

Minutes of the Professional Standards Committee  
February 16, 2006

Present: Kris Bartanen, Bill Breitenbach, Karl Fields, Grace Kirchner, Sarah Moore, John Riegsecker, Don Share, Carolyn Weisz (chair)

PSC Chair Weisz called the meeting to order at 2:02 p.m. The minutes of February 9, 2006, were approved as revised.

Weisz announced that the Department of Theatre Arts has submitted a revised statement of evaluation guidelines and procedures. Rather than appoint a subcommittee, the committee as a whole will review the document. Weisz will circulate the revised statement to committee members.

Weisz announced that Senators have not yet had a chance to comment on the latest draft of proposed modifications to the amendment of the Faculty Code, Chapter III, Sections 6 and 7. The committee accordingly decided to postpone discussion of this agenda item for one week in the hope of receiving feedback from the Senate. Weisz will retransmit a copy of the latest draft to Senate Chair Barry Anton and ask him to encourage Senators to send their comments to the PSC by Wednesday, February 22. Weisz also suggested that PSC members undertake a thorough proofreading of the latest version of the amendment so that it might be possible to bring the amended amendment to a final vote at the March 6 faculty meeting, if no new issues are raised or new amendments proposed. Committee members agreed to do this.

Weisz announced that the Board of Trustees would like to be alerted in advance about any substantive amendments to the Code that will be brought to it for approval. Bartanen agreed to give the Board timely notice if the amendment of Chapter III, Sections 6 and 7, or an amendment of Chapter I, Part B, Section 1 (definition of tenure-line faculty) receives faculty approval. The committee judged these to be the only current agenda items that involve substantive changes to the Code.

Breitenbach asked if the Faculty Senate had discussed at its February 13 meeting the findings and recommendations concerning the PSC that were made in the report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Tenure. Bartanen reported that Senate has decided to postpone discussion of the PSC until after the Ad Hoc Committee on Professional Standards has submitted its report.

The committee spent the remainder of the meeting discussing a suggestion from the Diversity Committee that the PSC insert a new paragraph about diversity in the annual statement of "Faculty Evaluation Criteria and Procedures" (the "buff document"). The Diversity Committee suggests that the new wording be added to the section on "Teaching," which is part of the "University Evaluation Standards." An existing paragraph in this section reads as follows: "Students come to us from a variety of backgrounds and bring with them an array of experiences and abilities. Students' needs also vary as they progress through their university education. Effective teachers need to

recognize this diverse range of students. This recognition of differences should lead to flexibility in teaching strategy and tactics. Good teachers, then, will gauge students' current abilities and will provide strategies for their continued development."

The Diversity Committee suggests that the existing paragraph be followed by this new one: "Students also come to us with diverse social identities including sex, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, age, disability, marital or familiar status, sexual orientation, veteran status, and gender identity. Effective teachers recognize, value, and welcome such differences and acknowledge the challenges diverse students face." The Diversity Committee believes that this proposed addition is grounded in the current language of the Code in Chapter I, Part C, Section 2 (Faculty as Teachers): "They demonstrate respect for the student as an individual and serve as intellectual guides and counselors."

The PSC's discussion of the Diversity Committee's suggestion was wide-ranging and animated. These minutes can summarize only some of the questions that were addressed. One line of discussion concerned the practical or operational effects of including the new language in the university's statement of evaluation standards for teaching. Does the suggested language chiefly aim to raise faculty consciousness about issues of diversity, to elaborate on existing expectations about teaching, or to legislate new standards by which the effectiveness of teachers will be measured? Is it sufficient for teachers to recognize the differences among students and acknowledge the challenges facing them or should teachers also be expected to value and welcome those differences? How would the welcoming be measured if it were to become a standard of effective teaching? Does the second sentence of the suggested statement specify attitudes and behaviors that would be expected of all effective teachers, or would the display of such attitudes and behaviors be simply viewed as positive evidence in the evaluation of those teachers who do display them? Might it make better sense to replace the words "effective teachers" with the words "the university values teachers who can" do these things? Is the Diversity Committee's statement intended to cover both responding to students' diversity and teaching about diversity in course content?

Another line of discussion concerned the concept and list of "social identities" in the first sentence. Should the buff document move beyond its current emphasis on variations of academic aptitudes (insofar as those aptitudes might be affected by students' diverse backgrounds, experiences, and abilities)? Should the buff document begin to emphasize as well the diversity of "social identities," which seem more like categories of people than explanations of variations in academic aptitudes? Are there disciplines in which some of the listed differences of social identity are not likely to become an issue in teaching? Is the list of social identities illustrative or exhaustive? Is it a good idea to specify particular social identities, or should the statement be left general? How could teachers be expected to recognize some of the less visible social identities among the students they encounter in the classroom? Would effective teachers be expected to actively uncover social identities that are not immediately apparent?

A third line of discussion concerned the placing of the statement in the buff document. Should the statement appear in the section on teaching or does it have broader applicability (for example, in advising or university service)? Does the PSC have the authority to insert such a statement in the buff document without broader faculty discussion and approval? Is the buff document the best place for such a statement about diversity and teaching? Should a statement that alters the university's criteria for evaluating teaching appear in the Code instead?

Time expired before the discussion did. Weisz announced that the committee will take up this topic again at its meeting on March 2. Members of the Diversity Committee will be invited to attend.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:07.

Respectfully submitted,

William Breitenbach