

## **Retention Committee Minutes** **Thursday, November 4, 2004**

Present: Ron Bieniek, Carl Burns, Harvest Collier, Kate Drowne, Fathi Finaish, Greg Gelles, Amy Gillman, Matt Goodwin, Marcus A. Huggans, Paula Lutz (guest), Gearoid MacSithigh, Mark Mullin, Emily Petersen, Steve Raper, Dave Saphian, Keith Stanek, Laura Stoll, Bob Whites.

Absent: Dana Barnard, Jennie Bayless, Meg Brady, Steve Clark, Chad DeShon, Shari Dunn-Norman, Lauren Etheridge, Stephanie Fitch, Jay Goff, Martina Hahn, Tammy Pratt, Chris Ramsay, Kristi Schulte, Tina Sheppard, Lynn Stichnote, Roger Terry.

- I. The amended minutes of the October 21, 2004 meeting were unanimously approved as distributed.
- II. Dean Paula Lutz was a guest of the Committee and she initiated a discussion of the campus instructor initiated drop policy as utilized by the Mathematics Department. Dean Lutz reviewed the history of the situation over her 2.5 years as Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences. The Chancellor had requested that she “solve the Math problem” (poor student success in foundation math classes). In earlier years, the problem was broader and included Chemistry, Physics and Mathematics. The first two departments seemed to have solved the problem using various techniques such as learning centers.

The Math faculty had an old school philosophy of letting students sink or swim. The theory was that the students should be mature enough to cope on their own with little faculty intervention. Although this idea has some validity, it does not help in increasing student retention. Other institutions have recognized this and changed their thinking on the issue.

Upon an examination of the status of the Math Department, she found there was no departmental policy on attendance. This was changed in the Spring of 2004. Other changes included naming a coordinator for all foundation courses (2, 4, ...22, 204 and Stat 215). They also established performance policies, including more feedback to students. If they were failing a course, they would be so informed. Finally, poor performance/attendance would result in an instructor initiated drop at the end of the sixth week.

The impact has been a dramatic improvement in DF&W percentages. She emphasized this is not the only measure of success.

Part of the policy involves an email to any student with a D or F in a major exam. Second, in some classes, students have mandatory participation in a tutoring session or LEAD Learning Center after a D or F in a major exam. Dean Lutz said Professor Martin Bohner is a driving force in these reforms. The end result was a dramatic drop in DF&Ws for Spring 2004.

Ron Bieniek emphasized the use of “learning center” over “help session” or “tutoring.”

Dr. MacSithigh asked if the sum of DF&W grades plus instructor initiated drops was lower than the old percentage of DF&W grades. No one had those statistics at hand.

Laura Stoll volunteered the following statistics: During the 6<sup>th</sup> week of Fall 2004 (9/27/04 – 10/5/04):

	# of Instructor Drops	# Change to HR status
MA	79	86
Rest of campus	198	24

A discussion ensued as to what percentage of student class registrations are in MA. It seemed like 10% was a fair estimate.

Dean Lutz emphasized that she did not want the Math Department to lower standards to reduce DF&W grades.

Mark Mullin asked why the MA policy revolves around the 6<sup>th</sup> week. Is the policy tied to the date when instructor initiated drops don't show up on the DF&W list?

Carl Burns noted that the total number of instructor initiated drops and change to hearer status is around 400 or almost one for every 10 UMR students. He asked: Are the instructor initiated drops to help students or departments? Do students realize what is happening?

Dean Lutz replied that the policy is stated in writing in the syllabus of each course.

Laura Stoll stated that most students don't seem to be bitter and they are not surprised by the instructor initiated drops.

Harvest Collier stated that in General Chemistry, everything possible is being done to force students to participate. There is an attendance policy but 7-10% of students still have poor attendance.

Mark Mullin stated that he did not think the issue of drops for non-attendance was as critical as the issue of drops for poor class performance. Is low performance in the first six weeks enough justification for an instructor drop when most of the grade depends on the last 10 weeks and the final?

A discussion ensued where general agreement was reached that only occasionally did students pull off a remarkable turn around in grades after the first six weeks because the later material is dependent on the first six weeks of material.

Laura Stoll asked why Ws are lumped with Ds and Fs. A grade of W is not harmful to a student's record. She also stated that some sections of Math now have over 25% of students in hearer status. This seems excessive. Dean Lutz said that she would be interested in seeing those data.

Keith Stanek raised the financial issue. A four-credit course costs an in-state student about \$800 and an out-of-state student over \$2000. Are parents upset about instructor initiated drops?

Laura Stoll answered: "Yes, they are but they usually accept the situation with explanation."

Gearoid MacSithigh: "One problem is that advisors are not informed of these actions."

Emily Peterson: “The campus can supply advisor names to instructors.”

Harvest Collier: “The web-based ‘Academic Alert’ system is going to be completed for Spring 2005.”

Carl Burns: “We need

1. Clear standards and policies, and
2. Make sure students are informed.”

Mark Mullin: “Is UMR unique with respect to instructor initiated drops?”

Laura Stoll: UMR is the only campus in the system with this policy.

Keith Stanek: It does not exist at IIT, Michigan Tech or West Virginia University.

Mark Mullin: This policy could hurt recruiting.

III. The meeting was adjourned at 9:20 am.