

# WKU UNIVERSITY SENATE MINUTES

March 22, 2007

## I. Call to Order

The regular meeting of the WKU University Senate was called to order Thursday, March 22, 2007, at 3:55 P.M. in the Garrett Ballroom by Chair Michelle Hollis. A quorum was present.

**The following members were present:** John All, Mustafa Atici, Johnathon Boles, Marty Boman, Scott Bonham, Charles Borders, Tim Brotherton, Barbara Burch, Stuart Burris, Jeff Butterfield, Mike Carini, Walter Collett, Eddy Cuisinier, Judy Davison, Robert Dietle, Richard Dressler, Freda Embry, Sam Evans, Janice Ferguson, Tim Gilbert, Jerry Gotlieb, Kathleen Hennessey, Michelle Hollis, Kate Hudepohl, Skylar Jordan (SGA), Debbie Kreitzer, Scott Lasley, David Lee, Sherry Lovan, Karen Mason, Terrence McCain, Laura McGee, Andrew McMichael, Patricia Minter, Richard C. Miller, Timothy Mullin, Roger Murphy, Dan Myers, Laurin Notheisen, Holly Payne, Katharine Pettit, Keith Phillips, Heidi Pintner, Krist Schell, Peter Sepanski, Julie Shadoan, Vernon Sheeley, Peter St. Pierre Sandra Starks, Carol Stowe-Byrd, Michelle Trawick, Tom Tutino, Stacy Wade, Judy Walker, Carol Watwood, Jeff Willis, Jacqueline Wofford, and Mary Wolinski.

**Alternates present were:** Denise Gravitt for Greg Arbuckle, Sylvia Gaiko for John Bonaguro, Douglas Smith for Jerry Daday, Daniel Carter for Terry Dean, Shiu Yue Mak for Deana Groves, Beth Plummer for Anthony Harkins, Kelly Reames for Joe Hardin, John Faine for John Musalia, Isabel Mukonyora for Jeffrey Samuels, Jeanne Fiene for Bud Schlinker, Bob Reber for William J. Tallon,.

**The following members were absent:** Mike Binder, Robert Bowker, Janice Chadha, Nancy English, Blaine Ferrell, James Gary, Jens Harlander, Heather Johnson, Kaveh Khatir, Dominic Lanphier, John Long, Cynthia Mason, Thanh Lan Ngugen, Johnston Njoku, Katrina Phelps, Gary Ransdell, Eric Reed, Sherry Reid, Angela Robertson, Nevil Speer, Don Swoboda, and Samanta Thapa.

## II. Minutes

The Minutes of the February 2007 meeting were approved as read with no additions or corrections. Dr. Burch endorsed the minutes with one exception; she is holding approval of one new course, PH598 Applied Research in Public Health, for further discussion because it seems to replicate another course.

## III. Reports

### a. Chair

Michelle Hollis, Chair of the Senate, reported that the Executive Committee meeting will take place on April 30 and the University Senate meeting will take place on May 10. These meetings need to take place because of some curricular items that need to

take place this academic year. Attendance at these meetings is very important so that we can have quorum.

All departments should have conducted their elections by now. If you have not already done so, please send your results to Heidi Pintner.

Dr. Hughes has resigned from the university and a search is in progress. Michelle Hollis is serving on the committee. The advertisement for the position has already gone out to a wide net of places; if you know of anyone who is interested, send Michelle Hollis an email and she will send you a link that will guide you to all of the information that is needed.

Dr. Dietle resigned as Faculty Regent because he has accepted a position as the History department chair; the Faculty Regent Election will take place and Dr. All sent the timeline for this election via email.

Dr. Ransdell invited the members of the University Senate to the Board of Regents meeting in the Kentucky room of the Kentucky Building on April 27th to meet with the board and hear some of the research accomplishments of colleagues.

Michelle Hollis summarized the February 22<sup>nd</sup> Athletics Committee meeting report. Dr. Selig reported that stadium construction has begun. Stadium construction updates can be found on the athletics website. The track is now half a track and Warren Central has given permission to WKU to access its facility. A new track complex will be built across the railroad tracks under the water tower. Dr. Selig also reported that Russell Athletic and Western are trying to work out a deal where Russell will be the uniform apparel provider for WKU. Post Communications is going to be the multi-media rights holder for WKU. As part of this deal, they will advance us 1.5 million dollars to construct a video-replay board that was not in the original Smith Stadium project cost.

