Admission & Retention Policies Committee
Open Forum to Review Degrees with Distinction Policy
March 21, 2005

Members present: Gary Levine (Chair), Jayne Geissler, Lee Grubb, Carol Nichols, Randy Parker, Larry Seese, Natalie Stewart

Guests: Karl Abrahamson, faculty (computer science)
Robert Ainsworth, student
Amy Bissette, Associate Registrar
Connie Blake, Assistant Registrar
William David Barnes, Jr., alumnus
Carol Collins, faculty (computer science)
Don Joyner, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Academic Services
Renee Manley, student
Dorothy Muller, Special Assistant to the Vice Chancellor

Chair Gary Levine called the meeting to order at 4:00 pm and welcomed the guests. Levine explained that the purpose of the open forum was to gather input from students, faculty, and staff with regard to the degrees with distinction policy. The current policy includes past academic performance when calculating the GPA to determine if an individual qualifies for a degree with distinction. Levine reminded the guests that the Admission & Retention Committee is an academic policy committee and not an appellate committee, so it is not within their jurisdiction to grant individual exceptions to policy. Levin suggested that guests limit individual comments to 8 minutes.

Ainsworth spoke about the frustration he felt after achieving high grades at ECU and being denied a degree with distinction based on poor grades received 25 years ago at the University of Arizona. Ainsworth thought the policy was not fair and did not represent nor reward the hard work and efforts he has made in completing his degree.

Barnes stated that he returned to ECU under the forgiveness policy, earned high grades and was denied a degree with distinction because the “forgiven” grades were used in calculating the GPA. Barnes felt the policy should exclude the forgiven grades when determining degrees with distinction.

Joyner supported the current degree with distinction policy by explaining that recognition is given for the whole undergraduate academic career which includes all transfer work and grades received at ECU. Joyner felt that the current policy represents what is most fair for all students.

Muller reminded the guests that students returning on the forgiveness policy receive a letter stating that forgiven grades will be used in the calculation of degrees with distinction. She also felt that the current policy should recognize the whole academic career and is fair to students.

Due to the fact that several guests were asking questions of the committee and each other, Parker made a motion that only committee members should be allowed to ask questions. The motion was not seconded.

Abrahamson and Collins suggested that allowances should be made for nontraditional students, and there should be a “statute of limitations” on calculating previous grades. For instance, grades received 10 years or earlier should not be used when calculating degrees with distinction. There was some discussion by guests and committee members on the difficulty of determining the number of years for a “statute of limitations.”

Blake and Bissette provided numbers of students receiving degrees with distinction. Bissette also reminded guests that students are informed in a letter that “forgiven grades” are calculated for degrees with distinction.
Manley spoke in favor of changing the policy and noted that a degree with distinction was a motivating factor for her in achieving high grades. However, when she later discovered that her transfer grades might prevent her from receiving the degree with distinction, she felt the policy was not fair.

Muller reiterated the policy and provided a brief history on the forgiveness policy and stated support for the current degree with distinction policy.

Levine concluded the meeting by thanking guests for their input. He informed the guests that the Admission & Retention Policies Committee will discuss degrees with distinction at their next meeting.

Meeting adjourned shortly after 5 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Jayne Geissler
Secretary for the day