

Faculty Rights, Privileges and Responsibilities (FRPR) Committee
October 29, 2013
Meeting Minutes

Present: Rick Hale, Laura Hines, Kirk McClure, Jerry Mikkelson, Jan Sheldon, Jim Thorp

Absent: Mario Medina, Amalia Monroe-Gulick,

The FRPR Committee met on October 29, 2013 at 2:00 pm in 4001 Dole Human Development Center.

Approval of Minutes from October 8, 2013 meeting

Jerry Mikkelson moved and Kirk McClure seconded approval of the minutes from the September 24, 2013 meeting. The minutes were unanimously approved.

Core Curriculum and Academic Freedom

Committee members reviewed the first charge that was given to them by FacEx:

Gather information on the Core Curriculum course nomination, review, approval, and appeal processes. Consider how policies and procedures might facilitate implementation of the Core Curriculum while also ensuring that the Core is ideally compatible with academic freedom. Report findings and recommendations to FacEx.

At the last meeting, Jan passed out materials describing the Core Curriculum, each goal, learning outcomes, criteria for evaluating courses, and assessment rubrics. At that meeting, members briefly reviewed these materials and a discussion regarding the Core ensued. Members were concerned about the criteria for evaluating whether a course (or series of courses) met a learning outcome, and members felt that these criteria were too specific. For example, General Education Goal 2, Learning Outcome 1 states that “[e]ach of the two three-credit hour courses that meet this outcome must achieve all of the following: . . . 4. Evaluate the quality of students’ written communication, and use this evaluation for a supermajority of the final course grade.” In the School of Engineering, there are several required courses where students must analyze issues and complete a lengthy written paper. The “supermajority” of the final grade in these courses, however, is not determined by the grade on this written paper. Thus, this combination of courses would not meet the criteria for this learning outcome. FRPR committee members felt that these very specific criteria could, in fact, impinge on a faculty member’s right of academic freedom to determine the content of a course and the way students are evaluated in that course. Committee members felt that there may be concerns about substantive issues (i.e., content of a course and evaluation of students) and procedural issues (e.g., the approval and review process). Committee members also noted that faculty may not truly have the option of not having their course meet a core requirement since the number of students enrolled in a course is used for resource allocation including GTA assignment and faculty raises.

The committee discussed at length the issue of the Core Curriculum and its effect on academic freedom. After the discussion, Jerry Mikkelson moved and Jan Sheldon seconded the following statement:

The FRPR committee supports the goals of the Core Curriculum and the need for assessment. The committee, however, has serious reservations regarding the implementation of the core curriculum and how it could affect academic freedom, particularly if the content of a course and/or the specific method of assessing students is defined by individuals outside the discipline. The committee believes that a faculty member, or in some cases a committee of faculty members within the discipline, should determine the content of a specific course and the methods of assessment, not a committee outside the discipline. Whatever changes in courses or curricula might be required as a product of such longitudinal assessment should be made at the level where the expertise for the content is. The way the process is now established gives the appearance that the central administration, and by extension some other external agency, could determine the specific content of courses, and the allowed method of assessment. We believe the implementation of the Core Curriculum will be better enabled and will be more compatible with academic freedom if the institutional goals remain high level goals, and if methods of assessment are left solely to the discretion of the faculty members responsible for the course. As such, we strongly encourage the administration to strike references in the core curriculum which mandate forms of assessment, such as requiring a supermajority of grading for any specific outcome or objective. Additionally, we believe that the university should be broadly accepting of alternative means of assessment to meet specific goals (e.g., several courses rather than one specific course), with the understanding that the faculty responsible for the course(s) are also responsible for defining assessment metrics and providing sufficient evidence that institutional goals are met.

The committee unanimously approved the statement subject to edits made by committee members.

Freedom of Speech Update

Jerry Mikkelson stated that other than the articles and letters to the editor in the Lawrence Journal World, he had no further information regarding Professor Guth and his situation. FRPR members reiterated their concern that freedom of speech should be protected.

Faculty Code of Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct

The FRPR committee worked for 2 years on researching faculty codes at other universities and drafting a new code, which had not been updated since 1971. The Faculty Senate approved the proposed code on May 3, 2012. It was sent to the Provost on September 6, 2012. FacEx received the Provost's edits in September, 2013. A few weeks ago, Jerry asked Chris Steadham, FacEx

president, to send him a copy of the proposed code with the Provost's edits. Jerry passed out the code with the Provost's revisions. Jan indicated that Chris Steadham invited her to attend the October 22nd meeting of FacEx where the code will be discussed. Committee members asked Jan to ensure that FacEx is aware of the fact that we would like to be given the code officially so that we may comment on it.

After a discussion of the Core Curriculum, members emphasized that it is important to add a right to the Faculty Code indicating that the content of a course, definition of course assignments, and course assessment should be determined by the faculty member who is teaching the course.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:30.

Next meeting: Tuesday, November 19, 2013 at 2:00 pm in 4001 Dole