

Academic Affairs Committee Report
Sam Houston State University
Submitted by Sheryl Murphy-Manley, Chair of the Academic Affairs Committee
October 4, 2012

Members: Sheryl Murphy-Manley (CFAMC), Kevin Clifton (CFAMC), William Jasper (COS), Paul Loeffler (COS), Rick White (COS), James Crosby (CHSS), Doug Ullrich (COS)

I. Online Courses

The Committee will explore issues concerning online courses this semester by:

1. Gathering information relevant to our charge from Distance Learning (we are constructing a list of questions)
2. Surveying the chairs of each department (our questions will be based on the data we receive from Distance Learning)
3. Inviting faculty who teach online courses to speak with us as a committee about their concerns

II. The issue of Graduate Support and Low-Producing Programs (LPP) in Texas is of primary concern for the Committee.

A. The committee has constructed questions for Chair Steele and Chair-Elect James to ask at the Texas Council of Faculty Senates (TCFS) in Austin in October. We will first present our questions to Provost Hebert for his input, modifying our questions for the Legislature if needed. Our Chair has been asked (or will be asked) to forward questions that they would like answered during the meeting. They will be meeting with the chancellor and vice-chancellors and can get information specific to our system. They then can pose the same questions to the Coordinating Board staffers who will address the group in the afternoon.

B. Following the report from Chair Steele from TCFS, the AA committee will explore options about how to approach this topic, including inviting Kandi Tayebi and/or Provost Hebert to a future sub-committee meeting.

C. The following questions will be presented to the TCFS.

1. How are these LPP programs specifically determined? What is concrete in this determination, and is there flexibility in situations? Have the graduation requirements changed since this issue was last presented in 2010?
2. What has been considered concerning those graduate programs that contribute to departments in which much of the substantive undergraduate education is experience-based, and often provided by graduate students (science labs for one)? [For example in contrast, for on-line, coursework masters programs with little operational interaction between learning-community members, little mentoring occurs. The progress of the student

through these programs can be simply maintained through accumulation of courses/hours without the requirements for group work, sharing and serving, teaching and mentoring, or opportunities for leadership roles. Degrees can be obtained without group work in concert with others. However in disciplines such as chemistry, faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates gravitate toward research groups and the laboratories. Masters-level students are critical to the undergraduate lab experience, and undergraduate research opportunities. If we think of our service to students as one that presents opportunities for them, then we must prioritize these items that contribute to those opportunities.

3. Without quality master degree programs, even though low producing, the ability for SHSU to attract and retain excellent faculty will be hindered.

4. Means of Assessing Programs

A. We think that the success of an SHSU graduate, once in the work field, can serve as an equal or alternative measurement of a program's accomplishments. Has the legislature considered this viewpoint, as opposed to solely relying on the number of students graduating in a particular number of years?

B. SHSU was ranked the third highest in the State of Texas in job placement for our students. We would like the Coordinating Board members to consider this success and other assessment parameters beyond numbers of graduates in a program. We believe attributes that employers want in their young professionals, and this "success" or "value-added" that our students acquire from SHSU, cannot be measured by numbers alone. We would like to know if THECB will consider using these other criterion as part of its assessment of graduate programs, and if not, can it please provide the rationale for its decision?

III. The administration of the IDEA system and the use of its data need to be examined.

The Academic Affairs Committee is exploring how the IDEA system is currently being used, and what modifications might be necessary.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Academic Affairs Committee requests that the Faculty Senate ask the University to re-invite IDEA to campus for a public presentation and question/answer period about recommended ways to use IDEA on a campus like ours, in courses like ours, both on-ground and on-line, and to tell us about our comparative groups of schools, program by program. The Committee would further like to recommend that all Departmental Chairs be required to have training concerning the recommended ways to use the IDEA system in their departments. The committee also requests an update on the progress of the promised development of an assessment tool for online instruction.

IV. The committee stated that it would like clarification on the issue of faculty lines.

- A. Are faculty lines dissolving, and if so, at what level?
- B. Is this issue a matter of reporting budgets in a different way?
- C. Does this amount to a hiring freeze for departments with struggling budgets?
- D. What does this mean for departments and the hiring of new faculty?
- E. At the Faculty Senate Meeting on November 10, 2011, Chair Hatton reported that there was a new law ruling that “we” were not allowed more adjuncts or contingent faculty than 25% of FTEs. (Dean de Castro seemed unfamiliar with this ruling when asked about it informally earlier this week, although he speculated that the figure would apply University-wide. The committee would like to know details of this policy.)
 - 1. What is the status of this ruling?
 - 2. At what level does this apply? Department? College? University?

RECOMMENDATION:

The Academic Affairs Committee would like to recommend to the Faculty Senate that they invite Provost Hebert to speak at a Senate meeting this semester to address the above questions, and others related to the issue that the Senate might pose, concerning the funding and distribution of faculty lines (existing and new).