

Summary Update Number 10, January 14, 2005

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The purpose of this and previous Summary Updates is to keep all Faculty informed of recent events that have occurred and of initiatives currently in progress. All Summary Updates may be found on the webpage for the Faculty Council.

Recommendations and Resolutions Passed by Faculty Council

At the January 11 meeting, the Faculty Council approved one recommendation to President Schmidly and one Resolution.

Recommendation on "Market-Driven Salary Increases"

In April of 2001, the Faculty Council passed a recommendation to President Halligan "that an amount of \$2,000 be given to tenured and tenure-track faculty in addition to increases given in an anticipated merit-based raise program". In view of President's Schmidly's Restore, Reward, Grow initiative, the Council passed the following recommendation withdrawing the Market-Driven Salary Increase recommendation of 2001:

The Faculty Council recommends to President Schmidly that: Faculty Council Recommendation 01-04-01-BUDG, ..., be withdrawn and be replaced with the following Resolution and Recommendation:

Resolution: The Faculty supports President Schmidly's Restore, Reward, and Grow Faculty program, which is aimed at bringing average faculty salaries by rank and department to the Big 12 average, replacing vacant faculty positions, and growing the faculty over the next decade.

Recommendation:

1. The President annually report to the Faculty progress on bringing faculty salary averages to those of the other Big 12 schools by rank and department.
2. The President annually report to the Faculty progress on bringing faculty-student ratios to those of the other Big 12 schools.

The rationale for the action is that President Schmidly's Restore, Reward, Grow initiative is far more advantageous to the Faculty and to the University than the 2001 recommendation, which proposed relatively modest changes to faculty salaries and did not address the issues of restoring and growing the faculty. The recommendation passed unanimously.

Resolution for Optional Record of Class Rank on Transcript

The following resolution passed with only one dissenting vote:

The Faculty Council resolves that the Academic Standards and Policies Committee, in conjunction with the Provost, conduct a series of open forums to explore the pros and cons of the following proposal:

Undergraduate students should be permitted at their option to have one or more of the following appear on their formal transcript upon request:

- (1) Overall weighted class ranking with rank in every class,
- (2) Weighted class ranking for courses in the field of concentration with rank in every course in the field of concentration and related courses,
- (3) No class ranking of any kind.

Class ranking in the field of concentration is defined as the ranking for each course in the field of concentration, and courses that have the same subject prefix as classes in the field of concentration. The weighted average incorporates the number of credit hours associated with each class.

It is specifically intended that the student may request transcripts with different options applied depending on the recipient. It is expected that the Academic Standards and Policy Committee will present a specific recommendation on this issue at the June 2005 meeting of Faculty Council.

The Problem:

At present, the grades given at Oklahoma State University have become so high that they no longer serve the purpose for which they were intended. In every college, the average undergraduate GPA for all students in 2004 was at least 3.0 with one college reaching 3.4. In the Arts and Sciences College in 2004, 37.0% of all undergraduate grades were "A" and 31.2% were "B". Consequently, in a large class of 200 students, there will be, on average, 74 grades of A and 62 grades of B. As a result, there is no way to tell any difference between the number 1 student in the class and the student whose class rank is 74. The same situation exists for the B students: Number 75 looks the same on the transcript as Number 126. As a result, students are often penalized by not having their transcript reflect the true excellence of their work. Many industrial firms no longer consider grades in their hiring practices because of their lack of content. In my own department, we do not require applicants for faculty positions to include transcripts with their applications because we know that the transcript contains very little useful information.

In addition to the above problem, the letter grading system often causes a great deal of student and faculty anguish. In the above example, student Number 75 will probably be just a few points below the A cutoff line. It is unlikely that the professor's grading system has sufficient resolution to truly distinguish two students who are separated by just a few points. Yet, number 74 receives an A while number 75 has a grade of B assigned. This situation is the root cause of many grade appeals.

For over a year, the Academic Standards and Policies Committee of the Council has been working on a proposal for a Rank-in-Class grading system to serve as a complement to the letter grading procedure currently in use. The resolution passed at the January 11 meeting authorizes the Committee to set up meetings in each college to discuss and refine the proposal so that it serves the students, the faculty and the University well. It is my hope that each of you will participate in these discussions, read and study the proposal, and provide us with your critical comments and, most importantly, with your suggestions for improvement.

For your convenience, I summarize below the essential elements of the proposal as it now stands:

Guiding Principles:

1. Academic freedom is of paramount importance. It must be protected.
2. The proposal should be complementary to, not a replacement for, the letter grading system.
3. The proposal should be student-friendly and cause no harm.

