

Report to the University Senate Findings from the Student Activities, Aid and Affairs Committee

The SAAA committee would like to present to the University Senate two topics with potential leeway for improvement:

1. Spring Academic Calendar changes
2. Graduate Student Practices that Impact the Unionization Movement

I. Spring Academic Calendar

The University Calendar Committee has modified the start date for the spring, 2018 term. The result is that there will only be 14-Monday classes, which is out of compliance with Middle States Assessment Board. This occurred previously every 7 years with the rotation of calendar days with the start of the spring term. This change benefit students by prolonging their winter holiday break, and was lobbied for by the SGB (Student Government Board, undergraduate student government). The question is what to do to address this; some suggestions include: add 7-minutes to each of the 14-Monday classes; hold one additional Monday evening class; hold one on-line meeting class, create an at-home assignment. The SAAA members discussed the pros/cons of the various suggestions. The committee is concerned that these solutions are non-viable for students. For example, less time will be allotted to travel to the following class if 7 minutes is added to the end of each class. This change also diminishes the formality and value of class instruction. The committee would at to request an analysis/consideration of the impact of this calendar change to students, to faculty and to academic programs, and of the perception of our academic rigor.

II. Graduate Student Practices

Sufficient cards will likely be gathered to move the unionization effort forward. Student organizers believe the unionization effort is worthwhile, while the university is concerned about the additional cost and effort that come with working with a union.

It became apparent to the committee that the unionization movement is fostered by students who feel they have no recourse for their grievances or that they have not been addressed properly. Students who are content will not likely move to encourage students not to unionize, and may sign the cards notwithstanding their content. Key issues that students feel poorly addressed, based on the GPSG (Graduate and Professional Student Government) polls and committee member experience, include toxic mentors, long work hours, poor pay, lack of progress towards graduation. Regarding mentors, it was noted that graduate students feel beholden to mentors because they work under their tutelage for many years and because they are gatekeepers for their progress. The relationship between graduate students and their mentors impact the daily well-being of graduate students much more than the relationship between undergraduate students and their mentors/instructors impacts undergraduate students. However, a union will likely be unable to arbitrate these key issues that impact graduate students success and well-being at the university. In addition, a union has less of a personal stake in the success of the students than the student's school, department and faculty, and the university as a whole.

Therefore the SAAA committee recommends that this issue be further explored. The committee would like to see that best practices for mitigating student grievances/concerns across the schools (programs and departments) be investigated, and that these be communicated to the different schools. From the small review below, it is apparent that the professional schools have very detailed policies for mitigating student grievances. Across the university, it is also apparent that awareness of policies may be deficient at the departmental levels. In addition, much variability exists across departments and academic programs.

**Partial review of how different schools at the
University of Pittsburgh handle graduate student grievances**
(with undergraduate policies as well)

Pharmacy: Skledar, Susan Jean, graduate

For Students in the Graduate Program in Pharmaceutical Sciences (MS and PhD), Mary Folan has been assigned as the ombudsman. Students are assured that all information is confidential, including the fact that the meeting even occurred.

Pharmacy: Corey, Sharon, undergraduate

One of my roles as Assistant Dean of Students is to serve as an ombudsman for the students enrolled in our PharmD Program (The School of Pharmacy's 4- year program leading to the Doctor of Pharmacy degree). Students can come to me to discuss any problems or issues (academic, personal or financial) including complaints related to class instruction and or instructors. I serve as a Title IX officer for the School and I would report those complaints to the University's Title IX office. If there are no confidentiality issues associated with the instructional complaint, I am free to discuss the complaint with Dr. Meyer, our Associate Dean for Education for possible resolution (also with our Dean, Dr. Kroboth). Most of our courses are team taught and have Course Coordinators and students can issue instructional complaints to them. Finally, students can also contact our Dean, Dr. Kroboth, to present any instructional complaints.

Arts & Sciences: Streeter, Sybil

Department of Psychology: Philippa Carter (Director of Diversity Initiatives and Academic Affairs) is the ombudsperson for graduate students in A&S. She was formally put into this role last spring. I'm not sure how many students are aware of this though - the graduate students in my department didn't seem to know.

