

Provost's Council Minutes

January 23, 2020

In Attendance: S Becker, P Campbell, R Doster, D Echols Tobe, S Gaulden, S Hangen, L Keller, T Kwak, P Laprey, A Lorenz, D Nast, F Papalia, E Petkus, E Rainforth, E Saiff, N Varma, A Vasishth, and J Yao

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Approval of Minutes:

The Council approved the minutes of the November 26, 2019 Provost's Council meeting.

Report from the Provost:

S Becker shared an update on the Passaic County Community College 3+1 partnership, indicating PCCC faculty and staff would be visiting the campus to meet with Ramapo faculty and staff on January 30, 2020. He also reminded the Council that there is much work to be done after we conclude the Middle States Team visit next month, including finalizing and adopting an Academic Master Plan. This plan will focus on new academic program development and on using assessment findings to improve existing academic programs. S Becker also reported that the College must make every effort to increase our already impressive retention rate as much as possible, as any of the 100+ students who are not retained each year represent lost revenue. In order to decrease the number of students who leave the College, we all must make a concerted effort to do what it takes to maximize student success.

S Gaulden shared an update related to an issue raised at the November 26, 2019 Provost's Council meeting. Specifically, she reported that the Roukema Center director and staff are reviewing all existing policies/procedures to determine if any need to be edited or amended or if any new policies/procedures need to be developed to address issues faced by international students at Ramapo. It is hoped that a summary report of findings will be ready to share at the next Provost's Council meeting on February 26, 2020.

Policies/Procedures to be Voted On/Approved:

Modification to **Policy/Procedure 300-E: Repeat Courses** was discussed at the November 26, 2019 Provost's Council meeting, and Unit Directors were asked to solicit feedback/input from

their Unit members. The consensus of input received concerning how to count repeated courses in the calculation of the major GPA (i.e., to use the **best** grade earned in a repeated course rather than all grades or the last grade) was brought to vote at the January 23, 2020 Provost's Council meeting, and approval was unanimous. [NOTE: Discussion related to the "grade forgiveness" component of **Policy/Procedure 300-E: Repeat Courses** (i.e., a total of two RFs are allowed) will continue at the February 26, 2020 Provost's Council meeting in order to provide more time for Unit feedback/input. Meeting notes related to grade forgiveness are provided below.]

Information Items: Policies/Procedures Recently Modified:

New Policies/Procedures to be Revisited /Clarified:

- **Policy/Procedure 300-KK Integrity of Degree Programs**

Issue: Some language in the current Procedure is inaccurate or outdated and needs correcting or updating. Clarification is needed on the meanings of "concentration" and "track" and on the maximum number of credits required for a major plus the school core.

Meeting Notes: The suggested correction/update language was approved by unanimous vote. Extensive discussion related to the meaning of "concentration" and "track" and the number of credits required for the major plus school core occurred. A summary of points made by Provost's Council members on these topics is given below.

- ✓ S Gaulden requested that the Provost's Council begin discussion on what Ramapo means by a "concentration" and by a "track." She emphasized her opinion that we need to understand how these terms should be used at the College, especially to inform new program development. The language used in **Policy/Procedure 300-KK Integrity of Degree Programs**, which is as follows, is vague at present:

Concentration: A focused area of study within a major. A concentration: is free-standing in relationship to other concentrations within the major with no or few common courses on which all concentrations within that major are built, is substantially different from other concentrations within the major, and is typically employed in a major that has distinctive sub-disciplines. The concentration appears on the transcript.

Track: A focused area of study within a major. A track: functions as a subset of additional courses beyond a common set of courses on which all tracks within that major are built, is fairly similar to other tracks within the major, serves as an advisement path for different populations of students in the major, and is typically utilized in a major that serves populations of students with distinctly different post-graduation plans (e.g., teaching or some health professions). A track does not appear on the transcript.