Mechanism and Implementation

The proposal is that in addition to the letter grade reported for each course, the instructor in charge of the course will also assign a rank-in-class beside the box used to report the letter grade. Thus, an instructor might report "B 23" for a given student indicating a grade of B and a class rank of 23. If the number of students in the class counting W grades is 50, the software will record this as 23/50 on the transcript with a percentile score of 55.1%. The percentile average (PA) will be computed by weighting each course percentile score by the number of hours credit the course carries, summing the result for all courses, and dividing by the total credit hours attempted. This is the same procedure used to compute the GPA.

Discussions with the IT Division suggest that it will take approximately three months to implement the software required to electronically report rank-in-class and print appropriate transcripts as described below.

Scope

A rank-in-class system is ideally suited to larger classes. It is not well suited to courses with smaller enrollment, special courses, or graduate courses. Consequently, as presently formulated, rank-in-class (RC) grading is being proposed only for undergraduate courses with numbers in the range 1000 to 4999 with a total enrollment of 10 or greater. In addition, RC grading will not be used for special courses such as honors courses or courses whose students are selected by some stringent criteria as determined by the college deans.

Academic Freedom

The professor in charge of the course shall have authority to evaluate the student's rank-in-class as he/she deems appropriate. For example, consider a hypothetical undergraduate class with 20 students. Suppose that the top three students in the class are so closely bunched that the professor decides that his/her grading system does not have sufficient resolution to accurately rank order these three students. In such a case, after arranging the students in order of decreasing total points scored, the reported ranks-in-class might be

1, 1, 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 15, 15, 18, 19, 20.

The top three students are each assigned a RC of "1". With this ranking, the professor has stated that the performance of the top three students is too nearly the same to permit differentiation. In the example shown, the professor has also made the same determination for students number 10 and 11 by assigning them both a RC of 10, and for students 15, 16, and 17 by assigning each a RC of 15.

Just as any professor can assign all letter grades as "A" in a course, he/she can also assign every student a RC of "1", thus stating that in his/her opinion, all students are academically equivalent. Academic freedom prevails. The RC system simply affords the faculty the opportunity to be more accurate in their grading; it does not force anything upon the faculty.

Student-Friendly Nature of the System

As currently structured, the proposal gives each student the option of requesting any of three different transcripts. He/she can ask that their transcript show only letter grades and GPA. In this event, the transcript will be identical to the one presently available to the students. However, he/she can also request a transcript that shows the RC for each course in the field of concentration along with the PA in these courses. Finally, the student may elect a transcript showing the RC in all courses along with the corresponding total PA. It shall even be possible for a student to elect to send one transcript to one potential employer, a second type of transcript to an different employer, and the third type to another. The benefits of the system to the student are obvious.

Current Usage at Oklahoma State University

I think it is relevant to note that two colleges at Oklahoma State University, Vet. Med. and the Center for the Health Sciences, already employ a rank-in-class grading system for internal evaluation of their students. Their representatives on the Executive Committee of the Faculty Council report that the system works well.

Responses to Date

The proposal has been presented in brief form to all deans or associate deans save one. Their responses have varied between stating the proposal is worthy of further consideration to positive support. Dr. Strathe has some concerns that she intends to convey to me. The SGA officers appointed a three-person committee to examine the proposal. Two of the three members of this committee favored the proposal; one was opposed. This was before we modified the

proposal to include the three transcript options previously described. After this was done, a random sampling of 100 students in the food court of the Student Union on Monday, January 10, produced 98 favorable responses and two opposed.

College Forums to Discuss Proposal

The times and dates for these meetings have not yet been set. I will transmit a notice when they have been so that you may plan accordingly. If one meeting conflicts, you would be welcome at the corresponding meeting in another college.

Relocation of Journals Published Prior to 1980 to the Library Annex

This issue has been extensively discussed in Summary Updates Number 7, 8, and 9. These are posted on the Faculty Council's webpage and may be accessed by clicking on "Updates" on the left side of the front page of the site.

On Wednesday, January 12, a preliminary meeting was held between the Library Dean and Administration, the Officers of the Faculty Council, members of the Student Affairs and Learning Resources Committee and the Research Committee of the Faculty Council, and the Library Advisory Committee. Two graduate students were also present. Dr. Marlene Strathe, Provost, chaired the meeting. Two issues were on the table:

1. Design a workable, short-term plan for redistributing items between the main Library and the Annex so that important research journals (some, most, or all) can be returned to the main library.
2. Discuss viable ideas for a longer range plan to deal with limitations at the library regarding space and its use.

The meeting was cordial and, in my opinion, constructive. The principal result was a compromise plan that will provide significant relief for research faculty and graduate students who need easy access to journals, particularly those that are not presently available electronically in complete form, and the Library Administration and others who would like the Library to be more of a place where students come to study, visit, browse the internet, eat, etc. as opposed to a place that is primarily for scholarly study.

