

Policies on Policies Discussion
Faculty Senate Meeting
02-04-08

SHERRY ROBINSON:

Many of you may know me; I've been a faculty member in the Department of English and Theatre for a number of years. What you may not know is that as of May, 2007 I began in a role as Special Assistant to the Provost. One of my primary responsibilities has been to work on the University body of policy, particularly as it regards Academic Affairs' policies. If you've been around the institution any length of time you know that sometimes University policy is hard to figure out what exactly is policy, what's not, where do you access the policy, what is official policy, what's not. So my role over the last few months is to work on untangling some of that body of policy and trying to tease out what is Academic Affairs policy, and trying to codify it in a way that makes sense and will make it easier for people to access. So we are well on our way to that process. As you may well understand that process is going to take some time, but we are going to continue to work through that. One of the things that we determined as we were looking through the body of policy is that the University doesn't really have a specific policy on policy--on how to make policy, what constitutes University policy, how do we make those designations. So I've been working with the University Office of Governance and Compliance and we've worked on a draft Policy on Policies which you have in your materials. So this is a draft of the policy and what we want to do is present that to you, as the Faculty Senate, to get your feedback on this policy. It has been submitted to a number of other groups because this is a university-wide policy, not simply an Academic Affairs policy. So it is being looked at in a number of different venues across the University to get feedback so that we can get a better sense of how we go about making policy at this institution. We really don't have a policy, our current body of policy doesn't really address how you stand down policy. We have policies on the books that have not been reviewed since the late 1970's. So we need to have a way for the University to review policy on a fairly regular basis. So we are hoping that this Policy on Policies will allow the University to have a mechanism by which we can operate in a way that will make policy make more sense and that there will be a particular process. Part of what you received in your materials, should have been as well as what we are proposing, was a flowchart for moving through Academic Affairs policies. Again that is what I've been charged with is Academic Affairs policies. So I've not really been looking at policies outside of Academic Affairs. And, that is one of the things we've been doing, is trying to figure out what policies fall under what headings so people will know who "owns" a policy. So that when people want to look at a policy or make revisions to a policy, they know what process to go by. So we've got a proposed flowchart that will kind of show where Faculty Senate plugs into that process. One of the things that I've learned is that there was not always, I could go to five different people and have five different answers as to the flow for policy approval. This doesn't make it so rigid that there can't be some flexibility but hopefully it will guide us through the process. I'm presenting this to you today and would be happy to entertain any questions that you may have and then

SHERRY ROBINSON (continued)

ask that I get some feedback from you within the next month or so. We would really like to take this policy to the Board of Regents by their April or June meeting, depending on how well we can feel like we've got it fully vetted. Are there any questions that I can answer for you?

SENATOR JOHNSON

Sherry, you're asking for feedback. Do you want us to give any thoughts, ideas, feedback to come back to you? Do you want them now?

SHERRY ROBINSON:

We can do whatever works for you. I don't know how much opportunity you've had to really look at the policy. If you've looked at it and feel like you want to provide feedback now and later, you can certainly e-mail me with any feedback. Whatever makes sense to you all in terms of providing feedback. I want to make this, this is through the Senate process, so whatever makes sense to you. Then, when we get all the Faculty Senate feedback, and couple that with the other feedback that we're getting from the other sources and have a more fully rounded draft then that will obviously come back to Faculty Senate for its approval in its final draft phase.

SENATOR EAKIN

We've seen this before as an informational item and this is perhaps one of the most direct attempts on the part of the administration to figure out a way for us to all be in the loop trying to figure these problems out. Because it is clear during the time that I've been Chair of Faculty Senate that information that comes from the administration sometimes never makes it down to individual members of the faculty. People hear different bits and pieces and sometimes they just hear a piece and they think it means something and it doesn't. The same thing we think is true going up the line. We don't know where it goes sometimes. How many times have we made these comments. So here is an opportunity to work on something and give feedback to a policy on policies that will help codify how we go about all of these policies that are out there. It's just going to be a yeoman's task to kind of work through all of the ones, how many did you say you thought we had now at the University that you were aware of?

SHERRY ROBINSON

I don't know, I know that what I've been doing for Academic Affairs is trying to divide, if you can see in the "Policy on Policies" it is divided into a volume, a chapter, and a section. So Academic Affairs is volume four of the entire body of policies and what I've been doing is simply dividing the chapters. So there are several dozen policies that I've identified at this point that are Academic Affairs policies alone. Part of the problem that we are having is trying to, one of the problems that I've found is that we've basically gotten into the habit of calling everything a policy and so when everything is a policy then nothing is a policy. One of things that the policy on policies does is try to define what is a policy. We are using the term right now "operational

SHERRY ROBINSON (continued)

regulation" to mean something that is a similar weight to a policy but does not have to go through the entire process all the way to the Board of Regents. These would be things that are more specific ways in which we operate at the University but we want to have something that carries a similar weight to a policy. I'm not sure we're completely "married" to the term "operational policy". If there's a better term that you know of that would fit there, that's part of the process of having this discussed, but we need to be able to say policies are a limited number of things and then operational regulations will probably be where we have the vast majority of our guiding principles and guidelines.