Arts & Sciences: Gramm, Marylou

English Department: Grievances go first to the program director of the program to which the course belongs, then to the chair if they remain unresolved.

School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences: Baird, Joanne, undergraduates

Recently, SHRS has created the position of Ombudsperson for the school. The Ombudsperson is a person who handles complaints, serves as a mediator, and a spokesperson for the rights of a particular individual or group. The Ombudsperson in the School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences (SHRS) will be a neutral contact person (Non-faculty) for students with whom they can engage in informal discussions to express concerns about conflicts and other issues that may arise during the course of their education that they believe are difficult to address with their academic department.

The roles of the Ombudsperson are listed below. The Ombudsperson is not involved in formal grievance procedures but will serve to provide guidance to the student in managing conflicts/problems and provide information about institutional policies and university grievance procedures that may be related to the student's conflicts/grievances. The Ombudsperson may direct students to other campus resources as appropriate.

The Roles of the SHRS Ombudsperson:

- Listen to student concerns.
- Explain campus policies.
- Explain the grade appeal process.
- Act as a neutral resource between student and faculty member.

- Facilitate communication between and among individuals.
- Counsel faculty to minimize potential conflict.
- Coach students on how to talk to faculty and staff.
- Refer individuals to others as appropriate.
- Act as an informal resource to students, faculty, and staff.
- Keep information confidential except as required by law.

The SHRS Ombudsperson does not:

- Change grades.
- Change policies.
- Take sides, but rather tries to facilitate a mutual understanding between differing points of view.
- Identify individuals without permission, except as required by law.
- Take part in formal grievance processes.

We also have additional guidelines specifically for graduate students and post-doctoral students to assist in conflict resolution.

Nursing: Kitutu, Julius

Engineering: Borovetz, Harvey, graduate

Grievances can be brought to the attention of the Graduate Coordinator, who works with the Department Chair, and Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs as necessary to resolve. Students may also approach the Dean of the Swanson School, who can choose to appoint a Committee to address as necessary.

School of Dental Medicine: Taboas, Juan, graduate

Graduate Students and First professional student grievances: Any member of the University community having evidence may bring to the attention of the Department Chair and/or Dean a complaint that a faculty member has failed, in one or more respects, to meet faithfully the “faculty obligations” and “student rights” set forth in the student handbook (a list 12 items that include academic and professional relationships). The Chair or Dean, at their discretion, will take such action by way of investigation, counseling, or action in accordance with applicable University procedures as may appear to be proper under the circumstances. The faculty member's and student's interest in confidentiality, academic freedom, and professional integrity in such matters will be respected. Each academic unit has their own code, which is likely why first reporting to the chair is preferred. Faculty are required to report to the Dean allegations of discrimination reported by a student.

Specifically regarding academic grievances (student – faculty) : The matter shall (if requested by the student) be presented to the Academic Integrity Hearing Board for adjudication. It is the responsibility of the student, before seeking to have a grievance adjudicated, to attempt to resolve the matter by personal conference with the faculty member concerned, and, if such attempts are unavailing, to call the matter to the attention of the (Department Chair, Associate Dean, etc., as appropriate) for consideration and adjustment by informal means. If a matter remains unresolved after such efforts have been made, a formal grievance procedure is employed involving the school's academic Integrity Officer and an adjudication committee formed to mediate with the involved parties. The student may wish to proceed with a formal hearing in consultation with the chair of this committee, in which a representative from the university community is permitted for both parties but no legal counsel is permitted. The proceeding results are sent to the Dean who makes the final decision on the findings and remedies. Note that the dean may contact the Senate Committee on Tenure and Academic Freedom for an advisory opinion before issuing their own decision. The student or faculty member may seek to have the Dean's

decision reviewer by the Provost, who make seek the advice of the University Review Board. The Provost decision constitutes a final decision and exhaustive use of all institutional remedies.

First professional students (dental students): Students may also report concerns or complaints related to their experiences at the SDM to the Associate Dean of Student Affairs, who will meet with the student. Following the meeting, the concern/complaint will be recorded by the Associate Dean of Student Affairs (or they designee) in the student concern/complaint log for follow-up.