



FACULTY SENATE

Minutes  
April 8, 2013

**Senators in Attendance:** 51

**Absent:** Anesthesiology (Schapiro), Education (Walls), Family Medicine (Nicholas), FPPC (Ross), Libraries (Spitzform), Neuroscience (Hehir), Nursing (Cohen), Nutrition & Food Science (Pritchard), Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (Zweber), Pathology (Wilcox), Pediatrics (D'Amico), Pharmacology (Lounsbury), Physics (Headrick), PSC (Rodgers), Psychiatry (Naylor), Radiology (Green), RSCA (Galbraith), SAC (Prue), Social Work (Witkin), Surgery (Adams) (Trotter)

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- 1. Approval of the Minutes.** The minutes of March 11, 2013 were approved as written.
- 2. Senate President's Remarks.** President Roberts gave brief remarks overviewing some of the business the Faculty Senate will see in the coming months. Some of these were the Student Affairs Committee's work with Annie Stevens on high risk drinking behaviors, the continued work of the Budget Advisory Committee, the Graduate College evaluation and Dean search, and the ongoing progress with General Education. She concluded her remarks by reminding Senators to join her at the Faculty Senate dinner to be held after the meeting in the Waterman Manor.
- 3. Board of Trustees Chair – Robert Cioffi.** Board of Trustees' Chair, Robert Cioffi took this opportunity to thank the Faculty Senate for their work throughout the academic year. He spoke about how he valued the communication and developing relationship between the Board, President Sullivan, and the Senate. This year UVM is on target to have another record level of donor commitment which speaks to the strength of the University of Vermont and its new leadership in both the academic institution and the Foundation. Cioffi also noted how the current model of higher education is seemingly broken, however, UVM is at the forefront of some aspects of this evolving industry. This includes competing with other institutions on levels other than academics such as athletics, laboratory facilities, and resident halls. Examples of how UVM is set apart in these areas is the option for students to live in residential learning communities, high quality athletic teams, and the presence of the Honors College. The Senate also thanked Cioffi for his role in bringing new leadership to UVM this year through hiring President Sullivan.
- 4. Interim Provost Remarks.** Provost Low began his remarks with a brief budget update. At this point in time the Deans have all met their budget cut targets and as a result the budget will be balanced. He also spoke about the many searches that were taking place

this spring beginning with the Provost search. The Provost search is well under way and he looks forward to the interviews later this month. The CEMS Dean search will follow a similar timeline with the finalists announced later in the week. The Vice President of Research and Dean of the Graduate College search is just kicking off as the list of nominations has just been completed. Questions from the Faculty Senate included a request for more information about the idea of a summer semester, the RPT process, and the projected budget gaps. Provost Low responded by informing the Senate that the summer semester is under investigation currently. There are many variables that need to be considered and research still needs to be done on demand, resources necessary, and how it will effect a student's time until graduation. In response to the RPT question, Provost Low answered that the administration is exploring a possible flexibility in the process which would come in the form of an altered % distribution for faculty based on what they are good at and what they would like to do. Finally, Low addressed the projected budget gaps. Budget deficits are expected to continue unless the way the budget is structured and planned changes; new budget models are being explored and discussed with the Budget Advisory Committee/Financial & Physical Planning Committee of the Faculty Senate.

- 5. General Education Writing & Information Literacy in the Disciplines Proposal.** The General Education Committee on Writing and Information Literacy came to the Senate with a proposal asking the Senate to approve the following:

*Starting with the first-year class in the fall of 2014, all undergraduates will complete a three-credit course addressing foundational writing and information literacy goals.*

Feedback, questions and comments from the Senate floor came immediately following the presentation. Marc Laliberte spoke on behalf of the Undergraduate Student Senate praising the proposal. It was questioned whether this will become a requirement or just a recommendation. The answer was that it will be a new curricular requirement as if it were just a recommendation; the outlook on student writing would remain the same. There was a request for additional significant evidence that this change will in fact improve student writing during their time at UVM. Resources were also of interest to the Faculty Senate, and it was answered that there has been a commitment from the Provost's Office to support this initiative. There was clarification that AP credit for English could still be transferred in to fill this requirement if the proposal was passed. It is important to note that information literacy will be addressed in these foundational writing courses as well. Although not all TAP courses will be able to participate in the writing and information literacy workshops and assessment (modeled after the pilot from academic year 2012-2013) in the first year, it is expected that after some time all TAP courses will be participating. The objectives and competencies associated with the model however, will be available to faculty across campus. There was a concern about seat capacity to have this be a requirement. Char Mehrtens and Brian Reed explained the seat capacity analysis and that there will be 8 available sections next year, with 11 additional sections in the years to follow.

