

MSU Faculty Senate

Special Session

April 24, 2008 Minutes

The MSU Faculty Senate met at 2:00 p.m. on April 24, 2008 in Dillard 186. Senators present included Black, Alan; Bultena, Chuck; Coe, Mary Ann; Donovan, Tim; Fields, Peter; Giddings, Greg; Gooch, Roxanne; Harlow, Kirk; May, Marsha (Treasurer); McClintock, Stuart (Secretary); Mills, Dana; Owen, James; Redmon, Bob (Chair); Stiles, Beverly (Vice-Chair). Mark Farris was also present.

At the request of President Rogers, the Faculty Senate met in special session to address complaints about and problems with the online course evaluation.

Online course evaluations became universal this semester. Some colleges had already been doing online evaluations, but Prothro-Yeager College of Humanities and Social Sciences and the College of Science and Mathematics had not. The decision to make online evaluations universal was made at a deans' meeting in January, and this decision was brought up at the Academic Council on April 16, after the last Faculty Senate meeting of the semester at which it can conduct new business. The faculty and the Faculty Senate did not learn about this decision until a few days before students were to begin their evaluations. Faculty was informed of this policy with a flyer in each member's mailbox and with the same flyer posted around campus.

Mark Farris, Professor of Mathematics and Director of the Honors Program, informed the Faculty Senate that he had written to Dr. Rogers charging that his academic freedom had been compromised by the wording of the text that students read when they log on to do their online evaluations. The text on the login page that prompted Farris' complaint is

"Your instructor **may** require completion of this course evaluation before releasing your semester grade. Your evaluation of your instructor is, however, **anonymous** and will in no way affect your grade. Your instructor will be informed of your completion of the evaluation, but will not be shown your particular responses to the evaluation questions."

Dr. Farris asked Dr. Rogers to make several changes to the evaluation process so that a faculty member's academic freedom would not be compromised. Enough changes have been made so that Dr. Farris believes his complaints related to academic freedom have been adequately addressed.

Dr. Rogers charged the Faculty Senate to advise him to what degree the above statement on the login page is an infringement of academic freedom.

The Senate made the following recommendations to Dr. Rogers about academic freedom:

As Mark Farris believes his complaints related to academic freedom have been adequately addressed, the Senate chooses not to comment further on this matter.

Secondly, President Rogers asked the Faculty Senate to review the language and to make recommendations to a new statement put on the login page subsequent to Dr. Farris' charge. The new statement reads "Your evaluation of your instructor is anonymous and in no way will affect

your grade. Your instructor will be informed of the completion of the evaluation, but will not be shown your particular responses to the evaluation questions."

Senator Bultena moved that the sentences under "Please Note" on the Online Course Evaluation document be changed to the following single sentence: "Your evaluation of your instructor is anonymous, and the content will in no way affect your grade." Tim Donovan seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Senator Owen made a motion that access to the course evaluation completion status webpage should require the standard faculty network logon for security purposes. Senator Giddings seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Senator Owen also moved that the Faculty Senate commend Mark Farris for his efforts to raise awareness about issues related to online evaluations. Tim Donovan seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Additionally, many serious concerns were raised regarding the impact of this method of faculty evaluation on the validity and reliability of the evaluation process and the impact it may have on tenure and promotion decisions. Senators generally agreed that without some form of accountability, only those students with complaints would complete the evaluation. Senators also agreed that this accountability should be the responsibility of the university, not the instructor. Additionally, Senators observed that the current evaluation form cannot fairly or accurately evaluate online courses. No formal action was taken, but these issues were placed on the Senate agenda for August.

Respectfully submitted,

Stuart McClintock
Secretary of the Faculty Senate

Bob Redmon
Chairman of the Faculty Senate

The next Executive Committee meeting will be at 3 PM on Tuesday, April 29, 2008, in the Apache Boardroom in CSC.

The next Faculty Senate meeting will be at 3 PM on Thursday, May 1, 2008, in Kiowa Meeting Room in CSC.