

2016 Annual Report Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Status of the Faculty

1. Members of CAFPS during 2015-2016

Elizabeth Adkins-Regan (Chair, A&S)
Kimberly O'Brien (CHE)
Ritchie Patterson (Physics, A&S)
David Ruppert (Operations Research & Information Eng; Statistics)
Charles Seyler (Elec & Comp Eng)
Paul Soloway (Nutritional Science, CALS)
Tracy Stokol (Pop Med & Diag Sci, VET)
(Barbara) Gillian Turgeon (School of Integrative Plant Science, CALS)
Bruce Van Dover (Eng)
Diana Li (undergraduate, ILR)
Joseph Burns (ex officio)
Michael Fontaine (ex officio)

2. Activity during 2015-2016

a. The committee met four times, on September 8, September 15, October 16 and October 27, to discuss and suggest revisions to the draft revised policy on Romantic and Sexual Relationships with Students. Following the first two meetings, the committee consensus was that it should be brought to the Faculty Senate for advisory voting. The committee chair gave a brief status report of the draft policy to the Faculty Senate on October 14, followed by a fuller presentation to the Senate with extended discussion and advisory voting on November 11. Three of the four votes were majority negative. CAFPS then met with Alan Mittman, Kent Hubbell and Pam Strausser from the drafting committee on December 9 to provide feedback about the Senate votes and discussion.

b. The October 27 meeting also had on the agenda brief presentations by John Siliciano and Lance Collins concerning the issue of the role of "engagement" in the tenure criteria for tech campus hires. Neither Siliciano nor CAFPS members seemed to think that role was problematic or inconsistent with current tenure criteria.

c. The committee met on May 5, 2016 to discuss [GPSA Resolution 7: Supervisor-Student Relationships](#) and provide feedback to help advise the Dean of the Faculty's response to the GPSA. Written notes of that discussion, appended below, were prepared for Acting Dean Fontaine.

Appendix

Notes of the meeting of May 5, 2016 to discuss GPSA Resolution 7: Supervisor-Student Relationships

Prepared by E. Adkins-Regan

Attending: Elizabeth Adkins-Regan (Chair), Kimberly O'Brien, David Ruppert, Charles Seyler, Paul Soloway, Gillian Turgeon, Bruce Van Dover, Michael Fontaine (ex officio)

The committee began by discussing some of the "WHEREAS" statements at the beginning of the Resolution. The first "WHEREAS" concerns the limited accessibility of the current policy. The current policy is a University policy, not a graduate school policy, and it appears in the Faculty Handbook as well as at the graduate school website. Nonetheless, the committee agreed with the spirit of the statement and thought that any current or future policy certainly should be more widely publicized and disseminated than is presently the case. It should be sent directly to each entering graduate student by the graduate school dean and to each new faculty member by the college dean. Faculty should be reminded of the policy on a regular basis by their deans, and should receive a reminder when signing on to be a chair or minor member of a graduate student's committee.

The third statement ("WHEREAS, it is not part of standardized university policy...") puzzled the committee. The current policy is indeed a University policy, can be found by searching on "university romantic policy," and in the Faculty Handbook it appears in Chapter 6: University Policies Applicable to Faculty. Nonetheless, and as noted above, it certainly could and should be made more accessible to students.

The committee began the discussion of the "BE IT ... RESOLVED" statements by focusing on the similarity between these and the draft revisions to the current policy that were discussed at the fall 2015 meeting of the Faculty Senate. Both propose changes to the current policy to require disclosure of such prohibited relationships that do develop and remediation to resolve the conflict of interest. The Faculty Senate already debated such changes and provided separate advisory votes on disclosure and on remediation in which a majority disapproved of each addition. The GPSA might find it helpful to see the minutes of that meeting to understand what some of the reasons were for the objections.

In spite of that recent history, however, the committee thinks the Faculty Senate should discuss GPSA Resolution 7 next fall. The GPSA asked for that to happen, and to refuse would be inappropriately and overly antagonistic. Furthermore, a proposal coming from the graduate students that is specifically focused on their concerns might be received differently than one coming from the central administration that includes a controversial change that applies only to undergraduates.

With respect to who should be the "supervisory party" for disclosure, we thought faculty should disclose to their chair or college dean, and the graduate school dean's office should have the role of communicating with the junior party.

The fourth statement resolves “that ... the presumption of wrongdoing be on the person in position of authority.” That struck us as a problematic way to put it. The conflict of interest and the need to separate the academic relationship from the personal one exist regardless of who initiated the relationship. We do agree that the obligation to disclose should be on the person in the position of authority.

The fifth statement recommends that remediation be “at no financial cost to the junior party.” The committee thought there could be cases where those costs might be significant but impossible to avoid. For example, if a graduate student is functioning as a research assistant paid by the faculty advisor’s federal grant, a romantic or sexual relationship that develops between them would require the student to switch to a different form of support such as a TAship, losing the summer salary in the process. We think it would be hard to mandate a “no cost” provision, and see this as a good reason to ensure that graduate students are well aware of the policy and of the potential repercussions of entering into such relationships.

Finally, the last statement in the Resolution struck us as too vague to be useful.