

Arts and Sciences Council  
13 November 2008  
139 Social Sciences  
Chair: Prof. Suzanne Shanahan

Prof. Shanahan convened the Council's November meeting at 3:35 p.m., invited corrections of the October minutes, and, hearing no call for change, declared the latter read into the record as written.

She then introduced Prof. Peter Feaver (Political Science) in his capacity as Chair of the Academic Standards Committee. The specific issue he had been asked to address, an issue that had been "floating around for some time," was a "Proposed Underload Policy." The proposal now to be presented to the Council had been enthusiastically supported and unanimously approved by the Council's Executive Committee, and it would be voted on by the Council itself at its December meeting. At the present meeting Prof. Shanahan hoped both to clarify the nature of the underload proposal and express the Council's "tremendous debt" to Prof. Feaver for his adroit handling of a very complex issue.

Prof. Feaver then came forward and acknowledged the good work of all those students, deans, and faculty members who in some way or another had worked on his committee. They had encountered and wrestled with a wide range of views, considered the policies of Duke's "peer institutions," discussed the possible and probable effects of the proposal, and at length concluded that in certain situations a carefully planned underloading could be not only justifiable but also beneficial for at least some of those students who would like to participate in appropriate extracurricular or co-curricular studies. The purpose of the policy now to be presented to the Council was certainly not to make Duke easier for students. In fact, the hope was that at least some students would be encouraged to explore time-intensive subjects and activities that would significantly enhance their overall education. Furthermore, as a safeguard, the committee would be recommending that after a two-year trial period the proposal would be reviewed and evaluated in a third year.

Detailed provisoes aside, the Academic Standards Committee now proposed the following core policy:

Students who wish to enroll in an underload of not fewer than 3 one-credit courses per semester must meet the following requirements:

- > Have passed at least 16 course credits before the first underload semester. Typically this will restrict underloading to students with junior or senior status, unless the student has overloaded every semester and taken summer school to get ahead.
- > Have declared a major.
- > Have passed at least 16 courses at Duke prior to the 5<sup>th</sup> semester, 20 prior to 6<sup>th</sup> semester, 24 prior to 7<sup>th</sup> semester and 28 prior to 8<sup>th</sup> semester. This standard excludes AP credits.
- > Have a GPA of at least 3.0 and not be on academic probation.
- > Not be studying abroad or otherwise away from Duke; the underload semester must be taken at Duke.

Creatively designed and enacted, Prof. Feaver suggested, the planning might enhance the learning process. It might, for instance, enable a student to work on a "time-intensive project" with a particular professor. Both Princeton and Harvard currently allowed such underloading, apparently not to their discernible detriment, and his own committee had determined that it might, indeed, be a means of enriching the education of students who chose to take that path. Nor would his committee recommend that the procedure be allowed to interfere with a full four-year course of study at Duke.

Prof. Shanahan then invited Dean of Academic Affairs Lee Baker to say a few words about the proposal. First of all he noted that the process which had produced the proposal had been a model of its kind. Furthermore, the establishing of the policy would be a sure and positive sign that "we are not only

maintaining academic rigor, but . . . listening to our students.” The goal was “to be both innovative and flexible at the same time we maintain Duke’s academic excellence.” He wanted to compliment those who had examined the facts of the situation and contributed to the shaping of the proposal. “I give it my hearty endorsement.”

In answering a question from the floor, Dean Baker responded that a student who wished to take advantage of the proposed underload policy would have to consult a faculty advisor, the advisor would have to “sign off” on it, and the student would then proceed to talk with and request permission from the appropriate dean.

In response to a question posed by Prof. Ron Grunwald (Biology) Dean Baker explained that the faculty reviewer of a proposal “would not be expected to adjudicate.” The fundamental question for a faculty member to consider was “Is this student really eligible?” Any student would need to explain why she or he wanted to do this or that, and, yes, an advisor could say “No.”

Prof. James Bonk (Chemistry) wondered what impact such a policy might have on a transfer student who wished to take advantage of the policy. Reply: A student who entered with a certain number of credits (say 16) would never be eligible.

Prof. David Malone (Education) suggested that the situation of athletes might raise still other questions for ruminating. Dean Ingeborg Walther pointed out that Duke athletes were required to be full-time students.

Dean Margaret Riley (Study Abroad) wondered what would happen if a student was discovered to have enrolled in only three courses without having sought permission to do so. Response: We would have to review the record in order to get a proper picture.

The result of these and two or three less audible questions was the realization that some further revisions and additions to the current proposal might need to be drawn up and brought to the Council at its December meeting.

Nevertheless, and returning to his earlier supportive comments, Dean Baker bade all the attending members of the Academic Standards Committee to stand, at which point the non-standing audience rewarded them with vigorous applause.

“More work lies ahead,” the dean added, but “this was a great start.” Relevant to such work on undergraduate programs and our recent band of out-of-town evaluators who seemed to focus on graduate programs, Duke’s administration was beginning to focus more than previously on undergraduate matters.

One of the good results of this was that all of the numerous and varied deans were “having more say.”

At this point Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences George McLendon remarked that the outside reviewers (*viz.*, those academic visitors recently sent by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools) had sometimes talked with undergraduates and sometimes had not. In the future, he assured everyone, visiting reviewers would “*always* have encounters with undergraduates.”

