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Utah State University
Academic Freedom and Tenure (AFT) Committee

Minutes for meeting held 16 November 2015

In attendance (in person or via dial-in): Bruce Duerden, Kathy Chudoba, Cathy Bullock, Peter Adler, Susan Talley, Anthony Lott, John Stevens, Michael Lyons

Meeting called to order at 3:30 pm, and minutes from the 10/19/15 meeting were approved.

Old Business

- Proposed revisions to section 406
 - AFT members encouraged to look over those proposed revisions and send feedback to Vince Wickwar
- eDossier system and “lock” dates
 - John checked with Larry Smith, who reported back that the confusion over lock dates for adding material to eDossier appears to have been created in only one or two colleges, and will be consistently communicated.

New Business

- Request from Provost to look at possible conflicts of interest when a faculty member has a family member in a class
 - Committee had a good discussion of this, and arrived at the following outline response, which John will send to the Provost:
 1. Students in such situations (feeling they were treated unfairly by a faculty member, family or not) should make use of the grievance process available to them through Student Services (and as outlined in Article VII of the Student Code of Conduct).
 2. In general, we feel that students taking classes from family members should probably be avoided – more to prevent negative perception from others than to “solve” any real problems. It appears that this is an unwritten rule in many departments.
 3. This could potentially be addressed with brief code similar to that found in 407.9.1 (but not in that section, which deals with consensual [and amorous] relationships – this would be a terrible place to put it). That

section hints at the perception problem alluded to in #2 above. Maybe code could be inserted at the end of 403.3.1, as a new code section 403.3.1(11).

4. The potential code revision could clarify that where taking a class from a family member is unavoidable (due to required coursework in a student's chosen major), it would be best to have (or at least allow) a department head or supervisor arrange an independent evaluation of the student's work. (A blanket prohibition against taking classes from family members could unfairly limit student choices.) However:
 - a. Such independent evaluation may simply not be possible for all student work (such as performance or project or participation, where the evaluator really should be in the class every day to see how the course has unfolded). Such independent evaluation may only be reasonable for students' written work with unambiguous solutions.
 - b. Such independent evaluation only addresses grading the student's work, and does not resolve potential conflicts with in-class interactions.
 5. As the AFT committee, we feel that this probably isn't a very common problem, but we are willing to pursue it if the Provost feels strongly that a policy revision is actually needed (keeping in mind #1 above). We'll wait to do anything more on this until we hear from the Provost that such a need exists.
- Apparent need (and golden opportunity) to declutter / demystify / de-lawyerize the grievance process
 - Discussion suggested general positive consensus that the handbook and forms in general should be helpful. A few specific changes were suggested (requiring the code section numbers be specified where code violations are being grieved; adding to the prehearing conference form a list of allegations not to be examined at the hearing)
 - Committee given homework to review the draft handbook and forms, and come to the next meeting with suggestions and ideas. (In particular, the hearing outline found at the end of the prehearing conference form.)
 - Other items from committee
 - Next meeting (last of semester) on Monday 12/7 from 12:30-1:20pm (note different time than usual)

Meeting adjourned at 4:20 pm.