

Academic Policies Committee report to the SMU Faculty Senate
Wednesday, March 6, 2019

Matthew Lockard, *Department of Philosophy*

APC Members

Chair: Matthew (Matt) Lockard (Dedman I)
Ex Com Liaison: Brian Molanphy (Meadows)

2021

Brian Molanphy (Meadows)
Joe Kobyłka (Dedman II)
Sabri Ates (Dedman I)

2020

Carlos Davila (Lyle)
Susanne Johnson (Perkins)
Marcus Butts (Cox)

2019

Herve TchumKam (Dedman I)
Leanne Ketterlin-Geller (Simmons)

Charges for 2018-2019:

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Review petitions to Committee on Academic Petitions to determine nature, number and types of academic petitions received as well as decisions on petitions.2. Clarify with Associate Provost Larenda Mielke the relationship between Continuing and Professional Education and the academic units on campus.3. Work with Provost's Office to evaluate proposed revisions to course evaluations.4. Review transfer policies and procedures for evaluating transfer credit. Review limits on transfer work and credit by exam and standardize processes for determining course equivalency. |
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Progress on charges to date:

Charge 1:

- Carlos Davila of the APC currently serves on the Committee for Academic Petitions. The APC is working to create a mechanism by which data from the CAP (concerning, among other things, the number of petition requests, the number of approvals granted, etc.) are passed each year to the APC for review.

Charge 2:

- Larenda Mielke has agreed to meet with the APC at our next meeting.

Charge 3:

- Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs Doug Reinelt addressed the APC at our October 26th meeting and told us of the changes to be made in the student evaluation system.
- There are extreme differences among evaluations distributed by different schools at SMU. Different evaluations ask different questions, use different numerical scales, and differ in other significant ways.
- Dr. Reinelt distributed the new questions to be included in every evaluation.
- The new questions were formed with significant input from the Council of Deans.
- Individual departments will be free to add their own questions to evaluations administered to students in their classes.
- Faculty will be strongly advised to allocate at least some course time so that students can fill out the evaluations in-class.
- Some APC members raised concerns about the timing of the evaluation period. The proposal is to end the period during which evaluations can be submitted prior to final exam week. It was noted that this will mean that students are filling out their evaluations before they have experienced a significant component of the class, namely the final, which in many classes provides the primary source of feedback to students about their work.
- The new system has been approved by the Provost's office; it will be tested this summer and fine-tuned prior to university-wide rollout next Fall term.
- Faculty are encouraged to contact the APC with input about the new system so that we can monitor how it's working and communicate any concerns to the Provost's office.

Charge 4:

- Vicki Hill addressed the APC at our October 26th meeting to help us understand the current post-matriculation transfer credit policy.
- Dr. Hill presented evidence that SMU's policy of allowing 30 post-matriculation transfer credits is well above the post-matriculation transfer credit limits imposed by our peer and aspirational institutions.
- Dr. Hill provided some helpful context on the history of SMU's post-matriculation transfer credit policy, which until 2009 had only allowed 15 credits.
- The APC unanimously voted to revise current policy so that no more than 15 post-matriculation transfer credits will be accepted by SMU.
- With input from Dr. Hill, I drafted a resolution to this effect, which the APC voted at our February 6th meeting to submit to the Senate for discussion and approval.

As usual, a substantial amount of our committee's time as been devoted to other matters, not directly related to our charges for the year, including:

Grade appeals:

At our October 26th meeting, Doug Reinelt addressed the APC on the grade appeals process.

- Students sometimes appeal grades several months after the end of the class in question. APC members discussed, and voiced strong support for, updating the grade appeals policy

to specify that appeals must be sought prior to the end of the term following the term in which the appealed course was taken.

- APC members discussed and voiced support for insisting that appeals be made in writing (at least via email), so that the students' basis for the appeal is kept constant throughout the appeals process.
- There was discussion of whether to create a faculty panel that reviews appeals after a certain point, in order to ensure that administrators do not override a faculty member's grade decision without faculty oversight. (Current policy vests all authority for grades with the faculty member who offers the course; administration cannot currently override faculty grade decisions.) While there was general resistance to the notion of creating a standing panel of faculty for hearing grade appeals, APC members strongly supported the idea of ensuring that no administrative overrides of faculty grades be made without the input of at least one faculty member from the relevant field.

Plagiarism, the Honor Council, and the Honor Code:

Beth Newman of the English department addressed the APC at our February 6th meeting about plagiarism and academic honest at SMU. Matters of concern under discussion included

- APC members emphasized the need for professors to address academic integrity directly with their students, to communicate and uphold discipline-specific standards (noting how different these can be for, say, engineering vs. the arts).
- APC members expressed a desire for the Honor Council to provide information about its activities, for example, on the number of cases it has heard over the past year.
- It was noted that SMU could do a better job of educating professors about how to use the Faculty Disposition Form in dealing with cases of academic dishonesty.

In addition to our discussion with Dr. Newman, the APC reviewed and discussed the Honor Code and the documents governing the Honor Council.

- APC members voiced unanimous support for requiring the presence of a faculty member for a meeting of the Honor Council to have a quorum.
- The APC requests that the Honor Council report the number of cases it hears, and case outcomes, each year. After consulting with Faculty Senate President Dayna Oscherwitz and Student Policies Committee president Denis Foster, it was agreed that those reports should be relayed to the Senate via the APC. The president of the APC will confer with the Student Policies Committee if any information in the Honor Council's report raises concerns about student wellbeing at SMU.
- Vice President for Student Affairs K.C. Mmeje has indicated support for a Faculty Senate resolution that would require faculty participation in Honor Council hearings. Ensuring that faculty are available to participate in hearings will require expanding the pool of faculty who are trained to hear cases. This will likely come before the Senate towards the end of this year or the beginning of next year.

SMU's administrative drop procedure:

At our February 6th meeting, Sheri Kunovich discussed issues surrounding administrative drop requests.

- It was noted that administrative drops often have the result of rendering dropped students ineligible for financial aid and/or athletics, and also affects the status of students from foreign countries studying at SMU, particularly when the drop puts the student below full-time status.
- The current administrative drop request form allows students to be dropped for disruptive behavior, or excessive absence/tardiness.
- Administrative drops are requested by faculty, but must be approved ultimately by the registrar.
- The procedure makes no provision for dropping students who simply are not doing well in the class, are academically disengaged, are difficult to work with but not disruptive to the class, etc.
- It was noted that it is always better if students themselves drop a class; professors are encouraged to ask students to drop before initiating an administrative drop.
- Excessive tardiness or non-attendance can be penalized at the professor's discretion in accordance with policies stated in the course syllabus. While administrative drop requests can be denied by the registrar, a penalty for non-attendance (for example) that is stated clearly in the course syllabus is the professor's prerogative and less open to administrative interference.
- Since the F for non-attendance has been introduced into SMU's grading system, the APC has been asked to consider whether tardiness and/or non-attendance should be removed as an admissible reason for requesting an administrative drop.
 - The APC will discuss this matter—and, more generally, the wording of the administrative drop request form—at our next meeting.
 - Please contact me or another APC member to let us know your thoughts about the possibility of removing poor attendance/participation as a basis for administrative drops.

Thanks!