Academic statistics for the fall 2006 semester show that 9/10 of women's teams are at a GPA over 3.0. 5 of the women's teams had a semester GPA of 3.25 or better. All of the student women's athletes earned an average semester GPA of 3.24. The male student athletes earned an average semester GPA of 2.55. Over 38% of them had a 3.0 or better. 12 of the male athletes earned a 4.0, 9/10 of the men's teams had at least one student with a 4.0. 19 women had a 4.0 and they represented 8/10 of the women's teams. 8 were from swimming and 4 were from soccer. Women's golf had the best overall GPA of 3.35 and men's golf led the men's teams with a GPA of 3.16. When this information was presented, Dr. Wonker asked Dr. Selig what the other end of the distribution looked like. His response was that 40 out of 426 student athletes were below a 2.0. A question was asked which team had the lowest GPA and it was the football team. Someone asked Dr. Selig if this would be a problem with the move to I-A football and his response was that he thought the move would help to recruit better athletes, both athletically and academically. Someone asked if they thought they would go up in the spring. Dr. Selig said that grades usually are higher in season.

The Student Government Association has appointed Katherine Pettit to serve on the Executive Committee to finish out this year.

Dr. Harrimen recently had a meeting with Dr. Tice and he still no longer has his Preston Center Membership and he wanted to express to the Senate that he did not feel as though he was treated fairly in this three-year process.

After reading the Senate's resolution on the Child Care Resolution, the staff council will be submitting a similar resolution and they are going to work with SGA to see if they will submit a resolution on child care with hope that if all three bodies are interested in this resolution taking place, administration will see the importance of it.

**b. Vice Chair**

The Vice-Chair, John All reported that the following departments have not submitted election reports: Ogden (Dept. of Agriculture), Health and Human Services (Allied Health, Communication, PE and Rec, Public Health, and Social Work), Potter (Communications, Journalism, Music, and Political Science), Business (Economics and Management), and Education (Psychology).

Faculty Regent candidacy will run today through March 30. Nominees have to send a letter saying they accept the nomination. Campaigns will run through the 10<sup>th</sup> and the election will be on April 11 from 8 AM to 3:30 PM. Ballots will be counted and the new regent will be announced the next day. Details are in the email that John All sent out; questions can be directed to John All.

**c. Faculty Regent**

The Faculty Regent, Robert Dietle, stated that he is resigning because he is becoming the History Department Chair. He will be at the March 30<sup>th</sup> meeting and the April 12 announcement of the new regent will serve as his resignation. He wished the new regent his best and stated that he hoped that they would have the support and the advice that he has enjoyed for the past five years. He thanked the Senate for the last five years.

**d. Provost**

The Provost, Barbara Burch, thanked Dr. Dietle for his excellent representation of the faculty as Faculty Regent.

In the next 2-3 weeks, candidates will be on campus for the Chief International Officer.

We have been invited by the American Council of Education to be a campus that is part of their internationalization laboratory. It will provide some opportunities for faculty who are interested in learning more about ways that they can internationalize their curriculum and connecting with other campuses to do that. Information will be out on this shortly.

Salary allocations for next year are at the departmental level and will move to the deans in another few days. The pool was a 4% merit pool. This year, an extra \$250,000 (approximately) came as a result of the President wanting us to work on some benchmarking. We still have a 55<sup>th</sup> percentile benchmark target but when he looked at the comparison of salaries by rank of peer institutions in the state of Kentucky, he was not happy to see us below the #2 rank (we want it to be #1). The \$250,000 are targeted to the Assistant and Associate ranks. Dr. Burch anticipates that most of the colleges will be looking at the 1% pool on vacant positions to address some of the issues at other ranks. All in all, that combined with the increased amounts for promotions will help us in many ways. The progress that is being made in some of the ranks will give leverage to address the professorial rank in coming years.

Most people have been keeping up with the memos from the President and the information in the newspaper about the decisions being made (or not made) regarding budget in Frankfort. There are three really big things that we are anxiously waiting to hear about: (1) Many of us are waiting for construction on facilities in the bonding issue; (2) the resolution that deals with a different type of funding for the optional retirement program; and (3) the funding for the academy

\$200,000 this year will go toward packages for graduate assistantship tuition wavers. A commitment over the coming years will move toward full tuition wavers for approximately 250 assistantship positions. This will be very helpful in our graduate program.

There are three different commencements coming up – there are two commencements on Saturday (half the colleges in one, and the rest in the other), plus the graduate commencement on Friday night.

