

MONTANA TECH FACULTY SENATE

Friday, October 31, 2008

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

Members present: David Armstrong, Betsy Garlish, Gretchen Geller,
Rod James (Chairperson), Rich McNearny, Kirk Waren, Miriam Young

Members absent: Jerry Downey, John Nugent, Traci O'Neill

Attending without vote: Doug Abbott, John Garic, Thomas Gibson, Steve Luft, Sylvia Moore,
Bill Ryan, Amy Verlanic

Business

This meeting was dedicated to allowing Tom Gibson and Sylvia Moore to present a summary of the Class 8 Certification requirements, and a question and answer session followed. A four-page handout explaining the issue and including drafted definitions and rules was provided.

Here are some highlights from the meeting:

Tom Gibson and Sylvia Moore discussed the origin and evolution of this issue. At some point in the past, the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) was drawn to consider qualifications of individuals or programs being used by Montana's schools, particularly rural, eastern Montana schools where instructors of various levels and credentials were being drawn not only from Montana sources, but from other states as well. OPI needs to ensure the integrity of teachers in our public education system, so ultimately the notion that anyone teaching students for high school credit should be "certified" was extended to apply to college-level instructors that teach high school students.

Tom Gibson noted that he felt this was going to happen, one way or another, and thus it would be in the interests of the colleges to develop a program to certify dual credit instructors in a manner that will meet the requirement, yet be as unobtrusive or disruptive as possible for college instructors. It should not be an onerous undertaking.

As had been noted in earlier meetings, Tom went on to note that this undertaking is meant to benefit Montana students. This plan ultimately strives to reward those motivated students that seek to take advanced college-level classes by allowing them to potentially earn both college credits and high school credits for a class taken. Generally, the cost of such classes are split among the student, the college, and the high school, and by allowing the credits to be dually allotted, it allows both the high school and the college to "count" the student in terms of enrollment for funding purposes. Additional details of school funding mechanisms, attracting new students to college, and so forth, were discussed. In the end, they felt that the students, high schools, and colleges would all benefit from the proposed arrangement.

The big three issues on the table for the Class 8 Certification requirements were identified as 1) The background check, 2) The fact that the Class 8 Certification will not "qualify" recipients to say, quit their jobs and go teach K-12, and 3) The cost of the certification. These were addressed briefly: The background check would be focused toward the type of things that are important for educators – such as adjudicated sex- or children- related crimes. The Class 8 Certification would serve its specific role for college level instructors to include pre-college students in their classes, but not fulfill the requirements, or be an equivalent of, an education degree. Finally, whatever the cost of the certification, the current intent of the task force is

that instructors would not have to pay any such fees. The colleges will have to find a way to absorb or fund these certification activities.

Questions and answers followed. Questions were from the Faculty Senate members and visitors, and the answers were provided by Tom Gibson and Sylvia Moore. The general topics and responses were as follows:

Q. The determination of competency, scores, and pass or fail condition will be of great interest, particularly if someone is denied the certification.

A. It is highly unlikely anyone will be denied certification based on their competency as an instructor, because that is already handled internally at universities. Certain education-specific competencies likely would be addressed in the proposed “four-hour” certification application and training process.

Q. Given the range of faculty responses to this certification issue, from “sure” to “no,” what would happen if a whole department of faculty refuses to comply?

A. No retribution is likely to come from a higher education office; however, the pressure will come from other sources, such as the community.

Q. Will high schools in turn be obligated to accept the high school credits assigned or offered by college courses?

A. No, it will be left to the high schools to determine what they will or will not accept.

Q. What about educators with four-year teaching degrees? Won't they be in a snit about how this “four-hour” certification suffices to match their degree?

A. It doesn't match their degree. It simply allows a high school to grant credits to selected students that have passed a college course. The college instructors will continue to teach college courses.

Q. What will this certification involve?

A. An application being developed is about a two page format. The intent is to keep the process from being unduly difficult, and yet meet the requirement.

Q. What about timing issues, such as last minute notice that a certain instructor will be getting high school students in an unanticipated short time frame?

A. There needs to be an ability to grant a one-time temporary certification for these types of situations.

Q. Why would a student in high school want to take Calculus III at a college when they could just take Shop? Will I need to have lesson plans like high school teachers?

A. These are probably gifted and motivated students. College instructors would be free to continue to teach college level courses under current criteria.

Q. What if a college professor in Engineering teaches math? Would they be certifiable to teach math to high school students?

A. This would entail whatever criteria colleges use to approve or assign course work to instructors. Therefore, instructors would be certified to teach high school students that sign up for what ever class it is they are teaching, whether it falls under their exact degree or field or not.

Q. What about College of Technology's articulated agreements with local high schools that allows the students to take the college classes for free?

A. Not much response offered; that is the COT's affair and part of the Tech-Prep program.

Q. These two items, the Tech-Prep and Class 8 Certifications should be two different conversations. However, this whole effort will result in better transparency and transferability for students that continue on in the Montana University System.

A. Yes.

Q. Who will council high school students on "transitions," recommended courses, and so forth?

A. This is an ongoing challenge. High school counselors are laden with a huge amount of programs and information to disseminate, and also have to deal with things like "who beat up Johnny" that day. All on a nominal salary – so their effectiveness has to be considered carefully and realistically.

Q. What is the deadline for this requirement?

A. Ideally, Fall Semester, 2009.

Q. Is four hours the length of just one part of the process, or does this include filling out the application and so forth as well?

A. The idea is that ultimately, this entire process should only take about a half a day. Otherwise, it is becoming onerous!

Q. What about the case where someone gets a "lower score" in the process? Can they still qualify?

A. They are trying to keep the process simple, and do not anticipate anyone being denied a certification based on their competency. This issue should be taken care of already as part of their normal evaluation and status as instructors at the universities.

Comment made: The real test will come when someone is denied the certification. Then the lawyers will get involved.

On that note, the meeting concluded.

New Business

Due to the dedication of today's meeting to the Class 8 issue, we were unable to address the following new topics:

1. Fill Vacancies on standing committees (from the agenda)
2. Montana Tech's status on the Climate Initiative (a new issue brought by Chancellor Gilmore)

3. Change in age to use Alcohol from 21 to 18: Montana Tech's position (another new issue brought by Chancellor Gilmore)

The Senate group adjourned at about 1:20 PM although a few members had to leave earlier.

NEXT MEETING:

The next meeting of the Faculty Senate is at noon on Nov. 14th, 2008.

Respectfully submitted,

Kirk Waren
Secretary