- ✓ P Campbell shared information on degree requirements for several CA programs including Music, Theater, and Communications, which all have multiple concentrations available. The number of shared major core courses, required of students pursuing *any* of the available concentrations, ranges from a minimum of 2 to a maximum of 5 or 6 in addition to the 1 course required for the CA school core. A question was raised whether majors with concentrations that shared only 2 common courses were actually different enough that they should be considered distinct, separate majors rather than concentrations. To answer this question, it was suggested that we may want to establish a minimum number of shared major core courses or otherwise specify the number of allowed different courses to distinguish each concentration. P Campbell also pointed out that the current way degree requirements for each concentration are presented in the catalog (i.e., are all required courses listed under the concentrations or is there a separate shared major core courses section) and coded in the degree audit vary from program to program and establish inconsistent practice across campus.
- ✓ F Papalia reported that Music students often complete more than one concentration (NOTE: sometimes students even complete 3 concentrations) because there are presently no “double counting” restrictions for concentrations, as there are for first major + second majors, majors + minors, and majors + general education. She raised the question of whether students should be allowed to choose/complete more than one concentration in a major.
- ✓ E Rainforth provided historical context to the discussion. She recalled that when adopted at Ramapo these terms were intended to mean the following: a) a “concentration” was to be distinct enough to show up on the transcript; and b) a “track” was to be more of an advisement path.
- ✓ J Yao shared his definition of a “concentration” by stating his opinion that a distinct, in-depth course of study should be seen.
- ✓ At present, Ramapo has more concentrations than tracks. Tracks include those offered in the English & Literary Studies major, the Liberal Studies contract major, the Teacher Education major.
- ✓ T Kwak compared this issue to minors, which are subject to double counting restrictions (i.e., 50% of the courses completed for a minor must be different from

the courses used to complete a major). He suggested we could survey other colleges such as TCNJ to determine what policies/practices they have in place and how they apply the terms “concentration” and “track.”

- ✓ A Vasishth stated his preference to not add language to the Policy/Procedure that specifies a minimum number shared major core courses. He supports using a 1/3 – 2/3 rule.

The conversation continued to share thoughts on the double counting rules that presently exist at Ramapo. Comments made by Provost’s Council members included the following:

- ✓ E Rainforth asked whether it is fair to restrict a student who completes the required set of courses from being awarded a minor because of the effect of the double-counting rule. For example, if a History major completes the five courses that would be enough to award a History minor to a non-History major, why is the History major not entitled to the minor? Is the current practice of allowing only no more than 50% of the required courses to double count for the major and the minor sufficient or should we increase the number of allowed double-counted courses? (NOTE: TCNJ only allows one course to be double counted for a minor.)
- ✓ S Becker asked who is benefitting from the rule that allows only up to 50% of the courses required for the major and minor to double count? NOTE: The no-more-than-50% rule is also in place for a second major (i.e., at least 50% of the courses counted toward the second major must be independent from the courses counted toward the first major).
- ✓ A question was asked about the value of a minor. T Kwak shared that Ramapo students who complete minors typically either choose a minor that supplements their major or a “wildly different” minor that complements their major.
- ✓ E Saiff reminded everyone that all completed courses appear on the transcript and that a completed minor has value in that it can be seen as an asset when interviewing for a job (e.g., a Computer Science major with a Mathematics minor).
- ✓ R Doster shared a definition from the internet, which stated that a minor is a “second academic discipline,” although this contradicts the complement-the-major minor example shared by T Kwak.

The last component of **Policy/Procedure 300-KK Integrity of Degree Programs** discussed at the January 23, 2020 Provost’s Council meeting was the 68-credit limit for major plus school core requirements. Comments made by Provost’s Council members included the following:

- ✓ S Gaulden shared her concern that several programs at Ramapo currently exceed the 68-credit limit for major + school core prescribed by this Policy/Procedure. She shared the Title 9A, Chapter 1 NJ statute that indicates “approximately half of the required minimum of 120 credits shall be in general education, and the other half shall be in the major and/or in courses necessary to fulfill requirements for the degree.” Is Ramapo College violating the spirit of this state law suggestion/requirement? The recent “creeping major credit” trend/situation may be causing Ramapo students to not pursue as many minors or double majors, which possibly runs counter to the College’s position that pursuing multiple interdisciplinary interests is valuable and may need to be reconsidered. S Gaulden will request trend data to determine whether the number of students in majors whose number of required major + school core credits have “creeped” who are pursuing minors or second majors has declined in recent years.
- ✓ E Petkus stated that the 4-credit courses at Ramapo College make meeting this state suggestion/requirement challenging.

