

Fall 9-10-2021

Student Academic Policies Committee Minutes of the Academic Senate 2021-09-10

University of Dayton. Student Academic Policies Committee

SAPC minutes September 10th, 2021 **DRAFT**

Attendance: Joanna Abdallah, Lee Dixon, Sharon Gratto (Chair), Jay Janney, Allison Kinney, Ryan McEwan, Grace Pierucci, Andy Slade, Thomas Skill, Madison Woodrum, + Maureen Keane-Sexton via telephone

Regrets: John White (on travel)

Note to Committee: Dean Andy Strauss from the Law School has been excused from the SAPC

1. Joanna moved to accept the minutes of September 3, 2021 and Allison seconded; the minutes were approved
2. Completing Academic Dishonesty documents updates/edits - Allison, Lee, and John to confer about their collaborative work here and to set a time goal for completion and report back to the SAPC
3. Discussion on SET: We asked our three student members (Madison, Grace, Joanna) for their input. Madison approves of them, strongly encouraging anonymity. She completes a majority of the SET, but not 100%, but is much more likely to do so if she holds strong opinions either way. She noted a majority of classes do not set time aside for SET completion in class. Madison was unsure if setting class time aside for SET would make a difference. When that happens, it mostly occurs at the end of the class, so students who want to leave will leave sooner anyway. Faculty who arrange for forms to be completed outside of class seem to make an effort to request that students put thought into the evaluations. Grace indicated if you do them at the end of class, everyone will want to do so in a rush in order to depart more quickly.
 - a. The evaluation tool is good; the committee last year expressed very limited interest in revising the tool. In evaluating our SET tool, we recognize it as above average in its research-based preparation and its quality compared to others.
 - b. A key SET issue is how to address uncivil and often harassing comments: Because SET is anonymous, some students are more likely to communicate honestly AND inappropriately. Comments can be immoral, unethical, or even cross lines into harassment and criminality. Sharon shared how new faculty can be greatly impacted by reading uncivil comments. Lee shared anecdotally how SET can be so stressful that faculty can engage in less optimal behaviors to address them, including having a 3rd party read/screen them first, drinking before and while reading them, or even refusing to read them. She also noted that extremely negative comments often target faculty who are female, LGBTQ, of color, very young or very old, international, or whose first language is not English.
 - c. Process concerns:
 - i. Some departments rely solely (or nearly solely) on SET for tenure and promotion and merit decisions. They also often rely mostly on “the numbers”. Although not shared in the meeting, in Jay’s department the T & P chair formally reminds all faculty that SET are one piece of the evaluation, not the sole one, and that “the numbers” are one piece of SET, not all of it.
 - ii. Lee spoke about bias in using the SET, and how it cannot be eliminated. The committee’s goal last year was to shift SET from primarily evaluative to developmental. Ryan asked if we can set guidelines for how SET is to be used.

Tom reminds us our policy does that already for extreme comments that are deemed to be threatening. It prohibits relying solely on SET for evaluation. SET is to be a part of a larger evaluative process. This leads us to ask how do we hold departments accountable? Several people agree that the oft-used approach “have department chairs fix it” isn’t a good idea (chairs have a full plate already).

- iii. Madison wasn’t aware the university formally uses the SET to assess faculty, and she was unsure this message is effectively communicated to students. This is a crucial point about our process [Jay’s opinion: if students don’t think SET matters, they’re less likely to fill it in]. Madison has never included an uncivil comment and was surprised how prevalent it appears to be. She thinks it would be good if the university could track harassing comments. Tom did indicate the system has the ability to track anonymous comments back to the submitter, but the way our SET system has been set up (to protect anonymity), requests to link comments back to a specific student is both difficult and time consuming. Formally the University of Dayton policy is to search for student/comment link only for threats, where something should be reported to Public Safety. It has never been used for comments lacking civility or even those crossing over into harassment. Tom indicated very few comments have been tracked, as almost no students cross that line. Students do cross into incivility but rarely into criminality.
 - iv. Andy recommends along with Lee that that we modify our SET language from anonymity to informed consent. Knowing this might decrease student motivation to engage in uncivil language. Could it reduce participation as well?
 - 1. Andy recommends greater transparency in our evaluative process. Any referenced Title IX investigations, how they stress evidence, as well as the weighing the evidence. Rendering the weight we place on specific portions of evaluation should make it more transparent, stating it up front. Although Jay didn’t raise it in the meeting, he did something along those lines as department chair. Annually Jay provided faculty with a letter explaining the procedure employed in determining merit raises, which included a weighting process. One suggestion would require decision makers to formally state the weight up front. Another is to have all evaluators take mandatory implicit bias training (e.g. everyone on the T & P committee)
 - v. Sharon indicates that some comments can be so negative they are harmful to someone’s career. Faculty may question their career choice after receiving uncivil SET comments. Andy indicated as chair that he is empathetic with faculty and will discard uncivil comments. When asked for an example of a comment that got discarded or discounted, he shared “How did an English Department hire someone who doesn’t speak English”? In that instance the evaluation was completely discarded. Lee believes that was right, but discarding comments can also introduce bias.
- d. We did not get into any classroom climate discussion

4. Next week if the full Faculty meeting is in person, we will be in person and meet in KU 331. If the full faculty meeting is on Zoom, we will meet on Zoom.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:20pm

Respectfully submitted, Jay Janney (very much appreciated recorder)