Admission and Retention Policies Committee  
January 10, 2005  
Minutes

Members Present: Gary Levine (Chair), Wendy Sharer, Frederic Fladenmuller, Larry Seese, Shahnaz Aziz, Natalie Stewart, Carol Nichols, Lee Grub, Christine Avenarius, Maggie O’Neil.

Excused Absence: Jayne Geissler.

Guests: Laura Sweet and Stephen Gray (Ombudsman Office), Nita Boyce, (Assistant Athletics Director), Nick Floyd (Interim Athletic Director).

Chair Gary Levine called the meeting to order at 4:05. More copies were made of the minutes from the meeting on December 6, 2004 and the latest draft of the "University Class Attendance Policy - Draft #2" in order to provide all committee members with the documents. Natalie Stewart agreed to serve as secretary for the day.

While the committee was waiting for the minutes and policy to be copied, the guests distributed two hand-outs to the committee. Stephen Gray and Laura Sweet distributed a graph comparing the number of times that students inquire about getting an excused absence verses the number of times they follow through and get the absence excused. More discussion ensued and Laura Sweet and Stephen Gray further clarified the graph and discussed University Excused absences in general. Laura Sweet said that there are no University Excused Absences for medical reasons. A student can take documentation of medical treatment to the Student Health Services. Student Health will then give the student a note saying that there is no University Excused Absences for health reasons. This allows the professor to contact Student Health for more information. If a professor won’t accept a medical excuse, Laura will sometimes make an exception in extreme circumstances for seniors and write a University Excused Absence for medical reasons or for accidents. However, there’s nothing in the policy that states that a professor must accept a University Excused Absence. If a student requests an excuse for a death in the family, the Ombudsman office does research on the severity and veracity of the request before granting an excused absence. The office doesn’t give excuses during final exam periods.

Copies of the minutes and the "University Class Attendance Policy-Draft #2" were distributed. The minutes were reviewed and approved.

Gary Levine asked the guests to review the draft for comments and feedback. In general, the guests supported the changes and felt that the draft was better at clarifying the responsibilities of the students and professors. Laura Sweet mentioned that she sometimes gives excused absences for crisis situations (i.e., apartment burns, sexual assault, court), and she would like to continue to have that authority.

Nita Boyce discussed the hand-out previously distributed. This was a sample copy of a memorandum that athletes receive at the beginning of the semester to give their instructors. The memo details when the athletes will miss class. Nita Boyce discussed the three point process that athletes are expected to go through for their University Excused Absences. 1) Athletes give this memo to their instructors within the add/drop period, so instructors know when the students will miss class. 2) Two days prior to the absence, athletes are expected to inform their teachers of their upcoming absence. 3) Once the athlete returns from the trip, they give their instructor an official University Excused Absence that has been approved by the administration. More discussion ensued about faculty not honoring the University Excused Absence. Nita Boyce said she liked the new wording in the draft: "Instructors are expected to recognize..." She felt that the word "expected" was stronger wording. Nick Floyd discussed the difficulty that travel causes the athletes in terms of missing class. Travel has increased since their being in the National Conference.

The committee and guests further discussed the policy draft. Laura Sweet recommended changing "Office of the Provost" to "Ombudsman Office". Referring to the last sentence of the document - "have the right to appeal through the appropriate Dean", Laura also pointed out that the Dean doesn't have the right to insist that the faculty member excuse an absence. The Dean would have to refer back to the faculty member.
Discussion ensued about the policy being able to be enforced if there is no appeal process for the student. There was more discussion about professors not honoring the excused absence. Some suggestions included requiring professors to include in their syllabus whether or not they accepted University Excused Absences, or requiring professors to sign the aforementioned memorandum indicating that the professor had seen the memo and agreed to the missed classes. There was also discussion about the issue of athletes missing too many classes.

Gary Levine thanked the guests, who, in turn, thanked the committee. The guests left at 5:15 PM.

A little more discussion continued about whether or not to have an appeal process. One suggestion was to change the wording from "Dean" to "Dean's office". There was also some discussion about whether to say that instructor's were "expected" to recognize University Excused Absences, since that may not be the case for all departments. One suggestion was to replace "expected" with "encouraged".

Gary Levine proposed that the committee think about these changes and discussions between now and the next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:18 PM.