

Minutes of the Professional Standards Committee
February 15, 2008

PRESENT: Kris Bartanen, Sigrun Bodine, Julie Nelson Christoph, Julian Edgoose, Karl Fields, Don Share, George Tomlin

Tomlin convened the meeting at 1:06 p.m.

Minutes from February 8th meeting were approved with minor revisions.

Chair Tomlin noted that he will need to miss the meeting of February 29. The PSC can decide at its February 22 meeting whether to meet in his absence. He announced that Faculty Senate Chair Cannon had sent him a new query regarding the question of greater consistency of expectations for faculty professional development across departments.

The PSC deferred discussion of Charge 18 (Nature and Procedure for Drawing up Letters of Appointment for Interdisciplinary and Multi-departmental Faculty Positions) pending further subcommittee work.

The PSC then turned to Charge 15 and worked to draft an amendment to Section 5 (a) of the Faculty Code (page 17). The amendment would permit ongoing instructors to elect streamlined evaluations through a process that roughly parallels the current process for tenure-line faculty. While considering that section of the Code, the PSC decided to amend the existing streamlined evaluation language for tenure-line faculty to include the possibility of such an evaluation in the 35th year of service.

Current language of Section 5 (a) of the Faculty Code:

Persons in the rank of associate professor who are not candidates for tenure or promotion and professors in years 5, 15, and 25 of service in that rank may elect to bypass the procedures for evaluation detailed in Chapter III, section 4 and have their next scheduled review conducted by the head officer and dean under the procedures described in this section.

Draft language of an amended Section 5 (a):

Persons in the rank of associate professor who are not candidates for tenure or promotion; professors in years 5, 15, 25, and 35 of service in that rank; or instructors in years 18, 24, and 30 of service in that rank may elect to bypass the procedures for evaluation detailed in Chapter III, section 4, and have their next scheduled review conducted by the head officer and dean under the procedures described in this section

Before approving and formally proposing the amendment, the PSC asked Dean Bartanen to verify that the new language would have the desired outcome for the 20 ongoing instructors remaining at the university, and to consider whether the proposed new language might have unforeseen consequences.

The PSC then continued its discussion of concerns raised recently by some faculty members about inappropriate student written comments on faculty evaluations (Charge 21.) The PSC is concerned that such comments might cause pain and humiliation for

evaluatees, a problem that could be exacerbated when those evaluations are read by colleagues. The committee considered potential responses ranging from changes in the pre-evaluation statement read to students to systems designed to remove evaluations with inappropriate comments from the evaluation process.

The PSC considered the addition of the following language, drafted by Dean Bartanen that could be added to the current statement read aloud before students complete their evaluations:

. . . the University of Puget Sound values a diverse educational community based on mutual respect, trust, and responsibility. The university believes its faculty members, students, and staff members should learn, teach, work, serve and lead in an environment free from harassment. Written remarks about a person's appearance, race, ethnicity, age, disability, religion, or other characteristics unrelated to teaching are not appropriate.

The PSC concluded that it did not seem workable to require department chairs to screen evaluations for such comments before releasing them to evaluatees. However, it might be possible to identify an ombudsperson to whom evaluatees offended by inappropriate student comments might appeal in order to have such evaluations typed with the offending passages redacted. Additionally, such an ombudsperson could serve to offer advice on how to explain the student comments to colleagues in the personal statement—especially when the student comments seem to indicate some larger issue with bias or harassment.

The PSC will continue this discussion at its next meeting. Dean Bartanen offered to do some research about how other institutions deal with such issues. The PSC may also decide to inquire into the frequency of such offensive written comments as a way to better assess appropriate responses.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:07 p.m.

Submitted Respectfully,

Don Share