Prof. Leslie Digby (Biological Anthropology and Anatomy) then inquired whether there were there any general guidelines to tell the administration and faculty what the reviewers were looking for. Dean Baker replied that whatever guidelines might now exist, future ones would be more detailed. For example, Dean McLendon added, specific questions could and would be articulated.

Dean Walther noted that her office was likely to be particularly helpful in these matters. Some thought about them, Dean Baker added, would enable us to “show off our best students and programs.”

Dean McLendon then expressed his pride and pleasure in knowing that the Arts and Sciences Council was nowadays taking a lead in this sort of business. Specific input from faculty members was invaluable.

Moving on to a very different subject, however, and postponing for a few minutes the next scheduled agenda item, Dean McLendon wanted to share some significant news on a very different subject. For the last couple of years the Arts and Sciences Council had been discussing, indeed had taken a lead in promulgating, the creation of a faculty “reward situation” in terms of course relief. One

major thing that “we learned from the faculty,” he said, was that time was a particularly valuable commodity. Moreover, some very good news was that Duke’s trustees had recently authorized each college to accelerate its faculty’s sabbatical leaves. Before long, faculty members would be getting letters about the situation. Meanwhile, some further good news of the moment was that “remarkable service” on the part of some faculty members would render them eligible for accelerated leaves.

Before anything at all could happen, however, early or late, all leaves would involve the consultation of faculty members with their departmental Chairs. Obviously only so many people could be off-base at the same time, and care would have to be taken to assure that all undergraduates who were supposed to graduate would be able to do so on time. It was very likely that in some cases this would prove to be complicated, especially in the smaller departments. All the critical courses, nevertheless, would continue to be taught, and, to make that happen, doubtless some “horse-trading” would be necessary. At the moment he simply wanted to share the news of the new opportunity in general terms. More information on the subject would soon be in everyone’s boxes.

Turning to the next announced agenda item, a “Financial Letter” dated 10 November 2008, Dean McLendon wanted to attempt to give an assessment of how recent nationwide events in the financial sector had affected Duke’s Trinity College of Arts and Sciences. In the last few days he had learned that Dartmouth, which depended on an endowment, had announced it had lost two hundred million dollars in the last couple of weeks and was going to have to make a number of really significant cuts. Even “our friends in Cambridge, Massachusetts,” with an endowment last year of some thirty-six million dollars, was confronted with a much sadder figure this year.

Duke, of course, was by no means immune to what was happening, but the good news was that we had for some time not only managed our endowment systematically and well, in fact “constrained our spending,” and hence were likely to fare relatively better than other places. Financial problems at Duke appeared to be less grim than at many places elsewhere, and we could hope to “absorb as many difficulties as possible.” To be at least a little more specific, we might have to (1) postpone filling some vacancies, (2) put off some projects that were desirable, and (3) ask all departments to put together contingency plans (perhaps postponing such things as add-on seminars, travel plans, and entertaining). At the moment, however, he was not ready to say even that all of these cuts would have to be implemented. Moreover, the handling of the matter was bound to be quite different in different departments and units. Some of the latter, for instance, were a good deal more “self-fulfilled” than others. We would therefore have to work individually with each of our various units.

Another element complicating the picture, he pointed out, was that a substantial fraction of the Arts and Sciences budget was not under the umbrella of his office. In fact, “We effectively lease our quarters.” A substantial fraction of Arts and Sciences budgeting was not at all under his control.

In any event, the administration would be working with all departments and units in order to proceed in the most suitable and best ways. To help make this work, all members of the Arts and Sciences Council should consider themselves to be ambassadors who were reporting back to their various units. Perhaps above all, he urged everyone involved to “Try to be understanding.”

Opening the subject for questions, he was first asked “What order of magnitude are we talking about?” For example, would a five per cent shrinkage “make a dent” in the situation? He responded “Yes, indeed.” Some forty units were to be considered, and if we were talking about non-personnel, it might still be half a million dollars.

One possible silver lining to the cloud, he added, was that Duke, to tell the truth, might in some ways be positioned in an “extraordinarily good place” at the moment. Though we might find ourselves able to proceed with hiring only twenty-some rather than thirty new faculty members, the overall situation might nevertheless enable us to make some extraordinary additions to our faculty. All planning of that sort would have to be deferred, however. We would not know much more about all of this until the end of Spring.

At the moment, Dean Baker observed, some departments here had already begun to suffer losses. For example, the Data Processing Specialist for English had departed to greener pastures and not been replaced.

Dean McLendon replied that it might be necessary to do some sharing. The better news, however, was that he hoped to have “restaffing” pretty much back to normal as of the first of July.

Dean Riley suggested that Duke might save some money by closing the University and lowering its thermostats between Christmas and the start of the new year. During that sort of down-time, she recalled, Michigan and Wisconsin had set its thermostats at fifty-five degrees. Dean McLendon was dubious about doing likewise, however, since Duke generally had a significant number of students on campus even during holidays.

His basic message of the afternoon, at any rate, was that while “Duke was by no means immune to the national plight,” there was also some good news, *viz.*, “We are in better shape than many places.”

At 4:50 p.m., there being no more at the moment to be said, Prof. Shanahan declared the Council’s November meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,  
Dale B. J. Randall  
Executive Secretary