SENATOR REED

May we have your e-mail address and could you send us the definitions you just verbally gave?

SHERRY ROBINSON

The definitions are in the policy on policies which you already have. The policies would find themselves in this policy template so all the policies are going to look the same. One of the things that I found in going through the policies is that we would have some very complex, complete policies. My e-mail address is Sherry.Robinson@eku.edu. So one of the things that the template does is that it allows us to have a more complete policy. There were some policies for example, the dead week policy was a two-sentence policy. And I know that policy is being reviewed currently by both Faculty Senate and Student Senate groups. You know obviously when you have a two-sentence policy it makes it a little complex when you try to have multiple interpretations of how those two sentences can read. Not that there can't be interpretation with a longer more complex policy, but hopefully we can begin to determine terms that need to be defined within a policy. One of the things that is very complicated with a policy is that there hasn't been a good review history. It's been, we've actually had to go back through Board minutes and Faculty Senate minutes to figure out what policies have been reviewed by what bodies. There's been no consistent way to record so the policy template will have with it when the bodies have seen the policy, when it's been approved, and those kinds of things.

SENATOR WINSLOW

It seems to me, and correct me if I'm wrong, but the difference between "expedited" and "non-expedited" is Faculty Senate review is eliminated in the "expedited". Who decides if it needs to be expedited?

SHERRY ROBINSON

It will probably be decided at the Provost level for Academic Affairs policies. Typically, the only time a policy would be expedited if there is a situation where we realize that we are out of compliance with a Federal regulation or accrediting standard and that we need to get a policy in place in a short period of time and then presentably at that time, once it's in place, it would try to

SHERRY ROBINSON (continued)

go back through the full standard process so that it's not that Faculty Senate would be removed from that process, it would just be that in order for us to become in compliance with whatever we needed to come into compliance with, we would expedite the process and then take it back through the standard process and make whatever revisions or changes would be necessary at that time. So that is the difference between expedited and the standard policy process.

SENATOR CARTER

This would probably come under the term "operational policies". They are not necessarily university-wide, but they are annoying. Last semester's trouble with the incomplete grades. And I just got something from Human Resources, a change in policy that I had not heard of having to do with my tax return. It's always presented to us as a "done deal". Is this kind of thing going to take care of that kind of surprise? Not the highest level changes in policies and rules, but the ones that needle us everyday?

SHERRY ROBINSON

Hopefully it will help to do that. We have not in Academic Affairs yet gotten down to creating a flowchart for the operational regulation step, but it would be similar in terms of through the process until it gets to the Board of Regents level. Hopefully it would make it more clear what process needs to go before an operational regulation would then be made official.

SENATOR EAKIN

Dr. Robinson could you just comment, because I've heard a couple of comments on this from faculty. Will there be a policy before there's an operational regulation?

SHERRY ROBINSON

According to the definition we currently have, it could go both ways. An operational regulation could flow out of a policy. It could further define specific ways a policy would operate. But it is possible that an operational regulation may not necessarily flow itself out of policy, is my understanding of the way we've kind of worded that definition.

SENATOR CHAPMAN

First of all I just want to say that it's obvious that you have done a lot. The one comment and concern that I have here is that it looks like after the Faculty Senate looks at this, if it makes changes then it goes back to the Provost Council where they could totally change what the Faculty Senate does and then it goes on. And, I know that the Faculty Senate used to be able to, this goes back to when I was on this body before, to go from the Faculty Senate to the President. I'm assuming that the President knew what the Provost Council had done and the President knew what the Faculty Senate had done and then the President made a decision based on the wisdom of both bodies. I would like to make a suggestion that the President be given an opportunity to

SENATOR CHAPMAN (continued)

have the wisdom of both bodies again instead of it being done this way. I can understand being with the Provost office that perhaps there is a little bias here to get the Provost Council to have the last word on everything, but I think it would behoove to have it come with input from both rather than having the Provost Council having input before and after the Faculty Senate if the Faculty Senate changes anything. Certainly the people on the Provost Council should have access to any changes we make and they always have access to the President, but I would like to have the President have direct access to us. If you could consider that in the final draft.

