Great Basin College Faculty Senate

Academic Standards Committee

Written Committee Report

Meeting: 18 November 2014, 4:00 pm
Location: Elko—GTA 128; Pahrump—PVC 115; Winnemucca—GBC 123
Present: Scott A. Gavorsky (Chair); Mike Elbert; Danny Gonzales; Dale Griffith [via e-mail review because of class schedule]; Doug Hogan; Jan King; Scott Nielsen; Diane Wrightman [quorum]

The following issues were discussed:

1) Committee Composition: At the request of the Chair of the By-Laws Committee, the Committee considered the efficiency of the current composition of the committee and possible improvements which may be made. It was agreed that the current composition of the committee consisting of representatives of various departments and from Admissions and Financial Aid is working very well. The Committee is of the opinion, however, that committee compositions should not be mandated for future committees.

2) Grade Appeal Procedure: In response to ongoing problems with the Grade Appeal procedure incorporating "Professional Conduct" issues, the Committee reviewed the Grade Appeal procedure and compared it to similar procedures from Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC), Western Nevada College (WNC), and the University of Nevada – Reno (UNR).

Context: In recent years, some grade appeal cases coming before the Committee as part of a Step Three appeal have included charges by students of "Professional Misconduct" in addition to the request for the grade appeal itself. At times, these charges appeared to be the result of "shopping"—the students noticed the "Profession Conduct" clauses in the Grade Appeal procedure and added a charge of "Professional Misconduct" to the appeal with limited or vague reasons for doing so. Such accusations have led the Committee to potentially become involved in issues far beyond grade appeals. It has also raised concerns from part-time instructors with professional positions within the larger community where "professional misconduct" often has more serious legal implications.

The following issues were of concern:

- GBC was unique in the inclusion of "Professional Conduct" in the Grade Appeal policy. The inclusion was apparently a hold-over from earlier policies. The reviewed policies explicitly limited appeals to matters of grading—including clear statements the grade appeal procedures are not to be used in cases of grades assigned due to plagiarism, cheating, or other forms of academic dishonesty.
- "Professional Conduct" potentially includes issues related to work performance better handled through an administrative process or, in extreme cases, might require legal action beyond the jurisdiction of a Faculty Senate committee.
- A charge of professional misconduct obligates the Committee effectively to sit in judgment of not only of a colleague's actions in a particular incident, but over their competency as a

professional as well. Such actions were never the intent of a grade appeal policy overseen by a Faculty Senate committee.

- GBC policies currently have a Student Grievance Procedure (see page 27 of the *GBC General Catalog 2014-2015*) which is currently identified as applying to "an [sic] non-academic injustice." The procedure requires the assembly of a grievance committee comprised of faculty, students, and a Vice-President. The Committee is of the opinion this procedure is better suited to hear professional misconduct allegations. The procedure also has the benefit of better guarantees for student and faculty interests than could be guaranteed by the grade appeal procedure.
- The Committee was impressed with discussions of circumstances under which grade appeals could be taken which are included in the TMCC and UNR grade appeal policies. Such discussions appear to help guide students in elucidating concerns. However, the Committee also felt that attempting to incorporate such discussions would unnecessarily complicate the Grade Appeal procedure.

ACTION: The Committee voted to make the following changes to the existing Grade Appeal procedure, to be published in the upcoming *2015-2016 GBC General Catalog* and associated publications:

a) References to "Professional Conduct" be removed from the Grade Appeal procedure.
b) An explicit statement that the Grade Appeal procedure does NOT apply to cases of Academic Dishonesty be added.
c) A statement that issues of instructor conduct not related directly to a grade be handled through the Student Grievance Procedure be added.
d) A statement stating the burden of proof lies with the student in Grade Appeal cases be added.
e) The section identifying the Office of Student Services as an aid for students in the Grade Appeal procedure be broken out of the existing paragraph to draw attention to this resource for students.
f) No changes to the actual procedures appear warranted at this time.

A revised version of the Grade Appeal procedure is appended to this report with the changes marked.

The Committee was also of the opinion that the pamphlets on the Grade Appeal procedure distributed by the Office of Student Services be modified to incorporate a discussion of the circumstances by which a student may consider appealing a grade, similar to the discussions included in the policies of TMCC. The Committee feels such information would aid students in formulating issues with grade appeals and facilitate resolution of grade issues. The pamphlets should also be distributed to department chairs, both for their own references and for distribution to students.

Scott Gavorsky, as Chair, was requested to meet with Vice-President Mahlberg to inform her of the proposed changes and identify any potential issues

3) Graduation Distinctions [***TABLED***]: A request to review the GPA requirements to graduate with distinctions (cum laude, etc.) was tabled until a future meeting due to time constraints. Some Committee members expressed interest in possibly reviewing the current grade scale as well.

Scott A. Gavorsky, Ph.D.
Chair, Academic Standards Committee

ADDENDUM 1—20 November 2014
Meeting with Vice-President Mahlberg: At the Committee's request, Scott Gavorsky met with Vice-President Mahlberg to discuss the Committee's proposed revision to the Grade Appeal process. The proposed changes were presented, and V-P Mahlberg saw no potential issues with the Grade Appeal policy at this time. However, the Student Grievance Procedure would need to be revised once the Grade Appeal procedure was approved to align the two procedures. It was furthermore agreed that the Committee and the Office of Student Services will work together to prepare a new pamphlet of the Grade Appeal policy adding some discussion of the types of situations under which a grade may be appealed to help students elucidate concerns, with the pamphlet being distributed through the Office of Student Services and to Department Chairs. A copy of the revised Grade Appeal procedure will be forwarded to V-P Mahlberg for comment before presentation to the Faculty Senate as a whole.

ADDENDUM 2—5 December 2014
At the Faculty Senate Executive Committee meeting on 5 December 2014, two friendly amendments were made to the proposed Grade Appeal procedure:

a) The removal of a reference to "charges against an instructor," which referred to the Professional Conduct clauses since removed from the procedure;
b) The inclusion of a provision that students contact instructors "in writing or by e-mail" to initiate a Step One Grade Appeal. The clause brings Step One into concurrence with the requirement for written complaints for Steps Two, Three, and Four and creates a record of the initial discussion between students and instructors.

The amendments were accepted by the Committee through a quorum vote via e-mail.