#### **IV. Standing Committee Reports**

##### **a. University Curriculum Committee**

Julie Shadoan, Chair of the University Curriculum Committee, reminded the Senate that there will be an April meeting and proposals are being accepted for that. She moved for approval of the February consent agenda. The report from the Steering Committee of the UCC regarding a revision of guidelines for proposals to create a cross-listed course to an equivalent course; other than that, the proposals are standard from each college. The course proposals passed unanimously as presented without discussion.

##### **b. General Education**

Patricia Minter, Chair of the General Education Committee, stated that the General Education Committee had no report. There will be an April meeting and any business passed at that meeting will be considered at the May meeting. Please have your departments send anything no later than Tuesday of next week.

**c. Faculty Welfare and Professional Responsibilities**

Nevil Speer, Chair of the Faculty Welfare and Professional Responsibilities Committee, was not present. Mary Wolinski presented the report in his place. The University Senate faculty survey has been completed and the results will be announced and posted on the Senate website prior to the next Senate meeting. The Salary Survey results will also come out in the spring. The response rate was over 330 this year, as compared to last year, which was around 280. The most positive responses to the faculty work life questions came in regard to the single-user health care insurance. The worst responses were regarding graduate student financing and salary. Michelle Hollis added that the normal protocol is for the Chair of the Senate and the Chair of the Faculty Welfare and Professional Responsibilities Committee to share these results with Dr. Ransdell and Dr. Burch prior to the results being made public.

**d. Committee on Academic Quality**

The Chair of the Committee on Academic Quality, Andrew McMichael, stated that there was no report.

**e. Graduate Council**

Tim Gilbert, the Chair of the Graduate Council, made a motion for support and approval of the Graduate Council agenda items for University Senate consideration. The consent agenda passed unanimously with no discussion on the items.

**V. Old Business**

The Plus/Minus Grading discussion began with Dr. Dietle, who gave a time line on this ongoing process. From the discussions over the previous month or so, it became obvious that many people were confused about the history of the plus/minus motion. Dr. Dietle consulted with Doug Smith (Former Chair of the Senate), Dr. Burch, and various others. In September 2003, Brian Strow from the business college announced his intention to present a motion on plus/minus grading. In October 2003, that motion was presented. There was a lively debate. Professor Strow provided links to various articles and reports, and some amendments were made to the motion. Between the October and November Senate meeting, Doug Smith and Dr. Dietle met privately with the Provost. In their conversations, both concluded that Dr. Burch was not inclined to approve plus/minus at that time (if it passed). However, she was very reluctant to veto a motion should it pass because there were issues that had been raised in the meeting that needed to be answered. The implications of plus/minus grading needed to be further explored. As a result of her views, Dr. Smith and Dr. Dietle referred the Plus/Minus motion to an ad-hoc committee on academic quality to allow several months of study. This motion was presented at the November 2003 meeting and it passed. That committee was created by January 2004. Michelle Hollis was on this committee along with Professor Strow, Douglas Smith, Patricia Minter. Dr. Dietle stated that he attended many of these meetings as an observer. He said there was student representation as well as someone from the Registrar's office, along

with the faculty representatives. The initial charge was for the committee to make a recommendation yes or no on plus/minus. In the course of the committee deliberations, Dr. Dietle and Dr. Smith met again with Dr. Burch and got the impression that she felt that further information needed to be considered and that WKU should not rush into the plus/minus decision. So before a final vote be taken on plus/minus, the Senate would be presented with the option of having a two-year pilot program during which information would be collected. The plus/minus would not have an impact on students' GPA's, but they would be viewed on the transcript. As a result of that, the ad-hoc committee on academic quality's focus shifted to constructing the terms of the study and what information they wanted to collect and carry out over the next two years. In March 2004, the Senate approved that pilot study. The original plan for the study was fairly elaborate, but decisions were made to set aside some portions of that study because of unavailable resources in Academic Affairs. The study was conducted for a year and a half, after which time, the computer space was needed by administration for the F/N grade. The study was concluded after 1.5 years rather than 2 years and the data was analyzed. The analysis and report based on this data was presented to the Senate and this is what is now under consideration.

With this timeline, Michelle Hollis clarified that a plus/minus grading resolution has never passed through the Senate; only a pilot program has been passed.

