

# JMU Faculty Senate Academic Policies Committee Annual Report for 2014-15

## Membership

Morgan Benton, ISAT, Chair

Kevin Borg, History

Sarah Carson, Kinesiology

Michael Mungin, Libraries and Educational Technology

Leigh Nelson, Communication Studies

Susan Nye, Kinesiology

Dave Shonk, Hospitality, Sport and Recreation Management

Ping Wang, COB

Nate Wright, Chemistry

Teresa Gonzalez, Vice Provost for Academic Development, Advisor

Michelle White, Registrar, Advisor

## Meetings

The APC met a total of five times during the 2014-2015 academic year, three times in the fall semester, and twice during the spring. One meeting in the spring was canceled due to snow.

## Summary of Activities

The following is a list of things the APC did this year, summarized from meeting minutes.

### **Consideration of a Proposal to Offer Micro-courses at JMU**

This activity took up the greatest portion of the APC's time this year. A separate report and proposal was developed as a result of this effort and will be attached to this report.

### **Review of Discussion Regarding a Formal Reading Period Prior to Spring Exams**

In the 2013-2014 academic year, the APC was given the task of reviewing a proposal to create a formal Reading Period that would take place during the last week of the Spring Semester prior to final exams. Feedback was collected from faculty across the university, research was done into the practice at other universities, and the APC eventually recommended that a reading period should not be created.

The APC recapped this discussion this year. Attached are separate documents that include both the raw feedback from the faculty and also the text of an email that was sent to a Breeze report inquiring about this matter.

## **Provision of Feedback to the Registrar on a Revised Policy for Awarding Graduation Honors**

University Registrar Michelle White requested feedback on new policy language updating the way that JMU determines which students receive Latin honors, e.g. magna cum laude, at JMU. The policy was primarily designed to address issues related to transfer credit, the minimum number of hours of study a student has to complete at JMU to be eligible, and also setting new GPA cutoff points to retain the exclusivity of the honor. All APC member agreed that the new language was reasonable and offered no substantive revisions.

## **Consideration of a Proposal to Move Spring Break into Spring**

A faculty member in Chemistry proposed that JMU move Spring Break out of early March and into a time when it is warmer outside. The rationale put forward were:

- It would facilitate outdoor field research and data collection
- It would be more likely to coincide with local school systems' (K-12) spring breaks easing logistics for faculty members with children
- It would make JMU more attractive to potential hires

Counter-rationale included:

- Spring break is timed to be exactly in the middle of the semester
- K-12 spring breaks move from year to year and coordination would be extremely difficult
- The proposal did not articulate benefits that would significantly outweigh the costs of changing current practice

The APC decided not to move forward with this proposal. The proposal was sent forward a second time from the same faculty member, but it did not change the APC's mind.

## **Provision of Feedback on a Policy for Removing Disruptive Students from Classes**

This request for feedback came from Kristi Shackelford, Assistant Vice Provost for Academic Policies and Curriculum Development. Her team was working on a policy outlining responsibilities and procedures for faculty forced to deal with disruptive behavior from students in classes. The APC read the policy draft and offered some small suggestions which included:

- Explicitly address study abroad
- Allow students accused of disruptive behavior to have an advocate of some sort present at meetings with the instructor and/or academic unit head
- Add "excessive use of offensive language" to the list of disruptive behaviors

Otherwise, the policy seemed reasonable and appropriate to all members of the APC.

## **Provision of Feedback on Changing the University's Inclement Weather Make-Up Day Policy**

Essentially, the revised policy would eliminate official make-up days for classes missed due to snow or inclement weather. The rationale for this change is:

- It is very time and labor intensive to reschedule ALL of the classes at JMU, especially when multiple days are missed in succession due to snow, for example
- Relatively few faculty members actually require students to come in on the make-up day, and there are always conflicts
- As such, instructors would be made responsible for devising their own make-up days

The APC offered the following feedback:

- Giving up the official, university-wide day is okay IF there is still some entity, e.g. college/academic unit, to "blame" for requiring students to attend make-up days. In other words, faculty do not want their popularity to suffer for requiring make-up day attendance.
- Units and faculty members need regular reminders to make sure that:
  - they know it is now up to them to schedule make-up days
  - there is a policy in place for each unit
  - there is a policy in the syllabus for each class
- The university should still send out mass text messages and emails to students reminding them to check their syllabi for applicable make-up day policies

## **Met with Bookstore Manager Mark Glenn to Discuss Bookstore Policy on Honoring Instructors' Wishes With Respect to E-Books**

Some JMU faculty members have done extensive research on the cognitive comparison between traditional paper textbooks and e-books. They found e-books to be inferior learning tools, and as such exercised their option to direct the JMU Bookstore NOT to offer the e-book version to students. They also found that their requests were not always being honored, and that in most cases, the e-book was the default choice selected for students when they purchased books online.

Mark Glenn attended the 2/6/15 APC meeting. He indicated that the website was controlled by the parent company of the bookstore, of which JMU's was only one of over 900 branches. He said he would look into the policies regarding how e-books are offered on the website. He also advised us as to the availability of a program called IncludEd in which the cost of a textbooks is included in fees for a particular course in exchange for bulk discounts to be negotiated between the instructor and the bookstore and based on the enrollment in the course.