

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON FACULTY COUNCIL ON STUDENT AFFAIRS

The Faculty Council on Student Affairs met at 9:00 a.m. on Wednesday, **January 21, 2004**, in 36 Gerberding Hall. Co-chairs Clark Pace and Jeffrey Schwartz presided.

Approval of minutes

The minutes of December 17, 2003 were approved as written.

Update on Student Athlete Initiative – Clark Pace

Pace reiterated that Faculty Senate Chair Doug Wadden recommended that a fact-finding report “would be the best way to go” for the council on the Student Athlete Initiative.

Pace said, “We could ask Dean of Undergraduate Education George Bridges to make a return visit to the council to give an update on the Satisfactory Progress Report. It would be good to revisit that issue. *Or*, we could we make a draft of what questions we would like to have answered, and identify who, from the council, will contact appropriate people to answer those questions.” Schwartz said, “You can e-mail any questions you think of to Clark Pace or to me.”

It was noted that significant changes are taking place in the Athletic Department (Richard Thompson is the Interim Athletic Director following the departure of former Athletic Director Barbara Hedges). Schwartz asked, “What *is* the role of the Faculty Senate in Athletics at the University of Washington? And what is the role of the administration in Athletics? These are questions we would like to see answered.”

Schwartz said that, with respect to the Student Athletes pamphlet, or brochure, being prepared by Kristin Henderson and others, “I haven’t heard what the current status is with the preparation and distribution of the pamphlet.” [It was due to arrive at the printers by December 17th.] Pace said, “A lot depends on the attitude of the institution towards the graduation rate and the seriousness of student athletes’ [sense of] academic responsibility. We don’t want to depend *only* on compliance to rules.”

TA Policy and Oversight – Elizabeth Feetham, Associate Dean, Graduate School, and Donald Wulff, Graduate School Assistant Dean, Director of the Center for Instructional Development and Research (CIDR)

Elizabeth Feetham, Associate Dean, Graduate School, and ex-officio member of FCSA, said, “The Graduate School and the Center for Instructional Development and Research (CIDR) have worked collaboratively for years on this issue. I will address policy issues, and Donald Wulff, Graduate School Assistant Dean and Director of CIDR, will discuss CIDR implementation of TA training and oversight.”

Feetham said the central policy document concerning Graduate Student Service Appointees (TA’s and RA’s) is Volume Four, Part IV, Chapter 6 of the University Handbook. The section devoted to appointees, including TA’s, is as follows, from Volume Four, Part IV, Chapter 6.

Feetham said, “The basic document has been in place a long time, and revisions have occurred periodically.” She said that in 1989 Provost Wilkening decided that the Graduate School would take the lead, along with CIDR, in TA training, clarifying campus responsibilities in this area.”

Feetham said TA orientation is a “central activity,” and that TA training is a “discipline-specific activity.” Feetham said there have been six national conferences that have focused attention on TA orientation and training. CIDR put on the conference held in 1989. The most recent national conference was in 1997. Conference participants included Graduate School deans, faculty and TA’s, and the conferences reflected

on possible ‘best practices’ in TA training. “Those six conferences advanced awareness,” Feetham asserted. “Locally, this awareness has grown significantly. Most departments at the UW with TA’s do *some* kind of TA training. And there has been an increase in departmental attention to the ways some TA assignments are made.”

Feetham pointed out that much of how TA training plays out “follows the culture of the discipline.” English department TA’s, for instance, “teach their own sections.” In other disciplines, TA’s may conduct quiz sections. In some departments, such as those in Health Sciences, TA’s teach in lab settings. And in many departments TA’s hold office hours. “It goes by discipline,” she reiterated.

Feetham noted that some departments “have begun to think about TA responsibilities as a developmental process and have considered moving TA’s from less complex tasks to more complex TA activities. Departments are beginning to ask new kinds of questions, such as: *Why* do we have TA’s? How can TA’s help most effectively with office hours? How can we best resolve problems with TA’s [when constructive criticism is made of particular TA’s]? Feetham said that in the late 1990’s certain memoranda were added to the Graduate School TA policy. Memorandum #14 asked that feedback from the department be provided to TA’s on their teaching experience. Memorandum #15 broadened the TA teaching duty definitions to include office hours and other means of assisting students.