When put to a vote, the proposal passed.

- 6. Commencement Walk Policy.** This item of business was continued from the March Faculty Senate meeting. The proposed changes to the existing Commencement Walk Policy would allow students who were within 6 credits of graduating, and in good academic standing to walk at the May commencement ceremony. There was a friendly amendment to include a stipulation that this student must have an approved plan in place with their Dean's office to complete their degree before permission to participate in commencement was given. It was clarified that when a student participates in commencement but does not complete their degree requirements, they do not appear in the commencement program and no one who participates receives their degree that day. One Senator questioned why six credits was used rather than fifteen or eighteen. This is an issue because at the December Commencement Ceremony, no one is sure if they have passed their courses when they participate in the graduation; meaning they could have failed all of their credits and still participate. It is important to note that this policy change was not in an attempt to fix the issues that occur with the December Commencement timeline, rather, to make the opportunity to participate at May Commencement more equal. A motion was made to modify the amendment to remove the requirement that the Dean's office approve the student's plan. When put to a vote, this change to the amendment was passed.

There were a number of department representatives that spoke both for and against the proposed policy changes. Some requested that the proper data be collected and this policy revisited once that data is available. Others suggested the winter commencement date be moved to January.

When the proposal with the modified amendment was put to a vote it passed by an extremely narrow margin.

The approved Commencement Walk Policy will allow undergraduate students, who are within six credits of graduating, in good academic standing, and have made a plan with the Dean's office of their College to participate in the May Commencement Ceremony.

- 7. New Business.** There was no new business at this time.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:36 pm.

## Motion for the Senate

Whereas, the Faculty Senate approved the request of the General Education Committee to carry out a pilot First-Year Writing and Information Literacy program, and

whereas the pilot was carried out from Spring semester 2012 through Spring semester 2013, and **the pilot was successful, based on assessment of:**

- a random sampling of students' complete work for the semester, which was evaluated to see the extent to which the foundational writing and information literacy goals were manifest in students' writing
- student attitudes, as measured by a pre- and post-course survey (John Ryan and the Office of Institutional Studies assisted in the design and analysis)
- instructor attitudes, as measured by a reflective teaching portfolio and ongoing conversation during the year, and

whereas the Office of the Provost has approved a budget to cover the expansion of the First-Year Writing and Information Literacy Program for the fall of 2014,

Be it resolved that, starting with the entering first-year class in Fall 2014, all undergraduates will complete a three-credit course addressing foundational writing and information literacy goals. First-year, first-time students will meet this requirement by successfully completing a College of Arts and Sciences TAP seminar (fall semester only; open only to first-year students), HCOL 85 (fall semester only; open only to first-year students), or ENGS 1 (fall/spring semesters; open only to first-year and sophomore students).

## Proposed Revision to the Commencement “Walk” Policy

“Walking” is the participation in Commencement ceremonies by students who have almost but not quite completed their degree requirements. Students within six credits of completion may under some conditions petition their dean’s office for permission to “walk” at commencement. Faculty sentiment on the question of “walking” has changed several times through the years. Whereas the practice was common enough, say, ten years ago, in 2009, the Associate Deans group proposed revision to the walk policy, disallowing the practice except in unusual cases, e.g., personal tragedy or the call to military service.

