

**ACADEMIC COUNCIL  
MEETING of APRIL 16, 2008  
McKenna Hall Auditorium  
3:30 – 5:00 p.m.**

**Members present:** Rev. John Jenkins, C.S.C., Thomas Burish, John Affleck-Graves, Dennis Jacobs, Christine Maziar, Anita Allen, Panos Antsaklis, A.J. Bellia, Robert Bernhard, Steven Buechler, Laura Carlson, James Collins, Martina Cucchiara, Mary Rose D’Angelo, Kenneth DeBoer, Cornelius Delaney, Stephen Fallon, Umesh Garg, Nicole Garnett, Paul Huber, Michael Jenuwine, Colin Jessop, Peter Kilpatrick, Christine Loza, Joseph Marino, Stephen Molvarec, Scott Monroe, Robert Nelson, William Nichols, Thomas Noble, Patricia O’Hara, Hugh Page, Rev. Mark Poorman, C.S.C., Mark Roche, Ann Tenbrunsel, Jennifer Warlick, John Welle, William Westfall, Jennifer Younger

**Members absent:** Adam Boocher, Seth Brown, Judith Fox, Nasir Ghiaseddin, Daniel Lapsley, Gaby Montero, Carolyn Woo

**Members excused:** Emily Cooperstein, Peter Holland, Michael Lykoudis, Donald Pope-Davis, Ram Ramanan, Scott Van Jacob

**Observers present:** Kevin Barry, Kathryn Lam, Dale Nees, Harold L. Pace, Don Wycliff

**Observers excused:** Brandon Roach, Daniel Saracino

**Guest:** Mark Gunty, Assistant Director, Institutional Research

After calling the meeting to order at 3:30 p.m., Fr. Jenkins asked Prof. Noble to offer the opening prayer.

**1. Approval of minutes:** The minutes of the February 21, 2008, meeting were unanimously approved.

**2. End-of-Year Committee Reports**

**a) Undergraduate Studies:** Prof. Page, chair of the Undergraduate Studies Committee, distributed copies of a document entitled “Final Report – AY 2007-2008: Undergraduate Studies Committee of the Academic Council” and outlined the one short-term and two long-term projects on which the committee worked. He explained that the short-term project was resolved by the action of the Faculty Senate when it developed a forum in which members of the Student Senate and the Faculty Senate can forward resolutions and requests and convey concerns to each other for appropriate action.

Dr. Page described the two long-term projects, the first of which was to continue deliberations on the issue of grade validity. After reviewing benchmarking data from Notre Dame and several peer institutions, the committee discovered that there has been a gradual rise in grades over time at Notre Dame. However, the exact reasons for that gradual increase are uncertain. The committee also noted that at present, there exists no institutional statement that makes clear the

relationship between grades and the quality of student work. Therefore, the committee took on the task of developing a basic set of grade criteria. Prof. Page emphasized that the brevity of the proposed grade descriptions should not belie the rigor of the process that resulted in their creation or the vigor with which the exact wording was debated. The goal was to make them broad enough for application across the University and flexible enough to lend themselves to local application in each college, school and department.

The second long-term project of the committee considered the appropriateness of producing a white paper to address some of the issues related to grade validity. The committee consulted with several people in the University who have done work in this regard, such as Kevin Barry from the Kaneb Center and Associate Dean Stuart Greene in the College of Arts and Letters. Based on these conversations, the committee ultimately decided that the project should be tabled until the Office of Institutional Research finishes gathering data on increased student performance and inflationary pressures in grading.

Prof. Page then described the four areas on which the committee would like to focus for the 2008-2009 academic year: 1) continue working on the grade validity white paper, 2) reexamine the issue of Advanced Placement credit and its role within the undergraduate curriculum, 3) survey what faculty throughout the University require (i.e., learning objectives, assignments, examinations, etc.) of their students, and 4) consider the implications of the current undergraduate course load on student intellectual engagement and learning outcomes.

In response to questions from Prof. O'Hara, Prof. Page indicated that the grade criteria would be published in the Bulletin of Information and that, in their current state, they are only applicable to undergraduate courses, and not law or other graduate level courses.

