

The Arts & Sciences Senate meets on Monday, October 17 at 3:30 PM in the Javits Room of the Library.

Agenda
Arts & Sciences Senate
October 17, 2005

- I. Approval of agenda
 - II. Approval of minutes of the September 26 2005 meeting
 - III. Report of the Committee on Academic Standing and Appeals (E. Mendieta)
 - IV. Discussion of a Response to the Academic Bill of Rights
 - V. Discussion of the impacts of the enhanced enrollment on campus
 - VI. Evaluating the Freshman Experience
 - VII. Other Old Business
 - VIII. Other New Business
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This statement has been drafted by the ad-hoc subcommittee on the ABoR, consisting of G. Fouron, W. Godfrey, N. Goodman, J. Lochhead, and F. Walter. If approved by the A&S senate, it will be presented to the Executive Committee of the University Senate.

Statement from the Arts and Sciences Senate on the Academic Bill of Rights

A proposal is before the Academic Standards Committee of the SUNY Trustees to consider implementing the Academic Bill of Rights (1).

As the Academic Bill of Rights directly addresses questions of faculty hiring, teaching, grading, and the intellectual atmosphere on campus, it is incumbent upon the faculty who will clearly be affected if the Academic Bill of Rights is implemented in the SUNY system to directly address the issue.

We, the faculty represented by the Arts & Sciences Senate, find much to agree with in the Statement of the Academic Bill of Rights. Indeed, the emphasis on teaching a "diversity of approaches" and promoting "intellectual pluralism" is a mainstay of higher education. We concur that grading should be based on "reasoned answers and appropriate knowledge", and not on "political or religious beliefs". We concur that faculty should not use their courses for "political, ideological, religious, or anti-religious indoctrination". We concur that efforts to obstruct free speech should not be tolerated.

Faculty in higher education are hired specifically for demonstrated expertise in their fields. Because of their expertise, faculty are the best positioned to judge who should be hired as expert colleagues and who should be granted tenure. As experts in their fields, the faculty are the most qualified to decide on an appropriate curriculum. Indeed, if the higher education experience is to transcend a mere reading of textbooks, faculty have the responsibility to bring their teaching alive by infusing it with their professional judgements and experiences.

We find that most students are capable of making an objective evaluation of faculty presentations. Indeed, a large part of the learning experience is in deciding how to evaluate information.

There are, of course, cases where the ideal breaks down, but there are adequate mechanisms in place at Stony Brook to deal with these matters. For example, students who perceive a bias on the part of an instructor may bring an accusation before the Academic Judiciary.

Despite our earlier stated agreement with many of the principles contained in the Academic Bill of Rights, we find that there are implications with which we take serious issue.

One is the inference that members of politically-underrepresented groups should be hired in order to provide alternate political perspectives. We believe that it is neither legal nor professionally appropriate to apply a political litmus test as part of the hiring process.

We disagree with the inference that political orientation affects the ability to teach in an effective manner. The majority of university instructors present alternative views, wherever appropriate, irrespective of their personal political orientation.

We also take issue with the statement that "Curricula ... should reflect the uncertainty and unsettled character of all human knowledge". It is simply not true that all knowledge is uncertain. There are indisputable facts, and scientifically tested and accepted theories, that supersede opinion. It is the responsibility of the faculty to ascertain the difference between mere opinion and supportable statements, and to educate students to see and to understand this difference.

We are further concerned about the statement that "academic institutions and professional societies should maintain a posture of organizational neutrality with respect to substantive disagreements which divide researchers on questions within ... their fields of inquiry". Knowledge is not meant to be hidden. As academics, we have a responsibility to the broader community to speak out both individually and collectively in areas where our professional expertise is relevant.

We are concerned that a document such as the Academic Bill of Rights, because of the varied political and ideological interpretations which have already surfaced, will foster a politicization of higher education. This would be a tragedy, as politics, which thrives on polarizing issues, and higher education, which thrives on the collegial search for an objective truth, are often antithetical.

We find that the Academic Bill of Rights is both unnecessary, since the safeguards it seeks are already in place, and dangerous to the core values of the academy, since its main effect is to encourage the further politicization of higher education.

Consequently, we strongly urge the SUNY Board of Trustees not to adopt the Academic Bill of Rights.

1: <http://www.studentsforacademicfreedom.org/abor.html>

Minutes of the Arts and Sciences Faculty Senate, September 26, 3005

I. Welcome from the President of the Senate

The meeting convened in the Javits Room at 3:30 PM.

President Walter introduced the new executive board and the members of the senate introduced themselves. He mentioned the need to fill various senatorial and standing committee vacancies.

The Promotion and Tenure Committee has an unfilled vacancy for one non-tenured instructor. Walter suggested that if such a person cannot be found to serve, we discuss bending the rules so that there will be an odd number of people on the committee.

II. Approval of agenda

The agenda was approved and seconded.