SENATOR EAKIN

I think I can answer that for you. Whenever we pass something here, I write a letter that goes directly to the President and technically the President is parcelling this out to different people. So everything that we've done over the last, since I've been chair, has basically been summarized and sent to the President first. So maybe we need to just look at why it doesn't show up quite that way. But the President does get it first.

SENATOR CHAPMAN

I'm glad you do that David, but I'm talking about the process and actually the basic status of the Faculty Senate. But it goes beyond that. Do you understand what I'm saying Sherry?

SHERRY ROBINSON

Yes I do understand what you're saying and I think we will certainly look at whether or not that is reflected

SENATOR CHAPMAN

Even if there is a, just some kind of, because I can remember the Faculty Senate passing something and the President actually implementing it almost immediately and taking it to the Board.

SHERRY ROBINSON

What we are shooting for here is a unified process, and the Provost Council becomes a clearinghouse to make sure that, because there may be more than just the Faculty Senate as a place of vetting the policy and so it becomes one factor. I would, having participated in the Provost Council for the last several months and watched the way that group operates, I cannot imagine that if there were major differences between what the Faculty Senate recommended and what the Provost Council sees as a problem, that that would not be communicated back and forth between Provost Council and Faculty Senate. The Chair of Faculty Senate sits on Provost Council. So I think what we can do is work on strengthening the language so that it's clear that the recommendations of Faculty Senate are not being ignored and I think that is kind of what I gather is

SENATOR CHAPMAN

I think that is good, but it is just the idea also that if we make changes then even if the line goes back to the Provost Council, there is something that is a little bit degrading about that in terms of the way the Faculty Senate appears.

SENATOR WATERS

I want to state my support for Senator Chapman's concern because I think that once one lays out an operational plan of how policies are developed and vetted and changed and implemented within an institution that one wants to look at the structure and see that one has direct communication lines that have been well established--and that is between the Faculty Senate and the President. I would also like to add that I'm concerned that with the expedited process, I don't see faculty in here except for potential originators or to be identified as stakeholders and I think I would like to see, not the Faculty Senate as a whole, but a faculty representative that is in the process, and that could be the chair of the Faculty Senate or some other designated person from perhaps say the Executive Council, because I don't see faculty in here other than we could be an originator or perhaps even identified as a stakeholder. I think that anything that pertains to Academic Affairs, that we need to have faculty representative on that.

SENATOR JOHNSON

I agree with both of these suggestions and I would suggest in addition to what Senator Waters said, possibly if you would want to include the faculty in the expedited, you might want to consider using the Senate Executive Committee which can be called, I understand you're in a hurry, we've got to move this through, we've got to do it. The Executive Committee by virtue of the chair of the Senate can be called to meet at a moment's notice, if necessary, for something. So if you would want to consider that, you might want to put that in. I also, in the standard process you list the Senate policies related to faculty welfare and actually I know what you are trying to say, but if you look at the role of the Senate, it's not just faculty welfare. It deals with academics, it deals with a lot more than just faculty welfare so I would suggest tweaking that a little bit.

SENATOR ROBINSON

That is just one of those things that I haven't gotten back to that I am aware of, so thank you for keeping it on our radar.

SENATOR KRISTOFIK

"Concerns" might be a better word.

SENATOR ROBLES

I am hearing what everyone else is saying and I agree especially when discussing the purpose of the policy on policies. I think documentation is key and so one of the items in looking at how

SENATOR ROBLES (continued)

Faculty Senate communicates with Provost Council, I think on the flowchart if we did something where we could have a collaboration or where it say "Stakeholder" somewhere in there it should include Faculty Senate again. We want to maintain documenting, but we still maintain the shared governance. I think that is something, well we can say that I can't imagine anyone on Provost Council will do this or whatever, well in three years people change and all kinds of things happen that we never imagine. So I think documentation is the key.

SENATOR REED

I would like to support everything that has been said and to add one thing. The American Association of University Professors recognizes three dominate stakeholders in the management of a university. One is the President, one is the Board of Regents, and the other is the faculty represented by something like the Faculty Senate. I would like to see that really maintained so that we can work collaboratively.

SENATOR EAKIN

I think the purpose of this, if I got it right, is to get this very kind of feedback. So I think if you will continue to send your comments directly to Dr. Robinson they would be greatly appreciated. You've got to start some place and she described it as a tangled mess, and it is a tangled mess the way it is. So I think just starting on this sorting out is a commendable thing. Please pass this on to your faculty and I'm sure Dr. Robinson will not mind receiving e-mails from anybody. This is not just for Senate, it's for all faculty.

SHERRY ROBINSON

I really did appreciate this and the opportunity to share this with you. I look forward to your feedback. It's already been very helpful. Thank you.