Dr. Strathe opened the meeting by summarizing the present situation in the Library. It presently has a capacity of about 1.5 million volumes. The total collection is about 2 million volumes plus 1.5 million volumes of government documents. The Library is down to about 1,100 seats. Dr. Strathe then stated two solutions that she considers to be unacceptable. These are the use of discipline-specific libraries housed in different locations and solutions that eliminate even more seats in the Library.

After these preliminary remarks, protracted discussion followed about various possible solutions. The compromise plan that seemed to have a significant majority in agreement is as follows:

1. Non-library functions such as the Honors Program will be moved out of the Library to free the space for peer-reviewed journals. The Provost indicated that this would be done in the near future.
2. Backroom functions, such as processing of incoming books/journals, will be moved to remote sites to free additional space.
3. The legal collection is currently available on-line. It will be moved to the Annex.
4. All peer-reviewed journals that are available on-line in complete form will be moved to the Annex. As more volumes of journals are put on-line, those journals will also be moved to the Annex.
5. The discussions about the possibility of creating a faculty lounge in the basement of the Library will be reconsidered. If this plan is abandoned, additional space will become available to house journals.
6. The possibility of moving entire collections, such as all the government documents, instead of just partial collections was discussed. The problem here is that the Annex is not ready to receive all of this material. There are costs and time involved to make this happen. The Provost indicated that she would examine what could be done in this area.
7. Dean Johnson told us that at present 144,000 volumes have been moved to the Annex. However, she also added that many of these are not peer-reviewed journals. These items could remain housed in the Annex without causing difficulties to research efforts. She will work to determine the percentage of the 144,000 volumes that are journals that need to be returned to the main Library.
8. With all of the above actions, Dean Johnson estimated that about 28,000 square feet of additional space for shelving journals could be realized. The key questions now are (A) how many journal volumes can be stored in this amount of space and (B) how many of the 144,000 volumes currently at the Annex are peer-reviewed journals. We do not yet have these data. If all these journal volumes will not fit into this space, a decision-making procedure will need to be developed for determining which journals to return to the main Library. There was some brief discussion of this point, but no decisions were reached.
9. As additional journals are received by the Library, the storage problem will continue. To some extent, this will be offset by additional journals becoming available electronically which would permit these hard print volumes to be moved to the Annex without damaging the research effort. However, if this is not enough to accommodate the newly received volumes, movement of journals to the Annex will have to continue until additional space for the Library is constructed.

An open meeting in the Browsing Room of the Library is scheduled between 2 to 4 PM on Friday, January 21. Everyone is invited. The above compromise will be distributed and discussed with the objective of incorporating improvements and changes.

Given the fundamental difference of views about what a library should be, I think the compromise outlined above is fair and reasonable. No one will be completely happy about it, but when fundamental views clash in this manner, compromise is the only possible avenue of approach. I have asked Dean Johnson to provide regular reports to me so that I may keep the Faculty informed of progress along the lines outlined in the compromise.

General Faculty Votes on Proposed Changes to Appendix D

(ATTENTION - IMPORTANT NOTICE)

This notice was circulated in Summary Update Number 9. Its importance is such that it bears repeating.

A committee of faculty and administration has been working for almost a year revising the policy document dealing with matters of Appointments, Tenure, and Promotion that was called Appendix D of the Faculty Handbook. The new document will be called the Faculty Policy Statement. The basic thrust of the revisions is to separate the implementation procedures from the Faculty Policy Statement and move the procedures to a different part of the Faculty Handbook. The revisions also include statements describing the new Research Professorships that were approved earlier this year and the Clinical Professorships that have just been approved by the Council.

At present, the document has been referred to the Faculty Committee of the Council chaired by Professor Linda Austin, English. This committee has been charged to report its recommendations to the Executive Committee of the Council at our meeting on February 1. I anticipate that the Faculty Council will consider the proposal and vote on February 8. Immediately following the Council's vote, the matter will be presented to the General Faculty for mail-in vote. You will have one week to return your ballot so you need to be prepared in advance. The Regents will consider the proposal at their March 4 meeting.

The Faculty Council has posted two versions of the proposed Faculty Policy Statement on its website. The first is a clean version of the final draft. The second tracks the additions, deletions, and relocations relative to the original Appendix D document via text highlighting and side boxes. I urge each of you to study these documents and convey any concerns or suggestions you have to Dr. Linda Austin, English. You may also convey your comments to me, Lionel Raff, Chemistry, and I will see that they are transmitted to the Faculty Committee.

Nominations for Election of Councilors, Secretary, and Vice-Chair of the Faculty Council

(ATTENTION - IMPORTANT NOTICE)

At the February 8 meeting of the Council, nominations for one-third of the councilors, the secretary, and the vice-chair of the Council must be in place. I urge you take an active interest in these elections. The Council serves as your advocate and voice. It is no stronger than the support provided by the General Faculty. Please considering running for a position on the Council. Work to persuade faculty whom you believe would serve well to run.