Feetham said that, in 1995, the provost decided that CIDR would be part of the Graduate School. Donald Wulff, Director of CIDR, joined the discussion.

Wulff explained that CIDR has been working with the Graduate School and departments on issues of TA preparation since the early 1980’s. “CIDR provides instructional resources for all TA’s in the University,” said Wulff. “Our role is to help departments implement TA policies that are established by the Graduate School and departments. To provide such support, we work closely with faculty who are appointed to leadership roles in TA preparation within the departments and with lead TA’s who assist as experienced instructors. There are three fundamental levels on which these issues are currently being addressed: the campus level, the departmental level, and the individual level.”

Wulff noted, “At the campus-wide level we now provide a TA conference each Fall before the beginning of classes for all TA’s new to their teaching roles. The program is designed to provide TA’s with teaching skills and information for their teaching roles at the UW as well as in their future. We have also compiled information in a handbook on teaching for TA’s that is maintained on the CIDR Web site and distributed at the conference as an online resource.” The Graduate School also offers courses designed to help graduate students reflect on issues of teaching and learning.

As for the process of TA training, departments, after the initial TA conference, conduct discipline-specific training ranging from a few days to a week or more, depending on the kinds of teaching roles TA’s assume in the departments. Many departments also offer pedagogical courses devoted to teaching in their specific disciplines that TA’s may take. Additionally, many departments offer ongoing pedagogical workshops on topics related to teaching and learning. At the individual level, TA’s can voluntarily receive instructional consultation at CIDR. International TA’s, however, in addition to having to demonstrate certain levels of competence in speaking English, are required to participate in mandatory instructional consultations with CIDR during their first two quarters of teaching.

Wulff said that “through such activities over the years, we have broadened the definition of teaching at the University. We now stress that *any* interaction with students about the content of a course is a *teaching* interaction. And we provide ongoing workshops, seminars, and preparation for TA’s within this broader definition.”

In response to questions about how TA's are assessed, Wulff observed that "students are directly involved in TA assessment. For one thing, there are student ratings of TA's. Additionally, for international TA's teaching for the first time, there is a process in place in which CIDR consultants obtain student feedback in classed of such international TA's in the first two weeks of a course. If 25-30% of an international TA's students specifically criticize her/his communication, we begin intensive efforts to address the issues of the communication skills." Feetham said, "Most departments have TA assessment. A 1989 study of undergraduate education revealed that student ratings for TA's are, on average, *about* the same as those for faculty." Pace said, "Sam Castic's concern was that students find some TA's ineffective: that it is an oversight issue. The Plan in the University Handbook does not address the oversight issue. We – in my department [Construction Management] – don't move TA's along. How does oversight of TA's work? What kind of feedback is there from TA's to faculty? Faculty are expected to report on TA's."

Feetham said, "*Departments* are expected to be responsible for TA oversight. The best thing a student with a concern can do is to go to a department chair and say that students have an issue with a particular TA. The Graduate School keeps track of what departments do. Grievances are sometimes filed, or other actions [are sometimes] taken. The Graduate School is *not* in position to police departments. We rely on our graduate program coordinators and graduate-oriented staff people in each department. When a new graduate program coordinator comes on board, the old coordinator should pass on knowledge of what a coordinator does."

Pace said, "Is there any type of handbook of policies to give to a coordinator?" Feetham said, "That's been on our agenda for years, but has not been done yet. It would be a compilation of what's already on our Web site. Departments are aware of what's necessary to do. When we do workshops for departmental staff, they're well attended. They are informed on what they need to know. With English, where there are lots of TA's, it's easy to mount a TA training program. It's harder with small departments. But the conferences and workshops can help *all* departments prepare. Also, departments with faculty concern about innovation at the doctoral level are more on top of this training: departments such as Nursing, Social Work and others. The process is continuing to evolve." Wulff said, "When there are concerns regarding what is stipulated in Graduate School Memorandum #14, there are processes in place to help students and faculty, including talking to the department chair. If that doesn't address concerns adequately, additional steps can be taken." Pace said, "No one in our department has mentioned these policies."

