

ACADEMIC POLICIES COMMITTEE
January 19, 2022
Zoom Meeting from 2-3 p.m.

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

Members Absent: Kimberly Smith

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

Keith Goyne (Chair) called the meeting to order at 2:02 p.m.

I. Review and vote upon

- A. The December 8, 2021 meeting minutes were approved without modification.

II. Review and approve agenda

- A. The January 19, 2022 agenda was approved without modification.

III. Notifications

- A. Keith Goyne hasn't sent the draft policy to the university legal team for review yet. He plans to send the draft after the committee agrees to final revisions today.

IV. Old Business

- A. Finalize the name of the policy
 1. The following suggestions were made: Compassionate Academic Relief, Revision of Records, Academic Relief, Academic Assistance, and Academic Aid.
 2. One member researched the names of peer institutions' policies and found that Academic Assistance is uniformly used most often in conjunction with the Division of Student Affairs (workshops, etc.). Our version of Academic Relief has a variety of different names.
 3. There was concern about including "withdrawal" in the title because Virginia Tech already has student withdrawal forms and resignations, and adding withdrawal to the title could cause confusion.
 4. It was thought that using "Medical Withdrawal" in the title doesn't represent everything the committee wants to accomplish through this policy.
 5. While several members liked the expression "Revision of Records," it was noted that there are many ways records are revised for different reasons. This expression doesn't stand out as anything different from course withdrawal or resignation.

6. After much discussion of the pros and cons of various suggestions, the committee unanimously voted to change the name of the policy to “Academic Relief Policy.”
- B. Review of edits from the last meeting
- C. How should the committee handle returning Ws to the students if they used a W and are granted relief? Do we return the W for future use or consider it used?
1. If a student’s entire semester is erased, I think the W should be returned to the student. However, it would depend on how this action is noted on the transcript.
 2. If the student is taking off the entire semester, I don’t mind returning their Ws because I think of it as an entire package.
 3. Even though we expect that academic relief (AR) is for an entire semester, there is an option for one or two classes to be dropped depending on the conditions and if the situation warrants (e.g., a learning disability).
 4. I have a tendency not to return Ws. I believe there are various ways students try to manipulate the revision to the record, which I think takes the spirit of AR away.
 5. We should remember that these students spent money on tuition and fees that won’t be returned. If we can help students salvage anything from a semester, I question whether it is right to force them to drop the entire semester while not returning the money they spent for tuition and fees.
 6. If a student is seeking AR because something happened outside of their control, it may not affect all of their courses equally. As soon we start using the rationale that we are helping the student salvage something from that semester, we are asked to drop specific courses. It always seems that challenging introductory courses are requested for AR. We will have problems when students tell us which courses to drop selectively.
 7. Perhaps we could insert language in the policy that if a student performs well in their classes but must withdraw due to catastrophic circumstances, they have the right to appeal to Provost Rachel Holloway. However, I don’t think this committee will be responsible for making that decision.
 8. Another option with returning Ws is saying that it would be up to each associate dean to make that determination, which takes the decision process out of the committee’s hands. However, my concern is that we could have inequities across the campus.
 9. The only time I think I wouldn’t grant that Ws be returned to the student is when the student continues to have the same reoccurring issues. The student has used their Ws in the past, and I’m not going to return them to halt this reoccurring cycle. The situation I described is rare; however, it does occur.

10. Do we want the committee to evaluate every situation, or should this be handled at the college level? We can easily add a sentence to the policy that the Compassionate Relief Committee (now the Academic Relief Committee) would determine whether or not students receive their Ws back if they used them before receiving AR.
11. I don't think it's necessary to include this language in the policy. Decisions should be based on individual context, and a consensus should be made the same way academic appeals are handled.
12. At this meeting, no decisions were made regarding returning Ws to the students if they previously used a W and were granted relief. The committee will revisit this topic at the next meeting.
13. Action items: 1) Keith Goyne will change the title of the policy to "Academic Relief Policy," 2) replace the words "compassionate relief" to "academic relief," 3) mention the revision of records in the first sentence in Section 1.0, Purpose, and 3) send the updated draft to the University Registrar's office for Rick Sparks to forward to the University Legal Counsel for review.

V. New Business

- A. Discuss other edits to the draft AR policy that committee members wish to bring forward
 1. There were no additional edits suggested to the draft AR policy.

- B. Initiate discussion of Presidential Policy Memorandum No. 196—Revision to Course Withdrawal Policy ("W" Grade Policy)
 1. Rachel Holloway requested that this committee review the existing policy to explore the practice of allowing students to see their final grades before using a "W." Currently, students have three Ws that must be used before the end of the semester—they cannot use them once the semester is over and before they see their final grades. The rationale behind this review of the "W" Grade Policy is that knowing grades beforehand might encourage some students to stick with a class, try to do their best to complete the course, and achieve the highest grade possible.
 2. You had to use the W slightly past the midterm deadline at my old institution. Everyone had to submit a midterm grade, and it wasn't restricted to first-time college students, but every student received a midterm grade. It was considered a late request; however, we also had different policies. The first time a student repeated a class, it replaced the prior grade. The repeat policy was a little more generous. Therefore, all the policies work together to create this holistic approach.

3. My former institution had no limit on Ws, but once you reached a certain point in the semester, it was either a W or a W-F, so if you were failing a class, it would be recorded as a W-F. Students were also able to resign up to the last day of classes, giving them more flexibility in their practices.
4. Having a limit of three Ws can force an advising conversation. If you have a student who isn't succeeding in their major and not making progress towards their degree, it will help advise them to consider a different career path potentially.
5. When we first talked about academic changes, I heard from different people that the three Ws with no signature are detrimental, especially to our younger students. First and second-year students often use those three Ws by the end of their second semester, and they need to be advised not to do that. Someone said previously, "Why don't we give them two Ws in 1000 and 2000 level courses and give them two additional Ws for 3000-4000 level courses, so students can't use all three Ws at the 1000 or the 2000 level." This is another suggestion, and generally, I believe everyone liked the idea of students seeing a final grade before deciding to use a W, except for one college.
6. What if we limited the use of a W to one course, one time? You can't use it again on the same course.
7. When discussing the "W" Grade Policy, we should keep in mind that our goal should be how this policy is helping our students progress toward their degree.
8. Discussion on this topic will continue at the next meeting.

VI. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 3:01 p.m.