III. Approval of minutes from April 18 2005

The minutes of the April 18, 2005 meeting were approved and seconded after several typographical corrections were suggested.

IV. Report from the Dean of Arts and Sciences (J. Staros)

The Dean reported on the results of the EPA audit during the week of August 8. The university did far better than expected—"passed with flying colors." The rehabilitated Humanities Building has opened on time and, despite several glitches, is setting a new standard for departmental buildings on campus.

Enrollment numbers for the summer session showed that summer enrollment is down. A three-week winter session has been implemented starting in 2005. Students will take one course and attend classes five days per week. The Dean has solicited course syllabi for the summer courses from faculty.

Several new chairs and interim chairs have been hired at the College. These are Mel Pekarsky in Art, Eduardo Mendieta in Philosophy, Peter Koch in Physics and Astronomy, and Pat Belanoff as interim director in Writing.

President Kenny has approved a new journalism program not to be housed in the College. It will be a freestanding program or eventually school. The Dean said that this will fall under the auspices of the Senate curriculum committee. The managing editor emeritus of Newsday, Howard Schneider, is putting together the initial curriculum. Norman Goodman stated that this is technically a program proposal that needs to be approved by the Senate.

The College fiscal outlook is for a flat budget. Our base budget has been cut 12% since 2003. We are functioning with fewer faculty, since the deficit has affected faculty searches and hiring. 19 searches for faculty lines were authorized this year based on departmental budgets, plus 3 special searches that were authorized by the Dean and Provost. The Dean stated that it is time for the base budget of the College to be increased, since the College generated \$2 million extra dollars in tuition last year. He mentioned that first attempts at increasing out-of-state tuition have been fruitful.

In curriculum matters, 5-year combination BA/MA programs have been approved by SUNY administration. Some of these are BA/MBA programs. Programs that require teacher certification are pending approval.

The skill 4 proposal (American History) DEC requirement has been delayed in approval due to bureaucratic snags. The curriculum committee is working to get this approved with SUNY administration.

The Dean asked if it were not feasible to reconsider the DEC requirements, and said that the Provost would like to discuss major requirements in the College. There are currently a great many requirements that curtail the flexibility of students' programs in some majors.

In addition to the changes in chairs of departments, other personnel changes have been made or are pending in the Dean's office. Peter Koch and Tony Phillips are both leaving their associate dean positions and an announcement for their replacements has been sent out.

Fred Walter raised a question about the \$2 million increase in tuition and where it was being spent. The Dean reported that utility costs for the university last year was \$48 million, more than the other three SUNY university campuses combined. He also mentioned cost initiatives that are currently in place such as the winter session and the proposed purchase of the Southampton College campus.

V. Report of the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee (J. Lochhead)

Judith Lochhead described the activities and meeting schedule of the committee. She recounted the history of Skill 4, the American History requirement. As mentioned by the Dean, this is currently tabled at SUNY Administration in Albany. SUNY has agreed to graduate students even though their Skill 4 classes have not been approved.

The College of Business: The College of Business was not going to be a part of the A&S Senate. They did consider, however, making use of our Undergrad Curriculum Committee. In the end they decided to use the CEAS Curriculum Committee to review and approve their curricula.

The College 102 Seminars: Judith recounted the history of the College 102 seminar. The curriculum committee has had to approve the course proposals for this mandatory freshmen seminar. The committee is currently satisfied that there is an appropriate level of coordination between the sections at this time. They asked for a review of the success of the seminars, but have received no reviews to date.

Digital courses are being considered for Undergraduate Biology. These may be delivered through electronic media in which students will watch videotaped lectures. The committee has deferred issues concerning workload and other matters to the Undergraduate Council.

The committee has also been discussing the impact of required minors in the College of Business on the College of Arts and Sciences. It has been argued that the actual workload to the departments in A&S will not change much, but the way of distributing courses will change.

Robert Kerber suggested that the committee look at the Senate's Policy on Curricular Coordination, which was originally composed to ensure coordination between the Colleges of Arts and Sciences and Engineering.

VI. Discussion of the impacts of overcrowding on campus

The Dean said that reports of departmental chairs do not provide a systematic way of charting the problem of overenrollment and overcrowding in classrooms. Frank Myers reported between 55 and 90 students in 300-level classes in his department as commonplace, and said this prevents upperclassmen from doing significant research in these courses. There was some extended discussion of the best way for the Senate to address this problem. A subcommittee was appointed to collect data from the departments, both statistical and anecdotal, and to report this back to the Senate.

VII. Discussion of a Response to the Academic Bill of Rights

The Academic Bill of Rights is currently being considered by the committee of SUNY trustees in Albany. Fred Walter argued that this document threatens the freedoms of university professors to teach from their areas of expertise. A subcommittee was formed to help him introduce this issue to the University Senate at the October 10 meeting. The presentation to the University Senate Executive committee will be on October 17.

VIII. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned and seconded at approximately 5 PM.

Minutes respectfully submitted by C. Davidson, A&S Secretary

