



Faculty Senate News

April 20, 2005

Our final Senate meeting of the year will occur on Tuesday, April 26, at 1:30 p.m. in 112 Kern Building. This meeting will be our busiest as we receive a number of reports that have been in the works since last fall or before. Our committees have been wrestling with some extraordinarily difficult issues, and I'm extremely proud of the challenges they undertook and the progress they made. As is normal, some of what we set out to do this year will not be completed until the next, including the work of the special committees on curricular integrity and P&T criteria. But we have done well. Let me highlight the work of our committees by elaborating on just three of the reports that are coming to the Senate floor next week.

You may recall that the dismissal of a tenured faculty member was a matter of considerable discussion last spring. Many wondered if there is a clear boundary between protected academic speech and "grave misconduct," a cause for dismissal under HR-23. There is no "case law" on grave misconduct because the work of the Standing Joint Committee on Tenure is confidential. So, what does the term mean? The Committee on Faculty Affairs has prepared a nice report on this topic (http://www.senate.psu.edu/agenda/apr26-05agn/app_b.pdf), and this report will be used as background for a forensic discussion next week. In effect, we will be debating the question, "How do we describe the limits of acceptable conduct by tenured faculty?"

Depending upon where you work, you may be surprised to learn that courses in many subjects such as chemistry, economics, and statistics do not share the same prefix throughout the University. So, for example, Abnormal Psychology is PSY 412 in the College of Liberal Arts, while the "same" course is PSYCH 486 at Behrend. Legislation has been proposed that would require identical prefixes for courses in the same discipline and identical numbers for essentially identical courses (http://www.senate.psu.edu/agenda/apr26-05agn/app_e.pdf). This would be implemented through the Committee on Curricular Affairs acting on recommendations of special disciplinary subcommittees with appropriate representation from affected colleges. Of course this is worrisome to many, but there is wide agreement that we must do it and at least reasonable faith that it can be done fairly.

The University Planning Committee has been studying why textbook prices are rising much faster than inflation. You can probably guess some of the reasons, but you will not guess them all, and I think you will find the committee's informational report to be rather interesting (http://www.senate.psu.edu/agenda/apr26-05agn/app_i.pdf). A fundamental reason is that the agents on the demand side (faculty members) are not the actual buyers, so the usual market resistance to rising prices is weak or nonexistent. In other words, the textbook market is not what I think the economists call a pure market. The report suggests a number of strategies that faculty members can employ to keep text-book costs as low as possible for students, or to help correct this market inefficiency (in case you are motivated by ideas). Tuition is high, and students deserve our help on this.

Here is the remainder of next Tuesday's challenging agenda:

- *Remarks by President Spanier*, followed by questions from Senators. The President will comment on the proposal to restructure the campus system.
- *Revisions to Senate Policies on Re-enrollment, Reinstatement, and Academic Renewal* (legislative).
- *Revision to Senate Standing Rules* (legislative). The Senate will act on proposed revisions to the duties and membership of 11 standing committees.
- *Penn State Web Presence* (advisory/consultative). This report examines the weaknesses of the University's current web presence and makes recommendations for improvement.
- *Revision to Policy HR-76 (Faculty Rights and Responsibilities)* (advisory/consultative). Several revisions are proposed, including changes in the operation of the Committee on Faculty Rights and Responsibilities.
- *Annual Informational Reports*. The Senate will receive three annual informational reports: Grade Distribution, Faculty Tenure-Flow Rates, and Campus Construction Update.
- *Faculty Benefits Programs, 2004-2005* (informational). This report compares Penn State's health care benefits program with those offered at 30 peer institutions.
- *Report of Senate elections and seating of new officers*.

The complete agenda for the April meeting is posted on the Senate Web site at <http://www.senate.psu.edu/agenda/index.html> and the minutes (*The Senate Record*) will be posted approximately three weeks after the meeting. Members of the University community are invited to attend any Senate meeting, and we have seats reserved for this purpose. Any member of the University community who is not a member of the Senate may request to speak on any item of business already before the Senate. Requests must be made to the Chair, through the Executive Secretary of the Senate, at least four calendar days before the Senate meeting.

To learn how to submit major, minor, option or course proposals, consult the following: http://www.senate.psu.edu/curriculum_resources/guide/contents.html. The April 12, 2005, Senate Curriculum Report is available at http://www.senate.psu.edu/curriculum_resources/bluesheet/bluex.html.

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(Also, I've been asked to announce that the first day of Fall 2005 semester classes will follow a normal Tuesday schedule. The Tuesday of Thanksgiving week will follow a Friday schedule. We are pleased that the President accepted this recommendation of the Senate Committee on University Planning.)