In light of the history that Dr. Dietle presented, Andrew McMichael presented a friendly amendment that would strike the first paragraph of his resolution in order to keep the vote focused on plus/minus. There were no objections to Andrew McMichael's resolution, which now reads as amended at last meeting and this meeting:

### **PLUS/MINUS GRADING RESOLUTION**

Given the results of the trial period as well as the faculty survey, the Executive Committee recommends implementing the plus/minus grading system on a "rolling" basis beginning with [new graduate and undergraduate students in Fall, 2008. A "rolling" basis means [that all incoming students beginning in Fall 2008 would be part of the plus/minus system, while students already enrolled in Fall 2008 would have the option of continuing under the "five grade" system or filling out a new degree audit form and switching to the plus/minus system.

Doug Smith stated that there were a number of votes regarding particular aspects of the plus/minus grading system that were passed. The Senate voted on whether or not they wanted to have a C-minus, a D-plus or D-minus, and an A-plus. Then they voted on the amendment. Various pieces of the plus/minus have already been voted on. The two-year pilot project plan was that data would be collected for a year and a half and data would be analyzed over the next six months. The analysis would come back in the fall with enough time to vote on it. If it was implemented, it would be implemented in the spring.

Several people asked to come to speak to the Senate. In an effort to have various views represented, Michelle Hollis had one speaker in favor of plus/minus grading and one speaker against plus/minus grading.

The first speaker was Jeanne Johnson, president of the Student Government Association. She gave a powerful speech in which she emphasized that she represented the views of thousands of people based on signatures collected over the past few years. She quoted some statistics from WKU's office of institutional research, stating that "more students would suffer losses in their term GPA's than would see gains – better than 2 to 1. On average, signed grading caused term GPA's to decrease approximately .025 points. If adopted, 57% percent of students would see a loss in their GPA's. 16% would see a gain. The greater the number of signed courses taken, the larger the negative mean change in GPA. This trend suggests that if more course grades were using signed grades, the magnitude of GPA changes would also increase." Support for the plus/minus grading scale has been the idea that it lowers grade inflation. Jeanne Johnson stated that it "takes the students' GPA as a whole and lowers it". She quoted Bob Cobb's report on plus/minus grading, saying that it is a "disservice to the students – it is a competitive disadvantage because not every school has plus/minus grading." She expressed disappointment that the University Senate did not have Bob Cobb speak about and explain the results of his report, as well as in the faculty's low participation rate in the survey. She questioned why someone would contemplate enacting a system without viewing its effect on the population as a whole. She brought up several statistics that she had previously distributed to the faculty regarding Brown University. She concluded her speech stating that students have actively spoken against the plus/minus grading system.

The second speaker was Brian Strow, the original presenter of the plus/minus grading system in Fall 2003. He stated that he brought about this idea because he was discontent with the current grading system. He experienced the plus/minus grading system as a student and when he assigned grades as a professor, he looked for this system. The excel worksheet that he used to compute grades had pluses and minuses computed, but he assigned straight grades. He stated that he started looking around and wondered which system was the norm – straight grading, plus/minus grading, or something else. He looked at the US News and World Report at the top 20 schools and went to each website individually to figure out what kind of grading system they would adopt. The findings were that 19/20 used some form of plus/minus grading. Brown was the only school that did not use plus/minus. He also looked at WKU's peer institutions at the time to see which ones used plus/minus. His argument was not based on what everyone else was doing, but was based on why the plus/minus grading system is overwhelmingly used around the country. He looked into the academic literature and found published papers written on the purposes of grading systems and the pros and cons of various grading systems. The two major purposes of grading systems are (1) to report academic achievement and (2) encourage a higher amount of studying and to focus on learning. There are a number of ways that academic achievement can be reported; no grades (just pass/fail), no grades

(percentages are reported). With respect to this information, it is important for both the buyer and seller to have a certain amount of information – the buyer needs to be able to determine the value. The solution to the problem is which gives better information? In our current system, a student with 80% gets the same grade as the student with 88%, and a student with 91% gets a different grade. The 88 and the 91 have more in common. Dr. Strow stated that he is not trying to penalize students with the plus/minus grading system but is trying to accurately represent academic performance. He stated that his two major arguments for plus/minus grading are accuracy in grading and an increase in student achievement. He also feels that it might serve as a signal of our dedication to academic quality.

The floor opened for discussion. The first to speak was Eric Reed, who circulated a 4-page document stating his argument in favor of the plus/minus grading system at the beginning of the discussion. He stressed that only new students enrolling in the fall of 2008 would be subject to this. No current students would be affected. Not only do the top universities in the country use plus/minus, but most of the top schools in the southern region use it. If we aspire to be at the top of our category, why shouldn't we use it?

