

Minutes of the Professional Standards Committee
September 19, 2008

PRESENT: Bartanen, Bodine, Christoph, Edgoose, Goldstein, Haltom, Tomlin (chair), Wood

1. The meeting was convened at 11:02 a.m.
2. Minutes from September 12 were approved with a minor correction.
3. The PSC discussed the challenge inherent in the task of balancing its various roles. The possibility of dividing the PSC into two committees has been discussed since the Ad Hoc Committee on Professional Standards report (October 31, 2006, section 7), with the function of interpreting the Code being separated from that of hearing grievances. Such a split would remove the possibility of conflicts of interest that might emerge when, for example, it hears a grievance concerning an issue relating to which it had earlier given a reading of the Code. If such instances are conflicts of interest they might necessitate the entire PSC recusing itself from the grievance which, following the rules in Chapter VI, Section 4 b of the Code, would be possible although immensely cumbersome.

The committee then responded to that challenge. One member noted that the Bylaws allow the committee to “call upon any part of the University for assistance” in its work to “recommend and improve continually the instruments and methods of Faculty evaluation” (Article V, Section 6 E c. 1). That might be interpreted to allow for the creation of other groups on campus (such as past PSC chairs) for Code readings in such cases, if it were possible to predict when a future conflict might emerge.

One suggestion was made that the PSC should give “post mortem” readings at the end of the year when their impacts had already been made. This was felt by others to risk leaving too little oversight on important decisions, a situation that some could abuse, and it was also seen as exposing others to the risk of making decisions for which they could be liable without the benefit of the PSC’s timely readings.

Others felt that many roles in this and other organizations involve the risk of such conflicts of interest, but that these were not unmanageable if they were handled carefully – particularly if requests for readings are framed without sharing any details of the case (when that is possible). Indeed, given the fact that the PSC remains a single committee it has to try to operate in this way, although suggestions were brought to the PSC in its February 12, 2007 meeting to address related issues that, some PSC members noted, might offer ways to move forward short of an outright split.

4. The committee then reviewed the new procedures for initiating grievances, noting the ambiguity as to when a complaint becomes a formal complaint, and addressing the distinct roles of chair, head officer, and Dean in these instances. It adjourned before any decisions were made.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:25p.m.

Submitted respectfully,

Julian Edgoose