S Gaulden asked that all Provost’s Council members continue these discussions and solicit feedback/input from their Unit colleagues about all of the following topics: a) definitions of “concentrations” and “tracks” and whether we should establish a minimum number of shared major core courses; b) whether students should be allowed to complete more than one concentration in a major; c) the adequacy or fit of the current 50% and double-counting rules for majors + minors and majors + second majors and whether we need such a rule for concentrations + second concentrations; and d) whether the current 68 credits is an appropriate maximum number of credits for major + school core. **Policy/Procedure 300-KK Integrity of Degree Programs** will be included on the February 26, 2020 Provost’s Council agenda for further discussion, which will also be facilitated in the meantime via the Provost’s Council Discussion Board.

- **Policy/Procedure 300-E Repeat Course**

Issue: The Provost’s Council must continue discussion that began at the October 24, 2019 Provost’s Council meeting and continued at the November 26, 2019 Provost’s Council meeting until consensus is reached on how the major GPA should be calculated and on how Ramapo’s “grade forgiveness” procedure should be amended, if at all. The Provost’s Council may want to compare the Ramapo “grade forgiveness” policy and associated procedures with those of other colleges and universities to determine whether our existing Policy and associated Procedure are “competitive” with those of other colleges/universities and the best fit for our students.

Meeting Notes: The Provost’s Council shared feedback/input solicited from their Units. The consensus was that the major GPA should include in the calculation only the best grade awarded for any repeated course. (NOTE: See section *Policies/Procedures to be Voted On/Approved* above.) Discussion on the “grade forgiveness” component of the Policy/Procedure occurred. A summary of points made by Provost’s Council members is given below.

- ✓ S Gaulden reported that several faculty she spoke with were unaware that a course in which a student earned a passing grade could be repeated, which *is* allowed and requires an enrollment override by the Registrar’s Office. Furthermore, the Dean can grant permission for a student to repeat a course more than once.
- ✓ S Hangen shared that HGS faculty are concerned that allowing multiple repeats of a course provides an advantage to wealthier students who can afford the cost of repeating a course. A question was raised as to whether there should be a cap on the number of allowed course repeats to reduce this unfair advantage.
- ✓ E Rainforth added that students who repeat courses they already passed (e.g., Biology majors who are concerned with their GPA being high enough to be accepted to medical school) are taking seats away from or “blocking” those who have not yet taken the course but need it to complete their program requirements.
- ✓ Many Council members expressed support for increasing the number of RFs beyond the current limit of 2. A Lorenz pointed out that SSHS faculty want to make sure that our grade forgiveness policy/procedure keeps Ramapo graduates competitive with those of other colleges and universities. J Yao noted that our 2 RFs is on the low end of the range that exists among other institutions. Several Provost’s Council members supported allowing RFs for up to 4 courses, which could be used when students had a “bad semester,” or otherwise up to 20 credits.
- ✓ E Saiff and A Lorenz pointed out that the Nursing program and Teacher’s Education program have other program-specific requirements, which would trump any allowances set forth in this Policy/Procedure.
- ✓ E Saiff stated that the Mathematics faculty do not like allowing students in developmental-level math courses to be able to use the pass/fail grading option. S Gaulden shared that her past developmental math students who passed the course wanted the grade they worked hard for to count.
- ✓ S Gaulden determined that additional time needs to be allotted in order for Provost’s Council members to request from their Units feedback/input on **Policy/Procedure 300-E Repeat Course** and asked Council members to summarize and post comments from their Unit colleagues on the Provost’s Council Discussion Board for all to review prior to the February 26, 2020 meeting. It is hoped that discussion can reach consensus at the February meeting

so that a formal vote to modify **Policy/Procedure 300-E Repeat Course** can occur at the March 26, 2020 Provost's Council meeting.

