

**Provost's Advisory Council
Summary of April 24, 2014 meeting**

James Bretzke, S.J., Chair
Lillie Albert
Tony Annunziato
Mark Brodin
Daniel Chambers
Pat DeLeeuw
Bill Duffey
Can Erbil

Samuel Graves
Don Hafner
You (Joseph) Jiang, S.J.
Maureen Kenny
Narintohn Luangrath
Susan Michalczyk
Katie O'Dair
Laura O'Dwyer

Theresa O'Keefe
Cy Opiel, S.J.
Joe Quinn
Anita Tien
Judith Tracy
Tom Wall

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1. The summary for the March 27, 2014 meeting was approved. The summary will be sent to the President's Office. All summaries are posted on the Provost's Office website; members are encouraged to share the summary with colleagues.

 2. The Council continued its discussion of a proposal, presented by Susan Michalczyk, to create a standing faculty committee for the Faculty Handbook. It was clarified by the Council's Chair (based on exchanges with General Counsel) that the Provost's Advisory Council may form subcommittees charged to address specific questions, but not subcommittees whose charge would extend to issues or responsibilities beyond the purview of the PAC.
 - Several members of the Council mentioned that they had received many messages in support of increasing faculty voice.
 - Faculty in the School of Theology and Ministry noted that, based on their recent experience, the establishment and maintenance of a Faculty Handbook involve a significant commitment of time and effort. It was also pointed out that the creation of a Faculty Handbook can be particularly challenging at Boston College, due to existing structures (such as the University Statutes, policies in individual schools, handbooks in some schools, and handbooks in some departments) that should be taken into account by any new group aiming to create a Faculty Handbook.
 - It was observed by faculty in the Law School that a standing faculty committee could provide helpful advice to faculty seeking answers to specific questions. The Law School underwent a process reconciling policies within the School in the course of creating its own Faculty Handbook, and it would have been valuable to have a number of faculty available to provide context and background during this process.
 - Susan Michalczyk stated that Research 1 Universities commonly have Faculty Handbooks which originate from the faculty. She said that she does not believe that the responsibilities of such a standing committee would be too onerous for its members.
 - In the Carroll School of Management, several faculty have written in favor of increasing faculty voice, viewing the proposed standing committee as a means to enhance faculty involvement.

- The proposed standing committee was likened to such bodies as the University Council on Teaching, which is appointed by and provides guidance to the Provost's Office. The UCT addresses issues that its members have identified for consideration, and also responds to requests from the Provost's Office to consider certain topics.
- A comment was made that the formalization of the existing Faculty Handbook, which is a collection of links hosted on the Provost's Office webpage, would be much-needed improvement. It was remarked that a format that would allow users to print hardcopies would be desirable. The University Statutes and the University Factbook each have adopted such formats.
- A member of the Council requested clarification as to the role of the proposed standing faculty committee, as either an advocacy group or a group charged with rule interpretation. Susan Michalczyk explained that the committee would not be charged with interpreting policies, but would be tasked with "keeping track" of issues.

Based on the discussion, Joe Quinn stated that a three-person subcommittee could be drawn from the membership of the Provost's Advisory Council, as the Council is a broad-based, elected group, and that he would favor such a subcommittee. Several members of the Council agreed, indicating that this arrangement would enable close coordination and communication between the Council and the subcommittee.

Next steps:

1. As part of the Council's summer business (which includes election of a new Chair for 2014-15 and approval of the meeting summary), members will be invited to volunteer for the Subcommittee on the Faculty Handbook.
3. Don Hafner circulated information about the distribution of grades in undergraduate courses. He asked Council members to weigh in on whether it is sufficient to continue to publicize such information in an effort to raise awareness about grading practices, or whether some additional actions should be taken--such as concrete guidelines about grading that would be developed at the departmental, school, or University level.
 - It was noted that the Law School has strict policies about the distribution of grades for its students. Some faculty consider grading on a curve to be extremely constraining under such a policy.
 - It was observed that some institutions have opted to provide additional information on student transcripts, such as the median grade in each course taken by the student. This was viewed as possibly too onerous and not effective at some institutions that have adopted such practices.
 - A member of the Council shared an opinion from a colleague who stated that the distribution of grades has remained stable over the past ten years. However, the same colleague noted that the University grants awards to undergraduates based on their grade point averages or class rank; given the large variations in grade distributions among departments, students across departments may face different levels of difficulty in achieving honors and awards.
 - One member of the Council related the concern that faculty may be giving higher grades in order to secure higher teaching evaluations. It was suggested that some faculty might be relieved to have guidelines for stricter grading.

- It was noted that lower grades could harm students in the marketplace, since some companies may grant interviews based on a student's grade point average.
- It was pointed out that grading practices vary across the disciplines, that there are different audiences for grades (promotion and tenure committees, employers, graduate schools, students and families) and that a fruitful conversation about grading practices should take into account these different audiences.
- At the recent Faculty Forum, it was mentioned that some disciplines (such as nursing and education) teach to specific standards, and that grading practices reflect the mastery of these standards. Whether grades are considered to be relative rankings of students' work or absolute indicators that a student has met required standards may vary across disciplines.
- Some departments circulate bar charts indicating where their faculty fall in terms of the average grade given, giving each faculty member a sense of where he or she stands (the other bars are not labeled, to respect faculty sensitivities). In addition, grade information is included in the Department and School Data Reports. Such tools have been made available to department chairs and deans, to encourage them to discuss grading practices with faculty.

4. Provost's Report

- Joe Quinn thanked Narintohn Luangrath and Bill Duffey for service to the Council as undergraduate and graduate student representatives.

Jim Bretzke thanked Joe Quinn for his service as Interim Provost, and the Provost's Advisory Council formally expressed its appreciation to him by acclamation.

Pat DeLeeuw thanked Jim Bretzke for his service as chair of the Council this year.