Skyler Jordan from SGA spoke next. He stated that the Ivy League schools are prestigious due to endowments, not plus/minus. He also stated that he felt the plus/minus system was not more accurate because there was no added value to an A-plus. He stated that a study that he read from about a decade ago found that professors were more inclined to award a minus. Because colleges are about more than grades these days, employers are looking at other things (such as extracurricular activities). Employers look at other things to give an indication of success besides the GPA. Students are aware that it won't affect them, but they are fighting for future students.

Dr. Dietle stated that he does not understand and completely rejects the rhetoric that we are trying to harm the students. Our lives as teachers involve students trying to decide what is best for them, what is the best pedagogical approach, what is the best way to accurately assess their performance in the classroom. We are trying to make WKU a better place, and the thought that the faculty's primary concern is to punish or harm students is absurd. Secondly, in the big wide world, nobody cares about GPA, but they do care about progress on standardized tests (ACT, SAT, GRE, M-CAT). There are some students who have very high GPA's who do not do well on standardized tests. He wants students to have an accurate assessment of where they are in comparison to everyone else. He wants to accurately reflect where students are in reference to their peers. Plus/minus would be a step toward more accurately assessing student progress.

Doug Smith corrected a few statements regarding the survey of the faculty. The survey was a systematic random sample of 400 professors. The actual response rate was 28.7% (1 out of 4). This is about the same response rate for any other survey on campus that the faculty participates in. At the same time as the above survey, the

student survey was done of a systematic random survey of 800 students. The response rate was 21.1% -- 100 out of 800 responded. Of those students who responded, 75% were against and 25% were for.

Dan Myers had a question about what the plus/minus system to be adopted is. Andrew McMichael stated that this is the same system we have been studying on TopNet for the past 3 semesters that is outlined in Bob Cobb's report. If language to that effect needs to be inserted to clarify, then someone can carry that.

Janice Ferguson appreciated the discussion of different ways we have worked through this. She stated that she received the email asking senators to poll their departments about their wishes before voting and stated that she will be voting based on what her department wants because she is representing her department. She also asked if the registrar had any new information that she wanted to share. Frieda Eggleton responded that the plus/minus system that NKU will be implementing in Fall 2008 will be for all undergraduate students (not graduate students).

Patti Minter spoke briefly about a point raised by SGA President Johnson that "of course it lowers grade inflation". This makes student degrees more valuable and feels that in 10 years they may thank the faculty for this motion if it is approved because it will make their degree more valuable. She also commended the students for coming out and speaking their view and said that she hopes this is not the last the senate sees of them.

Denise Gravitt made a motion to end the discussion and have a vote. 2/3 majority is required to end the discussion and vote. 2/3 majority was attained, so the senators did a written vote. A "yes" vote is in favor of implementing plus/minus and a "no" vote is not in favor of implementing plus/minus. Given the results of the trial period as well as the faculty survey, the Executive Committee recommends implementing a plus/minus grading service on a rolling basis, beginning with the Freshman class in the Fall of 2008. A rolling basis means that each incoming class beginning with the Fall of 2008 will be part of the plus/minus system, while students already enrolled in the Fall of 2008 will have the option of continuing under the five-grade system or filling out a new degree audit form and switching to the plus/minus system. A "yes" on the ballot is a vote to implement the new plus/minus grading system. A "no" on the ballot is a vote to not implement the plus/minus grading system. Michelle Hollis verified that all senators were seated at a table. Only senators were allowed to vote after Michelle Hollis clearly stated what we were voting on. The ballots were tallied by three people, with the resulting vote being 36 in favor of implementing the plus/minus grading system and 23 voting not in favor of implementing the plus/minus grading system. The resolution to implement plus/minus grading passed.

## **VI. New Business**

Eric Reed stated that the Faculty Welfare and Professional Responsibilities Committee received a note from student advising over spring break that they were

required to advise for two more years. It means that the job duties of advising are going to be increased and he was concerned that the Faculty Welfare and Professional Responsibilities Committee and the Senate were not consulted about the increase in advising duties. Michelle Hollis stated that she was not contacted about it and will check with Nevil next week. She said that perhaps a resolution could come forth next month.

**VII. Announcements**

There were no announcements.

**VIII. Adjournment**

A motion by Johnathan Boles to adjourn the meeting was seconded. The meeting adjourned at approximately 5:10 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Heidi Pintner, Secretary