

UFAC Meeting Minutes March 31, 2022

Meeting Participants: Randy Reif (at-large, Chair), Eric Bonds (CAS, Secretary), Caitie Finlayson (at-large), Lance Gentry (COB), Jennifer Barry (at-large), and Kyle Schultz (COE)

Guest: David Rettinger

Concerns about draft changes to Section 5.2 of the Faculty Handbook:

Last meeting we expressed concerns about proposed changes to section 5.2 of the Faculty Handbook (the section regarding the honor code). In short, we felt that some of these proposed changes could be interpreted in the future in ways that undermine faculty autonomy in the classroom and/or could be used to unfairly open up faculty to disciplinary proceedings.

Dr. Rettinger spoke to the committee about his rationale for these proposed changes and responded to our concerns. Significant differences, however, remained and the committee members' concerns were not resolved.

For instance, the committee was convinced by Dr. Rettinger's explanation about problems with automated test proctoring services, and no one on the committee advocated that faculty should require them in class. But we on the committee take our role as stewards of the Faculty Handbook seriously, and do not believe it is a wise use of the handbook to proscribe faculty pedagogy. There is a very long list of things faculty should not do in the classroom, and the Faculty Handbook is not and cannot be used as a place to try to list them all. Instead, we would much prefer to see administrators and faculty program directors work to educate faculty about problems and to encourage best practices.

The conversation concluded with an agreement to disagree, and Dr. Rettinger stated that he will take his proposed changes to the Faculty Handbook to the University Faculty Council without our support.

Action Item: We encourage the UFC not to make the proposed changes Section 5.2 of the Faculty Handbook, or at least to scrutinize them and weigh them against the need to protect faculty autonomy and the protections of tenure. A more detailed description of our concerns is listed in our meeting minutes from March 10.

J-Term and Calendar Committee

Dr. Gentry reported back about his work on the J-Term and Calendar Committee. He had earlier asked UFAC members to informally gather feedback on the idea of creating a mid-year holiday break in the faculty contract, but extending the contract out further into May, in order to create the calendar space for a J-Term. Dr. Gentry noted that even with this extension, the total number of contract days would be reduced. Anecdotal feedback from faculty has been mixed. While some faculty report positive experiences teaching the one J-Term the university has

offered, other faculty have expressed opposition to the idea of extending the contract further into May in order to accommodate it.

Another option would require an earlier fall start, but this could impose new difficulties for faculty with school-age children.

Dr. Bonds asked if the need and/or benefits for a J-Term was still being studied. Dr. Gentry explained that his committee had two purposes: (1) to determine whether or not there are benefits to a J-Term and (2) what the scheduling and logistics of such a term would look like.

After gathering this feedback, Dr. Gentry suggested that the next best move might be to describe different calendar options to the faculty at large for a J-Term, and then conduct a survey to see how much support exists for any of them. If there is no support for any of the options, then offering a J-Term may not be worth pursuing into the future. Members of the UFAC supported this course of action.

Commencement and COVID Precautions

Some faculty have expressed concern about a recent email sent by the Provost requiring our participation in the commencement ceremony without also describing what kinds of COVID mitigation methods will be in place. The email also did not mention that faculty who are vulnerable to serious COVID (or those with vulnerable family members) could seek an exemption from this requirement.

Action Item: The UFAC members encourage the University Faculty Council to discuss these issues at its next meeting and ask administrators to explain what COVID policies will look like at commencement and how faculty who need to avoid situations with higher risks of COVID transmission can do so.