Feetham said, "Regarding collective bargaining: It is likely that some of these policies and the way they are implemented will change with collective bargaining. Non-academic issues will be on our plate in collective bargaining: pay, medical benefits, and other issues. Work responsibilities and working conditions will very likely be topics in collective bargaining. Also, the issue of a feedback loop for oversight in departments may be affected by collective bargaining."

"*Now*, we think of TA's as apprentices," said Feetham. "In a collective bargaining environment, faculty will need to see themselves as management, and TA's will be labor. Oversight will be a piece of this. The policy route will change. *Because* this change is coming, we're hesitant to do too much with this now."

Almgren said, "My concern is with the relationship between the TA and his or her supervisory professor. The professor's sense of his or her obligation is crucial to this relationship. It would be good to be as clear as possible about the faculty's role with respect to TA's."

Feetham said, "The document will be the contract. There will be guidelines about the contract. There will be meetings on the provisions of the contract. We'll do our best to educate people. The process part will probably be made more clear for everyone." "In the meantime," Wulff noted, "plans are under way

to provide new faculty with additional guidance in mentoring graduate students in hopes of enhancing faculty-TA relationships.”

McKinstry said, “A problem is that some students are brand-new to a department, yet are instructors-of-record. How common is this progressive responsibility? How broad? Do TA’s go through a process to see if they’re *suited* to teaching?” Feetham said, “It depends on the discipline, and on funding mechanisms for graduate student support. In English and in languages, TA’s teach freshman courses. In Social Sciences and Health Sciences, TA’s are entirely supported by grants; their ‘teaching’ is assisting with graduate research instruction, laboratories, etc. If Graduate School TA’s *can* move toward more complex activities, it works best.” Wulff said, “All this depends greatly on the individual department. We need to get people to think developmentally. How to move a student TA to be properly motivated is a continual challenge for faculty.”

Wulff said, “I’m willing to meet with a department chair if it can help a TA issue [get resolved].” Pace said, “We need a place to red flag a problem with a TA.” Wulff said, “The more the faculty member is *aware*, the better.” Feetham stressed: “Still, TA’s get the message that their research is more significant than their teaching.” Wulff added: “*And*, this message is often *implicit* and communicated indirectly through oral and written communication.”

Feetham said it would be “great to have FCSA feedback on this issue.” Wulff told the council, “You’ve helped a lot by reinforcing the importance of [CIDR] working with departments.” Schwartz emphasized, “And it was significant that a student [Sam Castic] raised this issue.” Wulff said, “Yes, that underscores the importance of students’ knowing that there are resources in place and that there are policies that students can use to address any dissatisfaction.” Feetham added: “A student advisor can be crucial too: a key resource.” McKinstry said, “Sometimes, *technology* can be helpful in facilitating learning discussions. But we need to think more of TA’s. We sometimes focus too much on faculty alone.” Feetham said, “I’ll update FCSA along the way as developments occur in collective bargaining.”

Next meeting

The next FCSA meeting is set for Wednesday, February 11, 2004, at 9:00 a.m., in 36 Gerberding Hall.

Brian Taylor
Recorder

PRESENT: *Professors* Pace and Schwartz (Co-chairs), Almgren and Wood;
Ex officio members Feetham, Lewis, McKinstry, Morales and Perrin;
Guest Donald Wulff, Assistant Dean, Graduate School, Director of the Center for Instructional Development and Research (CIDR).

ABSENT: *Professors* Fearn-Banks, Fridley and Herwig;
ex officio members Castic, Hatlen, Kravas, Mortel and Stygall.