



Educational Affairs Committee
Minutes for Tuesday, January 8, 2008 – 3:30 p.m.
Tate Student Center

Members Present: Denise Mewborn (Chair), Gayle Andrews, Jere Morehead (Proxy for Ann Crowther), Dan DerVartanian, Sarajane Love, Rodney Mauricio, William Vencill, Conner McCarthy, Matt Gore (Proxy for Wesley Burnett), and Brian Paul Freese (Staff)

Others: Rebecca Macon (Registrar), Susan Little (Financial Aid), Amrita Veliyath (Red & Black), Brian Mink (SGA), and Katy Bowers (SGA)

Dr. Denise Mewborn called the meeting to order at 3:33 p.m. She thanked members and guests for attending.

Comments from the Chair

Dr. Mewborn shared that a number of issues are anticipated for the committee in the remaining meetings in this academic year:

- (1) SGA proposal for a “Preparation Week” policy
- (2) Graduate School proposal to amend the policy for “incomplete” grades
- (3) Academic calendar for 2009-2010
- (4) Nomination and selection of the committee chair for 2008-2009.

Because of construction, the next two meetings of the committee will be held in the Peabody Board Room rather than the Tate Student Center.

Minutes

Dr. William Vencill moved that the minutes of the October 22, 2007 Educational Affairs Committee be approved as recorded without revision. Dr. Dan DerVartanian seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously.

Old Business

Withdrawals: Dr. Mewborn updated the committee by summarizing the “Report from the Withdrawal Task Force” prepared by that subcommittee. Members of that subcommittee included Jere Morehead, Alan Campbell, Susan Little, Rebecca Macon, Connor McCarthy, Michael Bamber, and Denise Mewborn.

A withdrawal is defined as a student removing him/herself from a class after the end of the drop/add period. This form of withdrawal results in the course appearing on the student’s transcript, a grade of W or WF being assigned, and the hours counting for purposes of financial aid (including HOPE scholarship).

Professor Jere Morehead noted that the goal is to create a more intellectually rigorous environment at the University. The current practice of allowing an unlimited number of withdrawals may promote students making poor choices and not taking responsibility for their academic careers. From a practical standpoint, every withdrawal is a seat that could have been taken by a student who needed the course to make timely progress toward a degree.

Note: Although the issue of excessive withdrawals relates only to undergraduate students, some of the solutions will apply to both undergraduate and graduate solutions for purposes of consistency, equity, efficiency in programming, and clarity of communication.

Three problems were identified by the subcommittee:

- (1) The number of withdrawals is creating a problem by denying seats in courses to students who need them in order to make timely progress toward their degrees.
- (2) Students on financial aid must earn 67% of the hours in which they enroll every year in order to maintain their aid, and excessive withdrawals cause some students to fail to meet this standard.
- (3) Some students are “chronic users” of the withdrawal process, and there is a strong correlation with chronic use of withdrawals, lack of academic success, and student loan defaulting.

Three solutions to these problems were identified by the subcommittee:

- (1) Add an “Add” day to drop/add. Adding an add day will allow students to pick up any seats that become available after the end of the drop period. For purposes of consistency, this change applies to both undergraduate and graduate students. The motion was approved unanimously.
- (2) Limit students to four “Withdrawals” during their undergraduate careers (not counting hardship withdrawals approved by the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs). Two withdrawals would be permitted before a student has attempted 60 hours and two after the student has attempted 60 hours.

Dr. Mewborn distributed a handout summarizing practices at the University of Florida because this proposal is based on their current practices.

Dr. Mewborn asked the committee to consider only the matter of limiting the number of withdrawals without trying to deal with the particulars of how the policy would be implemented as an appropriate committee with staff assistance will work on implementation issues subsequent to the matter being approved by the University Council.

Mr. Connor McCarthy expressed concern that four withdrawals is too few because some students need to withdraw from individual courses due to financial or medical hardship in a particular semester. It was noted that this type of “hardship withdrawal” would count toward the limit of four. Only hardship withdrawals approved through Student Affairs would not count toward the four withdrawals limit. It was noted that such circumstances might be more appropriately handled as incompletes rather than withdrawals, depending on the individual case.

Faculty members of the committee expressed concern about limiting the number of withdrawals to four because students need a “safety valve” when they are starting their college careers. Some students are not able to accurately gauge the course load they can handle, and some students have difficulty adjusting to the academic demands of UGA in their first year. It was also noted that college is a time to explore different academic options, and withdrawals allow students to explore without fear of undue penalty.

Dr. Gayle Andrews suggested that any change to the policy would require vigorous student and faculty education.

After considerable discussion, Dr. DerVartanian moved that the proposal be changed to allow six withdrawals. The motion was seconded by Mr. McCarthy, and the motion failed with a vote of 3 in favor and 6 opposed.

The committee returned to the proposal from the subcommittee and further discussed the “before 60 hours/after 60 hours” portion of the proposal. After discussion about students adjusting to college in the first two years versus the difficulty of major courses and the challenges of including transfer students in the policy, it was decided to eliminate the “before 60/after 60 portion of the proposal.”

Dr. Mauricio moved that undergraduate students be limited to four withdrawals without restriction on when they may be used. This limit would not include hardship withdrawals approved by Student Affairs. Dr. DerVartanian seconded, and the motion was approved 6 in favor and 2 opposed.

(3) Move the withdrawal deadline later in the semester. Moving the withdrawal deadline later in the semester will allow students to receive enough information to make an informed decision about a withdrawal.

Dr. Mauricio moved that the withdrawal deadline for both undergraduate and graduate students be moved two weeks beyond the current date. Dr. DerVartanian seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously.

Note: This change applies to both undergraduate and graduate students. [Post-meeting follow-up: Following investigation by the Registrar's Office, the recommendation is to move the withdrawal deadline two weeks beyond the midpoint of the semester.]

A fourth solution was also proposed by a member of the Educational Affairs Committee. Dr. Rodney Mauricio noted that the current system of electronic withdrawals allows students to withdraw without talking to the instructor. Having a conversation with the instructor might allow the student to better assess his/her status in the course, to get assistance with how to study for the course, to be directed to necessary resources and would assist with building interpersonal relationships between instructors and students. No definitive proposal was made for how such a change might be handled, but the committee will continue this discussion at its February meeting.

A fifth solution proposed by Dr. Mauricio was to change the grading system from W (withdraw) and WF (withdraw failing) to WP (withdraw passing) and WF. This change in grading would heighten the awareness of both students and instructors of the significance of withdrawing from a course at any point in the semester.

There being no further business, Professor Morehead moved that the meeting be adjourned. Dr. Vencill seconded, and the meeting ended at 4:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Paul Freese", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Brian Paul Freese
Office of the Vice President for Instruction