More recently, the Senate Curricular Affairs Committee was asked to consider a more lenient walk policy, one that would permit *any* student who was within six credits of degree completion to walk at commencement. Several arguments for the more liberal approach were advanced:

- Because UVM now holds a December commencement ceremony and it is not possible to screen degree candidates for successful completion of their last requirements, December graduates are thus held to a less rigorous standard for degree completion than May graduates. Liberalizing the walk policy would address this inequity.
- Students express that it is very important to them to graduate with their class. Because reasonable circumstances sometimes prevent a student from completing all degree requirements on schedule (e.g., change in major, required summer internship), some of our students who have nearly made the grade are, under the current policy, unable to participate in the commencement ceremony with their friends. It would be meaningful to these students – and their families – if they were allowed to cross the stage with the other members of their cohort.

Further, it is understood that participation in UVM’s commencement exercises does not in itself signify degree completion. No student will receive his or her diploma until all degree requirements are complete. Students whose degree requirements are incomplete will not have their names printed in the Commencement program.

In consideration of all of these, the Senate Curricular Affairs Committee recommends adopting a more liberal approach to the walk policy:

*Undergraduate students who are in good academic standing\* and within six credits of completing and have a plan to complete all degree requirements may, pending verification from their dean’s office, participate in the UVM and College/School Commencement ceremonies. It is understood that participation in commencement exercises does not in itself signify degree completion. No student will receive his or her diploma until all degree requirements are complete. Students whose degree requirements are incomplete will not have their names printed in the Commencement program.*

*Graduate students will not be permitted to participate in Commencement ceremonies until they have completed all their degree requirements, passed their defense examination, and submitted the final copy of their thesis or dissertation to the Graduate College.*

*\*Good academic standing would probably be understood to mean “have a GPA  $\geq 2.0$ .”*

The revised walk policy was approved by the Senate Curricular Affairs Committee at its meeting of February 14, 2013.

## **2009 “Walk” Policy**

Commencement celebrates the accomplishments of students who have successfully completed all the requirements necessary for their degrees. In acknowledgement of both the importance and integrity of that considerable achievement, exceptions are made only in truly exigent circumstances to the University’s “walk policy” which states that only students who have successfully completed all degree requirements will be allowed to walk at Commencement.

Those students who are within 6 credits of completion of all degree requirements may petition their college or school for permission to participate in their Commencement ceremony. The petition must contain evidence and/or documentation demonstrating that the degree requirement deficit resulted from circumstances beyond the student’s control and that allowing them to walk at the graduation ceremony would be a humane and compassionate response to those circumstances.

A student wishing to petition for an exception to the walk policy must first present a petition to the Dean’s Office of his or her college or school. Only those circumstances deemed exigent (e.g., illness, family emergency, Dean-approved academic waiver, or other circumstance beyond the student’s control) will be considered. Final decisions will be made by the Associate Provost for Curricular Affairs.

Permission to participate in Commencement ceremonies in accordance with this policy does not constitute the granting of the degree or a guarantee thereof. No degree will be granted until all requirements are completed. The student’s name will not appear in the Commencement program.

Approved by the Associate Deans Group, January 13, 2009



*The*  
**UNIVERSITY**  
*of* **VERMONT**

FACULTY SENATE

February 19, 1999

Dear :

On February 16, the Senate voted unanimously that "effective with the academic year Fall 1999-2000 all students must have completed all graduation requirements prior to taking part in the Commencement ceremony and they may petition their Deans' offices in cases of exigency".

This reflects faculty concern over several aspects of the policy including:

- the growth of "walkers" to around 10% or more of those participating in Commencement
- a significant number of "walkers" who fail to complete graduation requirements and the possibility that walking is a disincentive to subsequent degree completion
- the assumption that it is a right of students and part of the academic planning process rather than a privilege to help out a small number of students
- the belief that the policy encourages lack of rigor and low expectations

We realize that many students with their advisors have planned their schedules this year with the expectation of walking so we have not implemented the change for the upcoming Commencement.

There is provision for exigency which we have left to the Deans' Offices to exercise. This is not an attempt to pass the responsibility but rather to give some discretion for genuine exceptional circumstances. I have a concern, on behalf of faculty, that discretion is applied relatively consistently across units. I suggest that the Assistant Deans may wish to discuss among themselves what sorts of situations might qualify for the infrequent exceptions. I am prepared to get the Senate involved in some guidelines if it is your wish, but my belief is that such centralization should be unnecessary and is probably counterproductive.

Regards,

A. John Bramley  
Chair  
Faculty Senate