

February 9, 2010 Faculty Senate Agenda
Holloway Hall, Room 119
(3:30-5:00 p.m.)

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1. Approval of minutes from the Faculty Senate Meetings of December 8, 2009.
2. Remarks from the Provost, Dr. Diane Allen.
3. Announcements from the Senate President.
4. Committee Reports:
 - Ad hoc committee on Senate Structure
 - CUSF report – Sen. Parker
 - APC report on Mid Semester
 - FARC on “distinguished university professor” No report
5. Unfinished Business:
 - Sen. Khazeh – Motion to require FWC members to be tenured
6. New Business:
 - None
7. Adjournment.

Mid-semester and the Schedule Adjustment Period

Academic Policies Committee

February 4, 2010

Charge from the Senate:

The Faculty Senate charges the Academic Policies Committee to consider changes to the ending date of the schedule adjustment period as well as determining when mid-semester shall occur in future years, including those dates in Winter terms and Summer Schools. Moreover the Academic Policies Committee is requested to report their findings and any recommendations to the Faculty Senate by the mid-semester of the Fall 2009 semester.

The Academic Policies Committee requested an extension to the reporting deadline until the first Senate meeting of the Spring 2010 semester on September 30, 2009; this request was approved by the President of the Senate on the same day.

The concerns that led to this charge stemmed from a discrepancy between the policy stated in the Salisbury University Catalog and the date assigned in actual practice for the end of the Schedule Adjustment Period (SAP). According to the 2008–2010 Catalog, “After the drop/add period students may officially withdraw from any course during the schedule adjustment period and receive a grade of W. This period extends until mid-semester.” In practice, the withdraw date has been placed at the end of the ninth week.

Mid-semester posting

The discrepancy between actual and nominal mid-semester on the Fall 2007 and Fall 2008 on-line academic calendars was due to staff error: dates were rolled forward without proper attention to the changed date for the first day of classes. The process for posting the mid-semester date has been changed in order to assure accuracy in the future. As there are 15 weeks of instruction (including final exams) during the Fall and Spring semesters, there is broad consensus that mid-semester should fall at 7.5 weeks, or on the 39th class day.

End of the Schedule Adjustment Period

Allowing students to withdraw from a class with a grade of W through the ninth week of classes has been the practice for some years, on the rationale that it allows students the opportunity to discuss the ramifications of dropping a course with their advisors during Program Planning. However, this extension concerns some faculty, who feel that students delay their commitment to courses that require sustained effort (for instance, STEM courses), or that later withdrawals disrupt courses where group work plays a substantial role.

Consequently, the Academic Policy Committee investigated SAP scheduling at other schools in the USM, and formally solicited comment on changes to the end of the SAP from a variety of constituencies at Salisbury University: the Deans and advising services of the four

schools; the Registrar; the Office of Student Affairs; the Office of Financial Aid; the University Curriculum Committee (which felt this was outside its remit); and the Student Government Association. Committee members also discussed the issue with their colleagues and brought their opinions to our deliberations.

The comments received from three Deans and three advising coordinators, representing all four schools; the Registrar; the Office of Financial Aid; the SGA; and many faculty supported the current timing of the end of the SAP for a closely interconnected set of reasons.

Firstly, it was felt that the SAP needs to be long enough for students to receive substantive feedback on their performance in a course. Faculty vary widely in their grading practices; where mid-term work makes up a substantial part of a student's grade, time must be allowed for faculty to assess the work and return it to their students. Ideally, students should be assessed multiple times during the SAP, so that those who performed poorly have opportunities to seek assistance and see the effects of their efforts to improve. The Student Achievement Center has recently implemented a program of mid-term reporting and academic intervention for underperforming students, intended to improve student success and retention rates. At present, this utilizes five weeks of course performance to identify at-risk students. If the end of the SAP were earlier, assessment and intervention would need to be earlier as well.

Secondly, the opportunity to discuss withdrawal with their academic advisor during advising allows students to better understand the implications of such actions, particularly in regard to the requirements of their program of study and course cycles. Since students are often loath to seek advice, there is a concern that if the end of the SAP were earlier, more students would make less-informed decisions that complicate their academic careers and delay graduation.

Finally, in order to remain eligible for financial aid, a student must pass at least 67% of the credits attempted. There is a concern that an earlier end of the SAP, if student opportunities for self-correction were curtailed, would lead to a higher withdrawal rate and an increased number of students losing their eligibility for financial aid.

USM End of Schedule Adjustment Period, Fall 2009

FU	8 weeks + 2 days
SU	9 weeks
UMCP	10 weeks + 1 day
UMBC	10 weeks + 1 day
TU	10 weeks + 1 day
UMES	11 weeks

While there appears to be broad consensus in favor of the end of the ninth week, some faculty view a late withdrawal date as suboptimal. They believe it is antithetical to the values of engagement and academic pursuit that we strive to promote by permitting students an "easy out" when their studies require more effort than they expected. This concern is particularly strong in the Henson school, where most of the disciplines with high levels of withdrawals are housed.

Some effort was made to consider evidence on withdrawals by looking at numbers for courses in the 2008–2009 academic year. In that year, the following disciplines had multiple

courses where 10% or more of students received Ws in both semesters: ACCT, CHEM, and MATH. BIOL had a single course with those levels; INFO 111 fell into the same category. A more rigorous analysis of data from a longer period may be desirable to understand the true scope and distribution of the problem, and what effect withdrawals have on retention.

Recommendations

At its meeting on February 4, 2010, by unanimous vote, the Academic Policies Committee approved a proposal to maintain the deadline for withdrawal from a course as Friday of the ninth week of the Fall and Spring semesters, and to revise the Catalog as follows to reflect that practice.

*After the drop/add period students may officially withdraw from any course during the schedule adjustment period and receive a grade of W. This period extends until **the Friday of the ninth week of the semester.***

In regards to the scheduling of mid-semester and the end of the SAP during Winter and Summer terms, we recommend that they be set in proportion to the length of the term: mid-semester at the middle of the term, and the end of the SAP on the day when 60% of the term has been completed. For instance, Winter 2010 consists of 15 days (January 4–22); therefore mid-semester should fall on the 8th day, and the end of the SAP on the 10th day.

Other options that the Committee considered included: 1) requiring instructor permission for students to withdraw from a course, which would create an opportunity for discussion and intervention; and 2) a tiered system, where students could withdraw earlier in the semester (by the fourth or fifth week) at will, but would be required to notify the instructor and provide some rationale after this point, again providing an opportunity for intervention. The latter might be coupled with an on-line survey that could provide useful data.