrees via 60 credits of Outlier content. He noted it might change the Pitt relationship to Outlier if students were to transfer from Golden Gate to Pitt but that the University would need to figure out how to handle such transfers. It might also complicate how Outlier credits would be “transcribed” either as Pitt credits or Golden Gate credits. He qualified by saying it was a very recent development. He said Outlier had approached the University about potentially doing so but that the University response would have necessitated engagement with shared governance. He added that there was enough of a relationship now that he would need to communicate the relationship with Middle States as significant enough to report in a slightly different way. He noted a student with 21 Outlier credits had recently transferred them to Harvard via Pitt. He asserted it did seem to be giving students readier access to higher education. Stoner asked McCarthy if students pursuing the Golden Gate credential would still get Pitt transcript credits. McCarthy said his understanding was that students seeking the Golden Gate credential would apply to Golden Gate and then simply take the Outlier courses as part of that program (and therefore not have Pitt credits). Stoner asked if the intention would still be to have PACUP monitor any significant changes in the program. McCarthy agreed that any substantive changes would need to be considered by PACUP but that course-related things up to now had not engaged PACUP thus far. He said he

thought he would do so. Streeter asked McCarthy if there continued to be evaluation and assessment of the Outlier courses. McCarthy said he would request the UPJ colleague on PACUP to report assessment data. McCarthy noted that early data suggested the withdrawal rate was significantly better than other online courses but higher than the withdrawal rate for in-person, non-Outlier courses but that the DF (low grades of D or F) rate was comparable to other Pitt courses.

There were no updates on Canvas/LMS.

Stoner then turned to the challenge of scheduling SEPC meetings to disadvantage the fewest number of people given the complexities raised by the schedules of the vice provosts and the co chairs. He raised it for discussion about reopening possible altering the meeting times of the committee. Hampton asked how availability data had been gathered in the past. She noted emails in the past but wondered if there had been a mapping of availability through a tool like When2Meet. Stoner answered by saying Qualtrics had been used in the past as a followup to working with the vice provosts' staff to provide a variety of potential meeting times. Stoner asked if people wanted to do so. Wert asked if there was an intention to stay entirely virtual; Stoner responded that the Senate had expressed some interest in reconvening in person when possible (while retaining hybrid opportunities). Stoner indicated he saw no need to stop the hybrid modality. McCormick indicated that asking about whether availability for meeting might be conditioned upon hybrid/virtual/in-person formats.

Meeting Updates: Kear provided a synopsis of September's Faculty Assembly meeting. She mentioned the ongoing Chancellor's search and the determination of the faculty representatives for the search. She noted progress in securing more continuous access to library/ID grace periods for faculty who regularly but not continuously taught as a part-time instructor. Kear penned a letter in support of a central Ombuds office that the Office of the Provost and the Office for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion had discussed. Stoner mentioned the October 10 visit of Rebecca Kaiser from NSF and a series of talks about security and intellectual property for a variety of audiences. Kear emphasized this was an opportunity for Pitt stakeholders to inform federal policy on the issues.

Falcione mentioned that there were no ACIE updates.

Stoner thanked Cecchini and Schein for continuing to serve as delegated representatives to PACUP and UCGS as per the new OTP policies on those bodies. Both indicated that neither had met as of the committee's September meeting.

Stoner announced the projected next date for the October meeting subject to changes after polling on ideal meeting times.

He adjourned the meeting at 4:30 p.m.

Agenda

1. Call to order
2. New Business
 - a. Welcoming new co-chair/members
 - b. Sybil Streeter (SAAA)—recent Provost guidance on religious observances and student well-being
 - i. <https://www.universityannouncements.pitt.edu/Religious%20Observances%20REVISED%202022%20memo.pdf>
3. Reports from Vice Provosts (if any)
4. Old Business
 - a. Overabundance of first-year students?
 - b. Test optional applications?
 - c. Recording protocols across units/schools
 - d. Outlier.org
 - e. LMS feedback
 - f. SEPC meeting schedule
5. Meeting Updates
 - a. Faculty Assembly
 - b. Senate Council
 - c. ACIE--Bonnie
 - d. UCGS/PACUP—Michelle/Nikki
6. Adjournment
7. Next Meeting –17 October @ 3 p.m.

Zoom Info

Stoner, John C is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.
Topic: SEPC meeting for September 2022
Time: Sep 19, 2022 03:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)
Join Zoom Meeting
<https://pitt.zoom.us/j/97054478364>

Meeting ID: 970 5447 8364
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162.255.37.11 (US West)

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115.114.131.7 (India Mumbai)

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213.19.144.110 (Amsterdam Netherlands)

213.244.140.110 (Germany)

103.122.166.55 (Australia Sydney)

103.122.167.55 (Australia Melbourne)

149.137.40.110 (Singapore)

64.211.144.160 (Brazil)

149.137.68.253 (Mexico)

69.174.57.160 (Canada Toronto)

65.39.152.160 (Canada Vancouver)

207.226.132.110 (Japan Tokyo)

149.137.24.110 (Japan Osaka)

Meeting ID: 970 5447 8364