

Meeting of the Villanova University

Academic Policy Committee (APC)

Date: February 21, 2011
Time: 3:00 PM to 4:30 PM
Place: 300 SAC
Secty: Robert Styer
Presiding: Susan Mackey-Kallis

Attendance: Susan Mackey-Kallis (chair), Gregory Sleasman, Robert Styer, Christopher Haas, Mary Ann Cantrell, Lesley Perry, Joyce Willens, Mike Pagano, Paul Pasles, Craig Wheeland, Louise Russo, Ed Kresch, Letizia Modena

AGENDA

I. Approval of the Minutes from the January 24, 2011 meeting
After a few typos were noted, the minutes were approved unanimously.

II. Future meeting dates: all in SAC 300: March 28th, 3:00 pm; Apr. 11th 3:00 pm.
Announcements: Frank Henninger will attend the Apr 11 meeting to discuss the new University Shop textbook software.

The CATS data analysis might be finished by April 11, in which case we will discuss it, otherwise an extra meeting will be scheduled or the issue will be discussed at the first fall meeting.

III. Review of draft of proposed language change to final exam/final assignment policy

The Chair distributed a draft rewording of the policy. She pointed out that any changes to the policy are changes to the Faculty Handbook, so would need to be approved by the Committee on Faculty.

The history of the restrictions on exams on the last day: the calendar formerly had two reading days. When fall break and Martin Luther King Day and similar constraints caused the dropping of the second reading day, the restriction on exams was added to assure that students had sufficient time to prepare for their final exams. The present discussion actually also arose out of the recent student desire to add a second reading day, with the SGA agreeing that, if the current policy of no exams or major projects were followed, then the second reading day would not be a critical issue.

One member stressed that restrictions on when a professor can give exams or papers is likely a direct violation of academic freedom. The APC decided that its immediate task is to clarify and codify the present policy, and that the bigger issues of academic freedom could be appropriately discussed at a future APC meeting or by the COF when they discuss the policy. A member asked the Associate VPAA if this policy has been an issue for faculty upset by infringement of academic freedom, and he replied that almost no complaints have ever come to their office, and the affected faculty members changed their paper due dates to adhere to the policy.

Two primary scenarios seem to be in mind for the policy. The first is scheduling what amounts to the final exam or final paper during the last week of class rather than during the scheduled finals period. Pressures from both students and faculty members to reschedule exams are especially acute when a final exam is scheduled for the end of the final exam period. The second scenario is an exam or paper or project on a portion of the course material that is due at the end of the term in addition to a comprehensive final exam.

Someone asked if it is permissible if students in the class vote to delay an exam until the last week or day. The short answer is that anything is allowed if the dean approves it in writing. A long discussion ensued about the pressures on students who might wish to vote against the majority of the class. Poor pedagogical decisions might be made by students who vote to move an exam up and so lessen their prep time. The consensus is that we do not want to encourage student class votes.

Members also shared anecdotal stories of students who had a major exam moved in one class, then leveraged this to beg another professor to change his or her exam or paper deadline. Also, some argued that if professors have an opportunity to move the final exam to the last week of classes, they would do so to lessen their end-of-year workload, so exceptions should not be routinely granted by the deans.

Several questions arose about lab courses that generally have no formal final exam but do have comprehensive exams on the last lab period. After some discussion, the committee amended the draft to say “with the exception of oral presentations or laboratory assessments...”

Questions arose about one day a week classes where the careful distinction in the current policy between the last week versus the last day is not applicable. The committee did not reach a consensus on the best policy in this case, so the default is the current policy that no exams or papers may be due on that last day without express permission of the dean.

Persons raised a question about the meaning of the “final week of classes.” Does this refer to the final five days of classes (which typically would mean Friday to the following Thursday) or does it mean the final calendar week (e.g., this year, due to Easter Monday, a three day period Tuesday—Thursday). One of the potential calendars ends classes on a Monday; would the week then only include Monday? The Associate VPAA said the understanding has always been the calendar week, even if that is only three days or one day of classes.

