In attendance: Brad Tomhaye, Jo Crane (Chair), Alison Tracy Hale, Sunil Kukreja, David Moore, Ben Tucker, Kurt Walls, Landon Wade, Meghan Bacher, Sarah Shives, Cole Jackson
Guests: Dave Wright (Director for Spiritual Life and Civic Engagement; University Chaplain) Jane Sadetsky

The meeting was called to order at 1:02 p.m.

I. Approval of Minutes
M/S/P to approve minutes of November 4, 2016 meeting

II. Discussion of Religious Accommodations
The committee heard from guests David Wright and Jane Sadetsky regarding the current practices for religious observances by members of our campus community, and the limitations thereof. Wright noted that this year for the first time his office provided faculty with a fuller calendar of religious observances across multiple faiths, designed to make such observances more visible. His hope was to communicate this information to the campus community early enough to allow faculty and others to make adjustments to class schedules and other events and activities to minimize conflicts.

Key issues around religious accommodations include scheduling of major campus events and programming, employment expectations, and assignments, exams, and labs that occur on religious holidays. In some cases, Wright noted, the student has not yet approached the instructor about a conflict, or may have had a negative experience with a previous discussion. Sadetsky added that in many cases, students are not forbidden or actively discouraged from making use of religious accommodations, but that a lack of clarity or consistency within or across classes causes stress for students who may feel the absence is “not worth it” and who thus miss services, or who are reluctant to use one of a limited number of “excused absences.” Students may feel that faculty policies make it “too difficult” for them to attend services or otherwise participate in faith practices. Demographically, the situation has the highest impact on Jewish students, as well as those who practice Islam or the Bahá’í faith. Puget Sound’s increased participation in diversity efforts such as the Posse Program may increase the representation of other faiths and thus raise additional issues around individual accommodations and equity and consistency across our community. Wright noted that this issue is not merely academic but also co-curricular; one approach is to use a 5% demographic threshold, in which no official programming be scheduled that would conflict with religious observances relevant to 5% or more of our population.

In addition to providing a more robust calendar and individual accommodations, guests informed the that students have very different classroom experiences around religious accommodations, which creates an inconsistency of impact. That is, different faculty
members have different absence policies that produce different effects for students who miss class for religious observances. It would help for faculty/campus to be more proactive in creating policies and addressing potential conflicts so that students can better plan for accommodations.

The committee discussed whether a stronger policy was needed, beyond or in addition to the calendar information available. Is what’s needed a specific policy, or a set of guidelines to improve equity? A stronger policy might better accommodate more faiths, and enable students seeking religious accommodations to approach faculty with more confidence. Kukreja pointed the committee to the “Statement on Religious Accommodation” at the College of Charleston for one possible model:

http://president.cofc.edu/community-relations/rlc/accommodation.php  
Wright offered to reach out to other institutions for further examples of relevant policies, in addition to those examples provided by Crane at an earlier meeting. It was further noted that it is harder to get accommodations for members of minority sects, and that younger students and those from minoritized groups may find it harder to speak with faculty, setting an even higher barrier for them. In addition, some students may not self-identify for fear of being stigmatized or for any number of reasons (it was also suggested that faculty and others in supervisory positions be sensitive to students’/employees’ privacy by offering private conversations around accommodations). In such cases, especially, a written policy would perhaps help students who are not familiar with university culture, and would indicate the university’s openness to such accommodations and its support for students of different faiths.

The committee discussed how best to communicate to faculty the information contained in Wright’s calendar of religious observances, and to move toward a policy, consulting with Wright’s office. Such a policy might also direct students to Wright’s office for assistance and support in making use of accommodations, approaching faculty, etc.

III. Petitions Report (Tomhave)


During the dates covered by this report, the following actions were taken on petitions submitted to the Academic Standards Committee:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Petition Type and Description</th>
<th>Approved by Preview Team</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Re-enrollment from Medical Withdrawal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registration for Classes with Time Conflict</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Withdrawal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For the Fall 2016 semester, a total of 49 petitions have been approved and 3 petitions have been denied. Of these 52 total petitions, 24 involved registration with a schedule conflict and 10 granted a medical withdrawal.

This year’s petition activity represents an increase over last year’s activity when, by November 11, 2015, 41 petitions had been acted upon: 1 denied and 40 approved to include 21 schedule conflict registrations and 7 medical withdrawals.

IV. Old Business: SAA and Exam Policy
The committee discussed Tomhave’s proposed revision of the Final Examination Policy, which includes information regarding accommodations through the SAA per the committee’s previous conversations with Peggy Perno. Based on several suggestions, Tomhave will further revise the policy for submission at the next subcommittee meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Alison Tracy Hale, Secretary of the Policy Subcommittee