

**ACADEMIC POLICIES COMMITTEE**

**February 2, 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 January 19, 2022 meeting minutes were approved without modification.

**II. Review and approve agenda**

- A. The February 2, 2022 agenda was approved without modification.

**III. Notifications**

- A. Keith Goyne sent the most recent draft policy to Rachel Holloway and Rick Sparks for University Legal Counsel's review.

**IV. Old Business**

- A. Review of edits from the last meeting
  - 1. No additions or modifications were made to the edits from the last meeting.

**V. New Business**

- A. Feedback from college units regarding the draft policy
  - 1. Comment from Director of Undergraduate Studies in COS: In Section 3.4, Number 3, the policy states that "if the campus entity determines that the student is ready to resume their studies, they will contact the University Registrar and request the removal of an administrative hold associated with the granting of the academic relief from a student's account." Dr. Hoffman commented that the draft policy implies removing the administrative hold for every student on academic relief.
  - 2. The committee's intent is to remove the administrative hold only for students with a hold placed on their account at the time of relief approval. Keith Goyne will develop some language clarifying this procedure for the committee's consideration before the next meeting.

3. Comment from Director of Undergraduate Studies in COS: Students find it awkward to explain why they withdrew from a class or received Academic Relief (AR). Some law and medical schools and external bodies look down on the designation of AR on a student's transcript. Is it necessary to keep courses on the record with an AR designation?
  4. This topic was discussed in previous meetings at length, and I believe Virginia Tech is out of compliance with the National Collegiate Athletic Association with its current activities and actions. We intend to be honest, show a clear reflection of what occurred, keep track of it, and simply not remove an academic record.
- B. Feedback from advising directors and academic advisors regarding academic policies that are or are not in alignment.
1. Inconsistencies in the use of Policy 91:
    - a) Some colleges use Policy 91, and others don't. Perhaps we let students continue for far too long before putting them on probation or suspension. At my former institution, it didn't matter if the cumulative was above 2.0. If a student had a term GPA of less than 2.0 but above 1, they automatically went on probation. If the student had a term GPA below 1, they were automatically suspended even if their cumulative was above 2. This policy sent a strong message to the student that they need to turn things around. Allowing an intervention to occur earlier could perhaps prevent students from floundering.
    - b) There is a university-wide minimum criteria to determine if students are making satisfactory progress towards completing their degrees. Ideally, advising directors would like to have one Policy 91 enforced for everyone. However, departments are allowed to increase standards on Policy 91, which wreaks havoc on students trying to change majors or transfer from one college to another.
  2. The Pass/Fail Grading Option: The Undergraduate Catalog states that "the P/F grading option is available to all undergraduates who have completed a minimum of 30 credit hours at Virginia Tech and have a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or above." No one verifies this, and any student can register for P/F regardless of GPA credit hours earned at Virginia Tech. If reviews aren't implemented, this process should be removed.
  3. The Repeat Course Policy: The Undergraduate Catalog states that students may only attempt a course three times; again, no one investigates this unless departments hand-check. If they can't check this, the policy should be removed.

4. Readmission and Leave of Absence Policy: The policy was due to begin spring of 2022, but there is no support for either the readmission process or for a student to request a leave of absence before the period of non-enrollment. This process requires a form that currently does not exist on Virginia Tech's website for students to access.
5. General Education: Colleges can dictate what fulfills General Education requirements via substitutions. It seems to be poor practice for the possibility that two students who have taken the same course can have that course counted differently for General Education depending upon their respective college.
6. "W" Grade Policy: Students polled liked the idea of having a maximum of three "W" grades. The general thinking was that students might not strategically use their "W" grades if they had more "Ws" at their disposal.
7. Keith Goyne asked for suggestions on how the committee should first decide which policies to address. We suggested focusing on the policies that impact student success or are unwise from an external review standpoint.
8. The committee agreed to focus first on the "W" Grade Policy and the Suspension/Probation Policy because both policies are tied to AR.

C. Discussion about the "W" Grade Policy

1. Aligning the "W" Grade Policy with the Repeat Course Policy: PPM 11B makes sense. I wonder if students should be required to wait until the semester ends to review their grade before using a "W." If a student has a C or better, they cannot use a "W," which might push some students to persist through a class. This could encourage students to stick with a class and wait to see their final grade before using a "W" grade.
2. We need to consider how long students can use a "W" after the semester ends.
3. The deadline should extend into the spring semester to allow students to discuss those decisions with their advisors.
4. Suppose a student takes a prerequisite class and gets a D, then attends the subsequent class, a degree requirement, because a D grade was required to pass the class. They then apply to use their "W," so they now need to repeat that course at some point. Is that a concern?
5. This would be a concern to me. The student is enrolled in the next class because they met the criteria; however, they would need to repeat it because they don't have the appropriate prerequisite.
6. Aligning the "W" Grade Policy with the Repeat Course Policy might encourage students, with help from their advisors, to stay in the course, attending the class, even though they know that they are going to use a "W." Persisting in the class should help prepare them for retaking the class.

7. I like the idea of having students wait until the end of the semester before using a “W” grade. How many “Ws” should be allowed?
8. In my experience, the students who use “Ws” on 1000-2000 level courses are in panic mode. If they had just stayed in the class, they probably would have earned a C grade; however, students can be so nervous about failing the course that they drop it. They don’t have to see an advisor to drop a class and use a “W.” They can do it independently, which is another issue we might want to discuss.
9. We need to be conscious of how a student’s decision to drop a class will interact with probation and suspension notices. If students are on probation or suspension and still have “Ws” remaining, I imagine many will use their “Ws” to get off suspension instead of considering whether they need AR. The student may have saved themselves that semester, but maybe they didn’t deal with the underlining issue that caused them to use their “Ws” in the first place. If they don’t address those issues, they will likely find themselves in the same situation the following semester. We want these policies to work to enhance student success. Our intention is not to punish students by putting them on probation or suspension but rather to use this opportunity to trigger a meaningful conversation or an intervention to reflect on what needs to change going forward.
10. We had a policy at my old institution called Academic Bankruptcy. If a student got into a situation where their grades were so bad that they were unlikely to recover, they could declare Academic Bankruptcy and remove every grade that was less than a C from their record. They couldn’t return to their previous major and could declare Academic Bankruptcy only once in their academic career.
11. We see how this scenario you described plays out with the Obsolete Credit Rule. Under the “Obsolete Academic Records Policy,” former Virginia Tech students returning to the university after an absence of at least five (5) years may request in writing to have their academic records evaluated by the appropriate college. But why not be proactive by enhancing student success to graduate sooner?
12. We don’t use Policy 91 because we accept many internal transfer students. We have students who might not be doing well in their current major, but they find success in our college. These students will have credible jobs and careers that they wouldn’t have if we were so strict on that policy. However, if we implemented Policy 91, these students would be suspended the first semester. So, this Academic Bankruptcy is an alternative to that.
13. The discussion will be continued at the next meeting on Wednesday, February 16, 2022.

## VI. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 2:58 p.m.