

Report of the Educational Affairs Committee to the University Council  
April 23, 2014

The Educational Affairs Committee has met three times since our last report at the September 2013 University Council Meeting. The Petitions Subcommittee meets monthly and since September, 2013, we have reviewed 154 appeals; 107 were approved, 41 were denied and 6 were tabled and reconsidered in later meetings.

We are required to present to Council an annual report on Academic Honesty and we have that today for you as an information item. The Educational Affairs Committee extends our sincere appreciation to Deborah Bell and her staff, along with a number of student and faculty facilitators, who run our academic honesty program so well. This is an important task for our University and requires much effort. Our academic honesty program is a model and again, I wish to thank Debbie for her excellent work.

At our November meeting EAC discussed concerns raised by a faculty member about the number of notetakers employed by the Disability Resource Center and about policies regarding student absences and notetaking. We note that faculty have the option to implement an attendance policy to ensure student attendance. DRC's procedures were deemed acceptable to EAC.

This year, EAC has been working on several important initiatives, which I have been reporting to this body over the past 2 years. Today, we have three action items relating to these issues.

Each year, EAC approves the academic calendar prepared for us by the Registrar. We have the calendar for 2015-2016 for your approval today as an action item.

I have explained to this Council in the past that our academic calendar is becoming increasingly difficult to develop due to several imposed restrictions by the university and the Board of Regents. A calendar subcommittee of EAC spent this year discussing possible changes to the academic calendar to assist with these increasing demands. They recommended a number of changes, including the inclusion of the finals period as instructional time in the calendar. The consideration of the finals period as instructional hours is allowed by the Board of Regents and has been adopted by a few USG schools. In March 2014, the full EAC voted to recommend that UGA adopt an academic calendar that included finals as instructional hours. This is not part of our recommendation for the 2015-16 academic calendar today, but we plan to continue to work next year with the Vice President for Instruction in changes to the calendar that address the challenges we face in scheduling our semesters.

The second action item focuses on the issue of hardship withdrawals and needs your careful attention. Remember that hardship withdrawals are allowed under current policy, and the Office of Student Support Services is able to process hardship withdrawals from courses only in the semester that the hardship occurs. Any hardship withdrawals requested after the semester has concluded must be appealed to the Educational Affairs Committee. First, we would like the policy to clarify the date at which this transition occurs. Currently, the date when grade rolls are available marks the transition, but no one knows what that date is. We propose to make the final day of classes the last date by which the Office of Student Support Services is able to approve a hardship withdrawal, after which EAC gets the appeal. The second element of the proposal is to give the Office of Student Support Services the authority to direct the Registrar to assign grades of WP in the case of complete withdrawal from classes in that semester when the OSSS concludes that a hardship exists. Currently, the OSSS must request a grade from the faculty

member. This takes time, but also forms the basis for appeals to EAC that we feel are best addressed by OSSS before the semester concludes. In the case of partial hardship withdrawals (which should be rare), faculty continue to be responsible for assigning a grade of WP or WF. Since removing faculty input from grades in these circumstances represents a significant concession, we would ask OSSS to report to EAC each year how many hardship withdrawals are processed and the circumstances surrounding any partial hardship withdrawals.

Another change we propose is to allow the EAC petitions subcommittee that ability to assign grades of WP in the case of a retroactive hardship withdrawal without consulting each faculty member. In practice, EAC does this now and it is necessary because of the difficulty in contacting faculty, in some cases years later. But this practice is not consistent with current policy and we seek a change.

Finally, we turn to graduation honors. As I have reported to this Council in the past, the % of UGA students graduating with honors has almost doubled, increasing from 20% to 40%, since 1999. Although that increase is likely due to increasing academic quality of students, EAC feels that the standards must keep up with the students. We propose a modest change to the GPA cutoffs required for graduating with Latin honors, effective in December 2018. EAC will continue to examine the issue of graduation honors as this change goes into effect and will not hesitate to suggest further changes.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rodney Mauricio". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "R" and "M".

Rodney Mauricio, Ph.D.  
Chair, Educational Affairs Committee