

**Minutes of the Professional Standards Committee
Friday, February 20, 2009**

Present: Kristine Bartanen, Sigrun Bodine, Julie Nelson Christoph, Julian Edgoose, Barry Goldstein, Bill Haltom, George Tomlin (Chair)

The meeting was convened at 1:00 P.M.

1. There were no announcements.

2. Minutes from February 13

Amendments were suggested. The minutes will be reworked for approval at the next meeting.

3. Recommendations and Actions for Charge #5: Department Professional Development Guidelines

The PSC continued its discussion of the question of consistency of expectation across departments regarding professional growth. This charge came to the PSC from the Senate, as a result of recommendations in the FAC 2006-07 Annual Report that either the Senate or the PSC offer more clarity on “expectations for peer-review publication and creative scholarship, pre-tenure promotion to associate professor, and early tenure” and in the observation in the FAC 2007-08 Annual Report that “some departmental guidelines are vague regarding professional growth” and that “It is helpful if departments delineate, if not in the guidelines then in departmental evaluations, what constitutes evidence for their fields.”

After deliberation, the PSC affirmed that its role is to ensure that department guidelines don't contravene the Code, and not to consider consistency across departments. The PSC considered the possibility of publishing departmental evaluation guidelines in order to shed light on the evaluation process, thus helping junior faculty to understand the review process, enabling departments to compare their own documents with those of other departments, and enabling the PSC itself to compare guidelines under review with comparable guidelines that have already been approved. The PSC is in agreement about the desirability of publishing these documents in a secure Web location available only to the Puget Sound community.

Having reviewed the Faculty Bylaws and the Faculty Code, the PSC determined that it does have the authority to publish the guidelines as part of its ongoing process of reviewing department evaluation guidelines. Because the expectation has in the past been that these documents would not be public, however, the PSC believes it is desirable to let faculty know of its intentions before posting the documents. PSC member Haltom will notify the Faculty Senate of the PSC's intention to make the review guidelines public to the campus.

4. Charge 7: Harassing Comments in Student Evaluations

This charge carries over from 2007-08, as explained in the PSC 2007-08 year-end report: “The Dean of the University brought an inquiry to the PSC on February 7, 2008 from a faculty member who complained about sexually harassing comments appearing in student evaluations of faculty. The PSC discussed the ramifications of this phenomenon, and began a list of possible remedial steps, when it decided to defer the topic until after the Faculty Senate’s survey of the faculty on evaluations was complete.”

Having read the Faculty Senate’s survey results (sent out on facultycoms on 12/8/08), the subcommittee (Wood and Christoph) recommended following up on the suggestions of last year’s PSC (see minutes of 2/15/08) with regard to an ombudsperson. The subcommittee suggested that it would be useful in the case of harassing comments, as well as in other ethical concerns, to have an ombudsperson (and/or an ethics advisory council) who is outside of the department, the FAC, and the Deans’ offices and who can offer disinterested counsel and information. Such a resource would also be useful in other instances when the Dean, department chairs, and faculty have questions or need counsel on issues that might potentially go to hearing boards.

The subcommittee also considered the possibility of working with the Faculty Senate’s ad hoc committee on student evaluations to add cautionary language to the script that staff members read aloud before student evaluations. The subcommittee suggested, however, that it would be more effective to raise the profile of the Student Integrity Code more generally.

Responding to the subcommittee report, the PSC noted the existence of campus policy (e.g. the Campus Policy Prohibiting Harassment and the Student Integrity Code) that make clear that harassment is inconsistent with the ethical standards of our campus community. The committee considered a variety of proactive and reactive ways of protecting faculty from harassment, attempting to address the problem of harassing comments without creating unduly large revisions to the existing procedures.

Several options were discussed in relation to the Student Integrity code. One possibility would be to ask students to check a box signifying their agreement to abide by this Code (much like Users Agreements in computer software). This possibility was deemed unworkable, however, because it is unenforceable in anonymous evaluations and would likely have the effect of undermining student trust in the anonymity evaluation tool itself. The PSC determined that a better route would be to work with the Integrity Principle that is part of the Student Integrity Code, as the Principle is based more in values than in legal responsibilities. A less intrusive approach would be to ask the staff member administering the evaluations to remind students of the Integrity Principle that students recite at matriculation. The Committee also considered the possibility of conducting a focus group with graduating seniors to see how they believe fellow students would interpret this explicit reminder of the Integrity Principle: Would fellow students feel intimidated or limited by that context for the evaluations? The Subcommittee on Charge

#7 will draft language to propose for insertion in the preamble to the student evaluation form.

Next, the PSC considered the possibility of making an ombudsperson available to help faculty respond to harassing comments in student evaluations. The committee determined that the position of faculty ombudsperson already exists as part of the Campus Policy Prohibiting Harassment and that cases of harassment in student evaluations are within the purview of that policy.

The PSC then considered what actions might be desirable or possible through that faculty ombudsperson. The existence of harassing comments might cause pain and humiliation for evaluatees, pain that could be exacerbated when those evaluations are read by colleagues. Would the best course be for the ombudsperson to counsel the evaluatee on how to treat the evaluations in the personal statement for the evaluation file? Would the best course be to cut the comments from the evaluation with some sort of note in a typed version explaining that harassing material had been cut from the original evaluation?

The PSC determined that the faculty ombudsperson has the power to determine the best course of action and that both counsel and omission of comments are possible under Chapter III, Section 4, a.3.e: "Other variations in procedure."

The PSC then considered how best to make known the possibility of working with the faculty ombudsperson. Potential vehicles that the PSC considered included a Senate motion, a PSC interpretation, or a revision to the Faculty Code. The PSC determined that the best course would be to add a paragraph to the buff document, advising evaluatees of their rights. This new paragraph would be highlighted in the cover letter to the document and announced at the first department chairs' meeting of the year. The Subcommittee on Charge #7 will draft language to propose for insertion into the buff document.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:25.

Submitted respectfully,

Julie Christoph