Seeing no objection from the Council, Fr. Jenkins announced that the grade criteria would be included in the Bulletin of Information.

**b) Faculty Affairs:** Prof. Garnett, Chair of the Faculty Affairs Committee, reminded the Council of the three priorities originally outlined for the committee for the academic year: i) perform decennial review of the Academic Articles, ii) carry out benchmarking study on post-tenure review procedures, and iii) contribute to the discussion on the Catholic hiring project.

Prof. Garnett said that the bulk of the committee's time was spent on the review of the Academic Articles. She thanked the committee for their hard work on the Articles. Though the committee intended to perform a benchmarking study on post-tenure review procedures, the extensive focus on the Academic Articles, they were unable to address this goal.

She also noted that the committee met with Prof. Jacobs to discuss the new Course Instructor Feedback proposal. Overall, the committee's view of it is favorable, though a few concerns were raised.

Following a meeting with Provost Burish, the committee decided, rather than debate the advantages and disadvantages of Catholic hiring, it would be more productive to begin to think about what might lay the groundwork for fostering a constructive dialog about the issue. Prof.

Tenbrunsel made a presentation that highlighted some of the issues that surfaced in the committee's discussion.

Prof. Tenbrunsel explained that the committee first (recognizing the differences in opinion on the issue) identified commonalities that existed: i) an understanding that what is driving Catholic hiring is a goal to maintain the University's identity as a Catholic academic community of higher learning, ii) agreement that no one wants to see the University regress academically, iii) agreement that no one wants to see the University faculty become only Catholic, and iv) an understanding that faculty are important to sustaining the University's mission. Disagreement surrounding the issue focused on the means to achieve sustaining the University's identity and the means to evaluate success or failure.

After outlining common misperceptions, Prof. Tenbrunsel explained the importance of identifying and addressing these misperceptions as well as developing a common knowledge so that different areas of the University can share a consistent approach, particularly as it relates to recruiting and interviewing faculty. Other important initial areas of focus identified by the committee included: i) developing a deliberate and thought-out approach to Catholic hiring that considers the need to incorporate feedback and make adjustments over time and ii) acquiring a better understanding of the people that came to the University and chose to stay, specifically because of the mission.

Prof. Tenbrunsel concluded by emphasizing the common understanding described above and asking members to consider the consequences of not maintaining the University's identity.

Prof. O'Hara reminded the Council that Prof. Tenbrunsel's presentation was not based on a vote of the committee, nor was it a formal report. It was an attempt to distill the conversations of the committee (including those with Prof. Burish) and "advance the ball" rather than just "recreate the wheel."

Fr. Jenkins commended the committee for its effort, saying that the Academic Articles alone is a Herculean task and that the review was conducted at a superb level. He commented that the discussion on Catholic hiring was particularly balanced and helpful.

**c) Advanced Studies:** Prof. Antsaklis, chair of the Advanced Studies Committee, explained that the committee works largely with the Graduate School as well as the Graduate Council and its executive committee. The committee addressed several topics which Prof. Antsaklis presented at the February 21, 2008 meeting of the Academic Council. He explained that two issues were in progress at that time: i) graduate commencement and ii) best practices in graduate student admissions and other operations at the Graduate School.

Prof. Antsaklis noted that good progress was made on both initiatives. Information was gathered from other universities to understand the best practices of peer institutions. Some outcomes based on this study and related meetings and discussions will be disseminated using the Graduate School's webpage.

An ad hoc committee of the Graduate Council addressed a number of the logistics for the Graduate School commencement. The commencement was scheduled for Saturday morning in the JACC. Prof. Antsaklis said that it is important for Graduate Studies to have a meaningful part and presence in the main University commencement on Sunday. Prof. Holland, Dean of the Graduate School, will have an opportunity during Sunday's main commencement to inform attendees about what went on the day before. Prof. Antsaklis concluded by noting that no discussions took place regarding the accommodations for the graduate commencement beyond 2008.

Fr. Jenkins thanked the committee for its work.