- **Policy/Procedure 300-JI Student Military Leave**

Issue: The current Policy/Procedure only specifies options for and rights of the student related to the semester interrupted by the military leave and does not include any information related to readmission to the College after an "extended" leave of absence.

Meeting Notes: The Provost's Council considered a suggestion made by J Connell to add the following paragraph to the end of the existing Procedure: "Students who were called to partial or full mobilization for state or federal active duty can return to campus and immediately assume their student status prior to military leave, which will allow them access to registration for courses in the next semester/term they want to attend without having to apply for readmission to the College." After a brief discussion, which included questioning whether there should be a maximum time limit away from studies specified and whether the Council should instead create a new policy/procedure to cover general leaves from the College, a unanimous vote approved accepting the suggestion exactly as is.

- **Policy/Procedure 300-SS Posthumous Degree**

Issue: This Policy/Procedure does not require edits, but some of the language contained in the procedure is subject to interpretation and needs clarification.

Meeting Notes: The Provost's Council was asked to interpret whether the phrase "50% of the required number of credits..." in the Procedure's statement "A posthumous degree may be awarded if, at the time of death, the student has met one of the following: ... 2. He/she has completed at least 50% of the required number of credits for the appropriate degree (Bachelor's or Master's), is in good standing with the College (e.g., judicial, academic, etc.), and is recommended for the posthumous degree by the appropriate Academic Dean to the Registrar" should include credits completed elsewhere that were successfully transferred into Ramapo College. Many Council members supported being as generous as possible in these situations, as they provide an opportunity for the College to support parents and others in the community who suffered a loss. D Nash questioned whether a student who transferred in all credits (i.e., at least 64) and had not completed any credits at Ramapo at all would be granted a posthumous degree. It was suggested that before Provost's Council proceeds with editing the Policy/Procedure, Cabinet should be

asked their opinion. This item was tabled until Cabinet could weigh in and will be revisited at the February 26, 2020 Provost's Council meeting.

Additional Meeting Notes:

The Provost's Council was asked by TAS faculty to review **Policy/Procedure 300-X: Final Examinations**. Of concern is the requirement that "no exams are to be given within the two weeks prior to the final exam period," which seems to be often violated or worked around (e.g., giving a "final quiz" not an "exam") at present. This Policy/Procedure, as well as any other related policies/procedures, will be added to the February 26, 2020 Provost's Council meeting agenda.

T Kwak brought up the "virtual contact time" issue and asked if we need a policy/procedure to spell out exact expectations when, for example, the College is closed for inclement weather or faculty are virtually meeting with their students in lieu of administering a final exam in week 15 of the semester. This is important to insure the required amount of meeting time to comply with the state definition of a credit hour. This topic will be added to the February 26, 2020 Provost's Council meeting agenda.

F Papalia summarized newly-passed state legislation that requires colleges to provide priority registration for students who are on active duty, which is already the practice at Ramapo. Provost's Council members reached consensus that this perk should be provided only to the active duty students themselves and not to any dependents studying at Ramapo. To make sure this distinction is clear, F Papalia agreed to draft language that can be added to **Policy/Procedure 300-K1 Priority Registration for Students on Active Military Duty**, which will be considered at the February Provost's Council meeting.

Policy/Procedure 300-FF Transferring Academic Credit must be reviewed by the Provost's Council to insure that it is in line with newly-passed state legislation that requires colleges to award up to 6 credits for military service. P Laprey was asked to research and share at the February 2020 Provost's Council meeting the current practice followed at Ramapo to award military credits in order to determine whether any policy, procedure, or practice changes are needed to comply with the new state law.

F Papalia asked Provost's Council to share any objections they might have to a proposed decision to not use wait lists for Summer 2020 term registration. No objections were raised.