Everyone agreed the policy must be workable and understandable. Several members thought that the VPAA should prepare an FAQ page linked to this policy. On this FAQ page could be items such as:

- Discouraging student votes on moving exams to the last week.
- The policy is meant to apply to classes, so students and professors can agree to give makeup exams on the final day.
- The exceptions for lab courses.
- The distinction between the final week of class versus the last day of class.
- Clarifying that the last day of class is for that class, not the very last day of any class.
- Reiterating that final exams or final projects in lieu of a final are due on the scheduled final exam time slot, not the last day of class.
- Reiterating that the dean can make exceptions.

Several times the discussion veered into calendar issues, since the origin of and motivation for the policy is connected to the single reading day. Student Life was happy when the reading days were reduced to one, and would be very unwilling to return to two reading days. In fact, they would be happier if there were classes on Labor Day. It seems that most students and faculty, and certainly Campus Ministry, oppose shortening the midterm week. Student Life and Campus Ministry and perhaps some faculty oppose replacing the midterm weeks by long Thanksgiving/Easter breaks.

The members decided to remove the highlighted word "Other" for grammatical reasons.

Motion: To send the revised draft policy to the Committee on Faculty for inclusion in the Faculty Handbook.

Vote: 11 in favor, 1 opposed, 1 abstention.

IV. Review and Approval of Academic Calendars 2014-2015, 2015-2016

A long discussion of the various constraints on the calendar: graduation should not be Mother's Day weekend, nor the weekend before the Memorial Day weekend. Between the fall and spring semesters, the college Academic Standing committees need to get grades in time to meet, send out the "drop" notices, and give students time to appeal before the start of the spring semester. Dropping Labor Day and MLK Day do not seem to be viable options.

Farid Zamani could not attend the meeting due to class teaching responsibilities, but he submitted a proposal to move the graduation one week later, so the spring semester could begin one week later, allowing professors more time in January for research. After some discussion, the committee had three objections: the students said they do not need nor desire a longer Christmas break, the professors are split between having more time in January versus more time in the summer, and preparing for the many outside sports and academic summer camps requires lead time in May, which would be shortened if graduation were one week later. In the end, the committee decided not to consider the proposal further.

Some brainstorm ideas were floated to effectively add a reading day or portion of a reading day:

- Using this spring as an example, one could deem the Tuesday (currently deemed Friday) as a "Thursday", then deem Thursday as "Friday"; many students have no Friday classes, so they effectively would have both Thursday and Friday as reading days, while almost all students have at most a half day Friday, so they in effect get at least 1.5 reading days.
- Move the final exam period from Saturday-Friday to Monday-Saturday. This gives in essence three reading days (Friday-Sunday). Committee members raised two possible objections: many large multisection courses have exams on Saturday, possible because the large campus rooms are free on that day. Also, having the last day of exams on a Saturday would further exacerbate the current problems of students claiming they need to leave early and so need their exams rescheduled to earlier in the week.

The Associate VPAA agreed to bring these issues up to the calendar committee. The 2014-2015 calendar was approved. Two potential calendars for 2015-2016 differ in the ending fall semester date, and the committee unanimously preferred Draft #1 with the earlier end date. The later date would mean the three final exam grading days would extend into Christmas day.

V. Rules and Review's evaluation of the APC.

Being out of time, we tabled this to the next meeting.

The motion to adjourn was passed unanimously.

Members of APC: Susan Mackey-Kallis (chair), Wayne Bremser, Bryan Kerns, Amy Patel, Harshil Patel, Fayette Veverka, Robert Styer, Adele Lindenmeyr, Christopher Haas, Mark Sullivan, Lindsay Waters, Mary Ann Cantrell, Louise Fitzpatrick (represented by Lesley Perry), Joyce S. Willens, Mike Pagano, Greg Sleasman, Nicholas Tumolo, Damien Germino, Paul Pasles, Chiji Akoma, Kail Ellis (represented by Craig Wheeland), James Danko (represented by Kevin D. Clark), John Doody (represented by Lowell Gustafson), Gary Gabriele (represented by Gerard Jones), Letizia Modena, Diepiriye Anga, Louise Russo, Farid Zamani, Ed Kresch, Sridhar Santhanam