**3) Course Instructor Feedback (CIF):** Prof. Jacobs provided copies of the CIF proposal entitled "Course Instructor Feedback (CIF), A Major Upgrade to the Teacher Course Evaluation (TCE) System," as well as a "Frequently Asked Questions" (FAQ) document in advance of the meeting.

Prof. Jacobs explained the context of the proposal: The Advisory Committee to the Provost on the Evaluation of Teaching (ACPET) was formed about three and a half years ago to review how the University evaluates teaching at the point of tenure and promotion. The committee acknowledged that the practice across the University was varied and at times needed improvement.

When that committee gathered, it recognized that the student voice, which is recorded through the Teacher Course Evaluation (TCE), is only one component of the evaluation of teaching. Other components are needed because even if the TCE was improved it could not capture all that is involved in effective teaching. Initially ACPET focused on elements of evaluation other than the TCE which resulted in the ACPET guidelines. The guidelines are to be fully implemented in fall 2009. Once that process was completed, ACPET turned its attention back to the TCE and considered whether the current instrument effectively gathers student feedback.

ACPET focused on the purposes for gathering information from students about courses and teaching: i) formative aspect of giving feedback to the instructor so that the instructor can, over time, improve his or her teaching by being responsive to student concerns, ii) evaluative function of instructor teaching and 3) analysis role that measures how the University is accomplishing its mission in terms of quality of teaching.

With those purposes in mind, ACPET considered the TCE instrument as well as a variety of other institutions' instruments. The committee recognized that one size cannot fit all and emphasized the need to add flexibility and adaptability to the instrument. ACPET sought to find a system that would allow for some variance to reflect the individual characteristics of courses and that would provide reliable and valid data. With the need for flexibility in mind, ACPET considered moving to an online format. Prof. Jacobs explained that ACPET spent "the good part of a year" studying other peer institutions that have made the transition from paper forms to an online format. The committee was pleasantly surprised by the responses of the peer institutions and learned that many of them faced the same fears, but were able to make it through the initial

steps. After initial implementation, issues of response rate and response bias turned out not to be as great of a concern.

Prof. Jacobs explained that his primary intention was to call the Council's attention to the "University Tier" of items/questions in the new instrument. He said that the purpose of a tiered structure is to include a set of questions (a portion of the whole) which are uniform across the University and to have another set of questions which can be tailored to different divisions or individual course sections. He highlighted some of the changes in the instrument, including: i) common scale across items/questions, ii) more gradation within the scale, and iii) new and different items.

Prof. Jacobs explained that Prof. Gunty, Assistant Director of Institutional Research, was a member of ACPET and helped design the instrument and pilot test. Prof. Jacobs distributed a chart that compared the scores of a multi-item composite to a single global item (i.e., a comparison of the average of scores from multiple items on the instrument to the score of a single item on the instrument). The results presented on the chart indicated that the multi-item composite is a more precise measure than the single global question. Prof. Jacobs said that the hope is to provide confidence intervals around both the multi-item composite and the single global item in an effort to be more informative.

Prof. Jacobs said that the proposal was discussed in other venues and thus feedback was incorporated in the draft before the Council. One piece of feedback came from a discussion of the Provost Advisory Committee (PAC) and suggested adding an item regarding the reason a student took a particular course (e.g., requirement, elective). Prof. Jacobs distributed copies of the suggested item as an addendum to the proposal.

Prof. Garnett reminded the Council that the Faculty Affairs Committee met with Prof. Jacobs to review the proposal. Based on their deliberations, the committee voted and recommended approving the proposal. However, Prof. Garnett called attention to the concerns raised by the committee in its deliberations: i) online administration – effect of moving out of controlled classroom environment, ii) online administration – incentives for students to complete the survey, iii) reliance on the overall perception score [the "single global item" referenced above], iv) validity of the pilot test and v) adequacy of time for faculty feedback.

Prof. Jacobs said that a lot of the feedback provided by the Faculty Affairs committee led to the FAQ document. [Copies of the document were distributed to the Council and are available on the Provost's Office website]. Prof. Gunty explained that the pilot survey included good representation across levels and size of sections. In response to a question from Prof. Antsaklis, Prof. Jacobs indicated that the CIF would be available for both graduate and undergraduate courses.

