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CWU Academic Affairs Committee Minutes - 04/ 10/08

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Minutes
Faculty Senate Academic Affairs Committee
April 10, 2008

Present: Kim Bartel, Joe Brooks, Tim Dittmer, Danielle Howard, Krystal Noga, Sura Rath.

Absent: Tim Englund, Dan Neighbors, Marla Wyatt, and Carolyn Wells.

Guest(s): Craig Johnson (IET)

Meeting was called to order at 3:15 pm by Chair Kim Bartel

Minutes from the April 3, 2008. Minutes approved with amendments.

Unfinished Business –

Grade Inflation – Kim reviewed with Craig Johnson and the committee the previous work the committee has done regarding grade inflation. Craig, as the person who initiated the FS charge, was asked to present his rationale. After providing his background, and his duties as Coordinator of two Programs in the Industrial and Engineering Technology Department, Craig indicated that he believes there are multiple issues related to grading.

To address grade inflation and grade spread, Craig endorses implementing class-by-class grade average and standard deviation limits in accordance with the CWU policy. CWU policy defines a grade of ‘A’ as “excellent or exceptional” and a ‘B’ as “superior work.” Because CWU policy refers to each course grade, it is logical to apply these terms to each course (as a statistical population). For example: No course grade could be given with an average over 3.00 or with a standard deviation of less than .5. Implementing a course grade with average and standard deviation limits would give more meaning to letter grades.

Craig also provided an example of a course (or courses) that might be an ‘exception’ to the above policy. The Aviation Department may use an FAA exam to generate a course grade. In that case the ‘population’ might not be the ‘CWU course’. Thus, a whole class could be ‘excellent’ with respect to a different population or methodology.

When asked how a GPA/Standard Deviation limit policy might affect academic freedom, Craig stated that GPA and grading are a contractual obligation, not an academic freedom issue. Discussion among the committee members followed. Danielle indicated that SSS provides its students with specific instructor grading practices and instructional style information so students can decide which instructor is most appropriate for them.

Tim Dittmer indicated that, rather than mandating a set GPA, he would like to see a policy of providing GPA data by department and then observing whether GPAs change as a result. Craig would like to see GPA data provided at the program level, not just departmentally.

Tim Dittmer provided a statistical analysis of changes in GPAs by department from 1992 to 2007. Based on the data, his conclusion is that grade inflation has occurred, but it is not of practical significance. However, differences in GPA certainly exist among departments across campus, and it is these differences that are causing concern about inflation.

Krystal asked which programs used grades as entrance requirements. Tim noted that since we use grades for this purpose, then we should care about 'grading' policies.

Crystal asked about the definition of 'excellence' by different programs.

When asked, Craig offered a final comment concerning the synergy between 'grading' and our current activities in 'program assessment'. These assessment activities are all subject to the same statistical, validity and reliability issues. He hopes that meaningful, consistent policies may be created.

Meeting was adjourned at 4:15 p.m.

Next meeting April 17 at 3:15 p.m.