

PROFESSIONAL STANDARD COMMITTEE MINUTES
November 20, 2014

Present: Geoffrey Block, Tiffany MacBain, Andreas Madlung, Kris Bartanen, Betsy Kirkpatrick, Amy Spivey, Doug Cannon

The meeting convened at 8:30am.

I. The minutes of 11/13/14 were approved unanimously.

II. Dean Bartanen reported on report from legal counsel about the acceptance of electronic signatures as legal signatures. This includes signatures that are inserted as images as well as original signatures on letters that are submitted as electronic files (e.g. as PDFs). University-internal authentication for e-signatures could be set up but it would be more difficult to do this for authentication of e-signatures from outside the campus email system. Regardless of this issue, the legal system generally accepts the types of electronic signatures mentioned above, therefore making such authentication system not necessary.

III. Several suggestions for changes in language for Code interpretations were discussed and approved by the committee as follows:

- Page 48, line 29 of the Code will be changed to read:
“As defined for purposes of interpretation, a letter of evaluation is a signed document.”
- Pertaining to the course assistant guidelines review (page 41, line 42), specifically with respect to changes regarding confidentiality and objective grading, the Dean’s office will make a copy of each departmental guidelines document they have on file in the Dean’s office and Kris and Tiffany will then send this copy with the relevant changes to the code interpretations to department chairs with the request to review and revise these guidelines if necessary and send them back to PSC.
- Page 43, line 15 of the Code will be changed to read “The evaluation process is clearly career influencing”.
- Page 43, line 38 of the Code will be changed to:
“If you have concerns regarding obligations under this policy, please refer to Chapter 1, Part D, Section 4 of the *Faculty Code* (“Professional Ethics”) and/or speak with your Department Chair or the Dean.”

Tiffany will compile all changes suggested by the PSC for final approval to the PSC before sending the final copy on to the Senate.

Next, the Buff Document needs to be brought in accordance with these clarified interpretations. We can do this next semester.

IV. Outside letters

The Senate provided the PSC with the following charge (first listed in the list of charges given to the PSC at the first meeting of this semester.)

Charge: Review the PSC “Unified interpretation of Chapter III, Sections 4, a (1) and 4, a (c). Letters of Evaluation from Persons Outside the Department” to determine if the language on outside letters should be updated for: (a) distinctions of submission process for different types of letters (e.g., letters from co-authors, mentors, reviewers); (b) processes of solicitation of letter writers; (c) dates of submission of outside letters for departmental review; (d) expectations of outside letters; and (e) any additional questions raised in PSC conversations.

- a. **Rationale:** Given that different departments have different procedures and expectations for outside letters in evaluation files, a uniform process for handling letters seems in order. Additionally, the time frame of letter submission at the department level may to closely align with department deliberations to warrant sufficient integration

The PSC members discussed the charge and the following concerns and questions were raised.

- Is there a difference between types of outside letter writers? Are all outside letters equal or do we need a distinction regarding their origin? What was the rationale for this specific part of the charge?
- It was stated that what is important in the evaluation process regarding, among other things, outside letters, is to have enough time for letters to come in and the department to read these letters. Letters after the due date don’t get included. The PSC members affirmed that 10 days, which the Code currently says is needed for outside letter review (page 9 of Buff Document), is enough time.
- The PSC discussed in general the value of outside letters and comments were made that for some fields of study there is no one on campus who can adequately judge scholarly work of a colleague in a given field, making outside letters valuable.
- The question was raised whether formalizing the outside letter process would imply a suggestion that outside letters were needed or required. Since the PSC is not being charged to discuss the issue per se, the PSC was reluctant to take up the general question of outside letter use at this point.
- Regarding expectations of outside letters, the PSC affirmed that there is some inbuilt (and desirable) flexibility in the current interpretation.
- Regarding the process of outside letter solicitation the PSC was unsure how to interpret language in the Code giving the head officer sole judgment of relevancy of outside letters to be included or excluded from a file (page 48, line 9 of the Code). More discussion on this issue is needed and was postponed until the next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 9:20.



Respectfully submitted,
Andreas Madlung