

Minutes of the Professional Standards Committee

March 11, 2016, 8:00 a.m.

Present: Kristine Bartanen, Geoffrey Block, Tiffany MacBain, Garrett Milam, Mark Reinitz (chair), Jennifer Neighbors, Kurt Walls, and Matt Warning

The meeting was called to order at 8:04 a.m. and the minutes quickly approved.

The first item of business was the discussion of two remaining code interpretations relevant to the new sexual conduct policy.

Reinitz prepared the first code interpretation, the “Code Interpretation of Chapter I, part C, Section 2, and Chapter 1, Part D, Section 4, Professional Ethics of Faculty and Relationships of a Sexual Nature.”

Here is the current interpretation:

In those cases where the faculty member is in a position of professional responsibility with respect to the student, the Professional Standards Committee rules that sexual relationships violate acceptable standards of professional ethics as required by the Faculty Code, Chapter 1, Part C, Section 2. This policy aligns with the university’s conflict of interest provisions in the Code of Conduct as well as Section II, Part E (“Consensual Sexual Relationship”) of the Campus Policy Prohibiting Harassment and Sexual Conduct.

After discussing the importance of making the Faculty Code consistent with university policy, which recently passed the Faculty Senate without dissent, the Committee decided to add the following suggested rewording:

Sexual and/or romantic relationships between faculty members and students violate acceptable standards of professional ethics as required by the Faculty Code, Chapter 1, Part D, Section 4 and impair the role of teacher as defined in Chapter 1, Part, C, Section. 2. This policy aligns with the university’s conflict of interest provisions in the Code of Conduct as well as Section II, Part E (“Consensual Sexual Relationship”) of the Campus Policy Prohibiting Harassment and Sexually Misconduct.

Discussion centered on whether the word “romantic” was the most accurate or meaningful word (two members thought the word “intimate” might be preferred). The Committee therefore decided to seek a legal opinion on this point.

Neighbors prepared the second Code interpretation. Her starting point was the September 17, 2015 revision to the following interpretation of Chapter VI:

The University of Puget Sound reaffirms the principle that its students, faculty, and staff have a right to be free from discriminatory harassment, including sexual harassment, and sexual misconduct by any member of the academic community. These behaviors are defined in the Campus Policy Prohibiting Discriminatory Harassment and Sexual Misconduct.

After discussion, mainly on whether to retain the word “discriminatory,” the paragraph was amended as follows:

The University of Puget Sound prohibits discriminatory sexual harassment and sexual misconduct by any member of the university community. The university also prohibits sexual and/or romantic relationships between faculty members and students. Details on these prohibitions can be found in Part II of the Campus Policy Prohibiting Harassment and Sexual Misconduct.

The next item of business was a discussion of the Faculty Senate charge to evaluate gender bias in course evaluations.

The Committee reviewed the literature on the topic and discussed various issues from several perspectives. Although it did not present a motion on how to respond, the Committee seemed to reach a consensus that gender bias was present in student evaluations. One possibility discussed was to add wording related to gender bias in the Faculty Evaluation Procedures & Criteria 2015-2016 (the “Buff” document), to Item 2 on page 15, the section “Evidence used by departmental colleagues.” Related to the issue of gender bias was the extent to which student evaluations in general should count in the evaluation process and whether the term instructor evaluation should be replaced by course evaluations. The Committee also discussed the current policies on class visitations and whether we should consider revising them.

MacBain and Bartanen offered to send links to a number of published articles on student evaluations and gender bias to PSC members. Among the articles were “Student Ratings of Teaching: A Summary of Research and Literature” from The Idea Center (2012), Colleen Flaherty’s “Bias against Female Instructors” in *Inside Higher Ed* (January 11, 2016), and Dan Berretts’s “Scholar’s Take Aim at Student Evaluations’ ‘Air of Objectivity’” in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (September 18, 2014).

Towards the end of the meeting the discussion focused on the possibility that student evaluations should perhaps play a supplementary rather than a primary source of evidence for purposes of evaluating teaching. The Committee agreed to continue discussion of these issues at a future meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 8:55 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Geoffrey Block

