ACADEMIC POLICIES COMMITTEE
March 5, 2021
Zoom Meeting from 1-2 p.m.

Members Present: Keith Goyne (Chair), Cassandra Garcia, Robin Panneton, Kimberly Smith,
    Susan Sumner, Keith Thompson

Recorder: Arlice Banks, Executive Administrative Assistant, College of Natural Resources
    and Environment

Keith Goyne, Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:03 p.m.

I.   Review and Vote Upon

    A.   The February 19 meeting minutes were approved without modification.
    B.   The March 5 agenda was approved without modification.

II.   Old Business

    A.   Update from Kimberly Smith on literature informing midterm grade reporting as
           a best practice. Why midterm grades?
        1.   Higher institutions are investing in the development of predicting student
              success to provide feedback to students.
        2.   In theory, midterm grades should help institutions identify students who may
              be struggling in a course early in the semester.
        3.   Midterm grades may alert students to withdrawal policies and upcoming
              deadlines should they decide that continuing in a course is not their best
              option.

    B.   Challenges with midterm grades at Virginia Tech.
        1.   An increasing number of faculty enter identical midterm grades for every
              student in their class.
        2.   Some faculty do not enter midterm grades at all.
        3.   Many faculty no longer believe that midterm grades are necessary, so they
              aren't investing much time in the process.
        4.   Faculty believe that students engaged in the Learning Management System's
              (LMS) learning activities receive accurate feedback about their class
              performance. This belief, along with graded coursework, may account for
              why some faculty don't see the need to calculate a midterm grade.
        5.   The academic calendar deadlines often require faculty to submit midterm
              grades before the student has completed a significant amount of coursework.

C. Methodological approaches.
    1. Predictive models of student success are broken into four categories: (1) data sources and student variables, (2) procedures of data handling and processing, (3) adopted machine learning techniques, and (4) evaluation of accuracy and generalizability. Midterm grades fall within the data sources and student variables category.

D. Data sources and student variables.
    1. Predictive variables either predict course-level performance or they predict program-level success. Midterm grades are based on course-level predictions.
    2. Quizzes and midterm exams are often used as predictive variables.
    3. Activities from the LMS are used as predictive variables. The premise is that the more students log in and download materials, the more engaged they are with the class.
    4. In addition to cognitive variables, some institutions look at social and emotional variables by having students complete surveys.
    5. In addition to the above, some institutions include student demographics, academic history, course modality, style, and quality as predictive variables.

E. What does this mean for Virginia Tech?
    1. Midterm grades are a good predictor of final course performance but only if used and entered appropriately by faculty.
    2. Virginia Tech must change its approach to educating faculty to get better buy-in for entering midterm grades.
    3. Most institutions use multiple measures to create a predictive model, whereas Virginia Tech uses a single data point. Perhaps Virginia Tech could partner with TLOS to look at the data for logging in and accessing Canvas. Perhaps historically, we can compare midterm grades from previous semesters to login activity to see any correlations.
    4. Virginia Tech should be mindful of the timing of midterm grades. Faculty must receive some prediction earlier than midterm to give students enough time to influence their performance and determine better future strategies. Faculty must review the academic calendar to be aware of critical drop dates and schedule their assessments so that they have enough information to give an accurate midterm grade.
    5. Educating faculty on the importance of midterm grades is crucial. Other institutions are working much harder to implement strategies to close academic performance gaps from different populations.

F. **Additional comments on Draft Policy 6.**
    1. There were no additional comments.

G. Review of the draft electronic form and other comments.
1. In conjunction with an academic advisor, the student initiates the compassionate relief request using an electronic form. The form is routed to the appropriate office(s) for comment based on the student's responses. For example, an international student's form is routed to Cranwell, and the form for a student receiving financial aid is routed to the Financial Aid Office for comment regarding the impacts of the student's CR request. The student selects the campus unit that should review their request.
2. Which associate dean receives the student's electronic form is determined by the student's home college. The associate dean will verify the student's academic progress and provide relevant comments. The associate dean will not have access to sensitive information submitted for the campus unit's review.
3. The form is routed to the campus unit selected in Step 1.
4. Following the campus unit's review, the relevant information is returned to the associate dean for review and discussion at a Compassionate Relief Committee meeting. The student's academic dean indicates the committee's final decision. Regardless of the decision, the student will receive a notification. If the CR is approved, the notification would include a step for the student to go to the Registrar's Office with specific instructions about what semester will be dropped, etc.
5. The electronic form is a prototype for concept purposes only and not meant to replace any process envisioned for CR by Vice Provost's offices for Undergraduate Studies and the University Registrar.
6. The CR policy description should appear in the undergraduate student catalog, encouraging students to consult an advisor before initiating a CR request.

III. New Business

A. Dissemination of draft policy and individuals to be contacted.
1. Rachel Holloway, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies
2. Rick Sparks, University Registrar
3. Byron Hughes, Dean of Students
4. Kanitta Charoensiri, Director, Schiffert Health Center
5. Ellie Sturgis, Director, Cook Counseling Center
6. Nikeshia Arthur, Director, Services for Students with Disabilities
7. Beth Armstrong, Director, Office of University Scholarships and Financial Aid
8. David Clubb, Director, Cranwell International Center

9. Other associate deans for Undergraduate Studies
   a) Kathryn Albright, College of Architecture and Urban Studies
   b) Laura Khansa, Pamplin College of Business
   c) Michael Pleimling, College of Science
   d) Dan Thorp, College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences

B. <u>Next steps and length of review of the draft policy</u>.
   1. Reviewers will receive the draft policy, Office 365 Pro Plus Setup Instructions, and a link to the electronic form prototype. Written feedback on the draft policy is requested by 5 p.m. on March 25.
   2. Reviewers are invited to join the Academic Policies Committee meeting on March 19 to share their thoughts on the CR process.
   3. Keith Goyne will ask Rick Sparks if the draft policy could be discussed at an upcoming Small Roundtable meeting.
   4. The draft policy will be sent to the Diversity Education Team (Michele Deramo, Alicia Cohen, and Blane Harding) for their review to ensure that the policy doesn't create additional barriers for students.

IV.   Adjourn
The meeting was adjourned at 1:59 p.m.