Academic Freedom Committee Minutes

November 1, 2017

Attending: Hollis Glaser, Monica Faust, Peter Bratsis

The meeting commenced at 2:10

 I. The committee approved the minutes from the October meeting.
 II. Geoff Kurtz visited and we discussed and unanimously approved the following resolution.

Whereas defending academic freedom and promoting faculty development are among this Academic Senate's responsibilities;

Whereas academic freedom requires strong governance procedures, at the college and departmental levels, which in turn depend on faculty members having the time for governance and service responsibilities;

Whereas the freedom to research and write is of little use without time in which to research and write;

Whereas BMCC's Performance Management Reports have shown that BMCC's tenured faculty members on average teach more hours than their counterparts at other CUNY community colleges, such that even after the implementation of the university-wide reduction in *formal* teaching load to which CUNY has committed, BMCC's *effective* full-time faculty teaching load will remain unusually high, absent new college policies;

Whereas the 2015 COACHE survey confirmed that the college's full-time faculty members widely consider teaching load to be among the "worst aspects" of working at BMCC;

Whereas more than four hundred BMCC faculty members signed a PSC petition during the 2016-2017 academic year calling on BMCC to mitigate the full-time faculty teaching load through new reassigned time policies; and

Whereas new reassigned time policies would contribute to academic freedom and promote faculty development at BMCC by allowing the faculty to better fulfill its teaching, scholarly, service, and governance responsibilities;

The BMCC Academic Senate

1. Calls on the BMCC administration to provide increased reassigned time for college and departmental service, by guaranteeing reassigned time for such faculty members as the

chairperson of the Academic Senate, the coordinators of majors and programs, and those responsible for other governance or departmental projects; and further

2. Calls on the BMCC administration to provide increased reassigned time for scholarly and creative work through policies such as one or both of the following: (a) funding, and working with the Academic Senate to design, a program that would provide access to regular, predictable reassigned time for veteran faculty members who are engaged in or developing substantial scholarly or creative projects; (b) providing for the automatic accrual of reassigned time for all tenure-track and tenured faculty members.

III.   Ruru Rusmin and Christopher Medellin attended to discuss e-learning policies regarding administrators' access to online classes. The committee took no action but is informing the senate about the following:
1) Blackboard administrators can see online courses in their entirety. However, they abide by FERPA and other professional policies that specify they go into courses for particular reasons and do not access any part of the course that is not relevant. Further, they do not reveal any confidential information.
2) Regarding their protocol for contacting students who had not logged in: they sent notes to e-learning faculty and gave them a specific date as to when they would reach out to the students. However, they did not explain how they identified the students.
3) This practice of contacting students who had not logged in was initiated in the 2011-2012 academic year by Janey Flanagan who was dissatisfied with the faculty response to the e-learning department's request to identify those students. Some faculty did not respond to the request and others provided incomplete or inaccurate information.
4) The e-learning administrators see this issue as a technological one, that students may not know how to log in. The administrators perceive their reaching out to the students as fixing a technological problem.
5) Jim Berg promised this wouldn't happen again. An alternative may be the Starfish program which would be linked with Blackboard, but they are waiting to see if it will function in this manner.

IV.   The committee agreed on the following:
1) Faculty would probably not have a problem with this service if they were notified about it clearly and had the ability to opt out of it;
2) This service brings up issues of student privacy;

3) This practice also brings up larger issues of academic freedom, that faculty are responsible for pedagogy and that as more classes are taught online, it is important that faculty control the corresponding pedagogical issues and that they not be framed as technological issues;
4) This practice also may be perceived as the administration trying to help the online classes succeed more than the face-to-face classes and that neither kind of classroom should be privileged above the other.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:10.