Prof. Jessop expressed concern about the inability of faculty to opt out of the use of the instrument and refuse to participate. He asked if instead of the faculty could choose to be evaluated by a different technique (e.g., peer evaluations) instead. Prof. Jacobs responded by saying that there exists a long-standing policy or designation process whereby department chairs have the opportunity to weigh in on whether or not a faculty member should be evaluated. He

continued by emphasizing that ACPET is proposing that both peer evaluation and student feedback take place.

A few Council members requested that additional questions be added to the FAQ document, including: i) What flexibility exists in choosing learning goals? ii) How can the CIF be administered in the classroom (e.g. through student use of laptops), and iii) What flexibility exists for students to provide open-ended written responses? Prof. Garnett also asked that clarification be made regarding the timing of students completing the CIF. In particular, she expressed concern about students' ability to complete the CIF after finals. Prof. Jacobs said that the CIF will be completed before finals and that the FAQ document will be updated to reflect that understanding.

Prof. Warlick spoke about her apprehension regarding the incentives for students to participate. She said that she was uncomfortable about withholding information which will allow students to make the best decisions about their academic careers at Notre Dame. Prof. Jacobs responded and explained that ACPET worked with a group of students and faculty in identifying what information students would like to have and what would be the right source of that information. Three sources were identified: 1) the instructor, 2) historical data (from Institutional Research or the Registrar), and 3) student responses to a set of very limited questions. All students will have access to the first two elements; the incentive focused on access to the third element. Prof. Jacobs said that students responded very favorably to this incentive. The incentive gives students an opportunity to have information that is not currently available, it does not withhold information that they can currently access. Prof. Gunty provided an extensive explanation about the incentives and mentioned alternative incentives used by peer institutions (e.g., fining students who do not participate or allowing early access to grades for those who participate). Based on discussions with the Academic Affairs Committee of Student Government and considering alternatives, ACPET found the proposed incentive to be the best option. He said that the primary incentive for completing the TCE right now, and presumptively for completing the CIF, is a culture of valuing student input in this process.

Seeing no further questions, Prof. Jacobs moved for the Council to approve the University Tier (including the addendum) of the proposal. The motion was seconded.

Prof. Jessop made a motion to remove question 11 [the "single global item referenced" above] which asks students to rate the "Overall teaching effectiveness of this instructor." The motion was seconded. Prof. Jessop said, similar to question 17 on the TCE, that including this question causes too much focus and reliance to be placed on that single response. Prof. Jacobs responded by calling the Council's attention to a FAQ that addressed this concern. He said that item 11 asks for an overall effectiveness of teaching based on weightings that the student has in his own mind. The student's assessment may include features or components that were not identified explicitly in the other items/questions. The student may also identify or weight more heavily certain things which were more important in his mind rather than taking the simple-minded average of the other items/questions, which effectively weights all the characteristics uniformly. He continued by saying that the ACPET focused on this issue, discussed it vigorously and elected to include the questions, but to report the data in a way that provides the multi-item composite as well as the question 11 item. Prof. Burish said that he does not think that question

17 or question 11 is bad, but that using it alone is bad. The composite of a lot of questions together will probably result in a better predictor than any one question by itself. It is very likely that its inclusion adds overall to the strength of the evaluation, but it cannot replace and should not be allowed to replace the other questions. By voice vote of the Council, the amendment was defeated.

Prof. Garg motioned to table the proposal because he felt that there was not a sufficient opportunity for the Council members to consider the document or to solicit feedback from their constituencies. The motion was seconded. Prof. Jacobs noted that tabling the motion would mean that the CIF could not be rolled out in the fall 2008 semester. He enumerated the opportunities in which various constituencies were asked for feedback. By voice vote of the Council, the amendment was defeated.

Returning to the original motion, the Council approved the University Tier (including the addendum) by voice vote.

**4) New Business:** Ms. Lam distributed a document listing the meeting dates of the Council for the 2008-2009 Academic Year. She indicated that the dates were also sent to Council members via email.

**5) Adjournment:** With no further business to discuss, Fr. Jenkins thanked everyone for their work on the Council and adjourned the meeting.