

### Academic Programs Committee Report

The Academic Programs Committee met February 19, 2004 in the Faculty Senate Office and the following are brief minutes on the discussion of that committee.

Present were Phil Johnson, convener of the meeting, Bryan Camp (law), Robert Baker, (Athletic Committee), John Anderson (Athletic Department) and Vice Provost Jim Brink.

The charge of the meeting was to discuss OP 34:04 Academic Regulations Concerning Student Performance.

A proposal was given to the Faculty Senate in its January meeting by Dr. Liz Watts concerning excessive excused absences. At that time Dr. Watts offered a resolution to the Faculty Senate on proposed changes to the OP. From this meeting Dr. Nancy Reed, President of the Faculty Senate assigned this topic to this committee for discussion.

Dr. Watts' proposal contained two issues: (a) whether the OP should require instructors to be notified before a student missed a class because of an event where the student was representing the University and (b) whether there should be an upper limit on the number of excused absences that would be permitted under the OP.

Vice Provost Jim Brink and Robert Baker were both active in drawing up the original OP 34:04 and explained why certain wording was used in this OP at the time and also why they felt proposing a limit on absences would be hard to enforce. Both speakers emphasized that the OP was intended to ensure that students who missed work because of representing the University-in a competition or other event would not be penalized for that missed work. The OP arose, in part, because of an incident where a student was denied the opportunity to make-up a test the student had missed because of representing the University-at an event. Therefore, the thrust of the OP was to ensure that instructors not penalize students for any work missed because of an excused absence.

The committee had a wide-ranging discussion of the issues. As to the first issue, the committee agreed that prior notification to instructors was entirely appropriate. Mr. Anderson and Dr. Baker emphasized that the Athletic Department currently tried to give advance notice, relying on the students to convey that notice to the professors. In light of current practices, the committee agreed to recommend that the phrase "should require" in ¶ 4 of OP 34.04 be changed to "must require." There was much discussion on how to notify instructors, from emailing, to carbon forms. The general understanding was that even though the OP required "Department chairpersons, directors, or others responsible for a student representing the university on officially approved trips" to make the notification, it was appropriate for those folks to rely on students to convey the notice. Ultimately it should be a student's responsibility to ensure that their instructors receive the notice in advance of the absence. Dr. Brink suggested that the OP contain, as an attachment, a universal form, modeled on the form used by the Athletic Department, which could be used by other sponsors. Dr. Brink also suggested that some mechanism

be used to enable sponsors to receive confirmation of when an instructor actually received the notice.

As to the second issue, Mr. Anderson gave numbers for Men's basketball, Women's basketball and the Golf team absences. Dr. Johnson noted that the Meat Judging team and other academic teams such as debate teams also frequently had extensive absences due to competition. The committee discussed the reasons for classroom attendance and the various reasons that students legitimately might miss significant numbers of classes other than university-sponsored trips, such as medical reasons. The committee also discussed the differences between undergraduate schools, graduate schools, and professional schools. Given the wide range of legitimate reasons for absences and the diversity of students potentially affected by the OP, the committee concluded that creating a set ceiling for the number of excused absences was unwise and would take away from each instructor's flexibility. Dr. Brink noted that should a student's absences from class become excessive, then the OP permitted instructors to consult with their Dean. He emphasized that while students should not be allowed an unlimited number of absences, determining an across-the-board upper limit was extremely difficult. Mr. Camp pointed out that the OP provides that excessive absences may be cause to drop a student. Dr. Baker pointed out that each instructor may have different tolerances for what constitutes an excessive number of absences and it was in the best interests of students for instructors who had concerns to pick up the phone and call the sponsor (whether it be the Athletic Department or the Debate coach) to discuss those concerns. A set upper limit of absences would discourage such communication. Dr. Johnson noted that students who are involved with academic competitions tend to be the students who excel in his program and could tolerate a higher number of absences without it significantly affecting their performance in the course than could other students. All agreed that there is no substitute for classroom instruction, but recognized that the effects of absences could be markedly different, depending on the nature of the student, the class, and the particular academic program affected. Accordingly, the OP should leave to instructor discretion (through appropriate consultation with their Deans and the student) the effect of excessive numbers of absences and should not try to limit that discretion by setting an arbitrary upper number.

In sum, the committee agreed (a) to recommend that the faculty move forward on Dr. Watt's first proposal and to recommend that the wording "should notify" should be changed to "must notify" and (b) to recommend against incorporating the idea of a set number of excused absences into the OP.

A proposed resolution is attached to these minutes.

WHEREAS, Texas Tech University maintains a policy on students' attendance in academic classes and excused absences for university business in OP 34.04, and

WHEREAS, OP 34.04 will be reviewed every even-numbered year by the vice provost for academic affairs, and

WHEREAS, the Faculty Senate of Texas Tech University is concerned with student attendance and academic performance.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the first sentence of the third paragraph of part 4 "Class Attendance" of OP 34.04 that deals with notification of a student's instructor with regard to departure and return schedules for officially approved university trips be changed to read "must notify" from "should notify," and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that it should be a student's responsibility to ensure that their instructor(s) receive notice in advance of officially approved absences, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that some mechanism be required to confirm when a student's instructor received notice of an absence, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a universal form for notification of instructors of officially approved absences be included as an attachment to OP 34.04.