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**USFSP FACULTY COUNCIL MEETING
COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES**

13 March 2009

MINUTES

Present: J. Arthur, S. Bundrick, J. Cabness, T. Hallock, J. Gore, R. Johns, J. Schneider.

Jim Gore (Chair) convened the meeting in the Dean's Conference Room at 3:00 pm.

1. Safety Committee Report. Rebecca Johns, Jackie Schneider, and Sheramy Bundrick reported the results of the *ad hoc* Faculty Safety Committee investigation. This arose as the result of several incidents in which threats of bodily harm upon faculty were made by students. Although some sort of investigation had been made, the faculty involved were never notified of actions taken or results of investigation, both Student Affairs and Campus Police citing "student privacy" protection.

The Safety Committee Report is attached to these minutes. The Faculty Council recommended that the Chair of the Faculty Council send the results of this report to the Dean, the USFSP Leadership Council, and CAS Faculty Senators.

2. Faculty Council elections for AY 2009-2010. Jim Gore reiterated that there is an apparent lack of interest on the part of tenured faculty to assume the role of the departed vice-chair, Joanie Spadaro. He has requested that the FC continue to "bend arms" to see if a replacement for Joanie can be found; that person taking over the role of Chair in the next academic year.

3. Other Business

There being no other business, the FC adjourned at 4:05pm.

**Report of the College of Arts and Sciences Faculty Council Safety Committee
March 2009**

Executive Summary

The College of Arts and Science Faculty Council convened a Safety Committee in Fall 2008 to investigate concerns raised by faculty and staff about safety issues on campus. The specific issues of concern, highlighted by recent national events, evolved from several incidents on campus in which staff or faculty felt threatened by a student's behavior. An electronic survey was created and disseminated to all campus faculty and staff regarding these issues. The purpose of the survey was to determine the general state of awareness of policies and procedures for dealing with student behavior that might be considered threatening, disruptive or potentially dangerous; to identify problem areas in the current process of addressing such behavior; and to begin a dialogue between faculty, staff and administration to work toward a climate of safety that is satisfactory to all. The data gathered from the survey was analyzed and a report written and presented to the CAS Faculty Council in March 2009.

The conclusions of the full report, which is attached, are summarized here:

- ❑ There is an alarming lack of knowledge about policies and procedures for dealing with disruptive or threatening students on campus.
- ❑ There is a significant incidence of encounters between faculty or staff and students that might be construed as disruptive, threatening or potentially dangerous.
- ❑ There is a lack of awareness concerning the role of the Office of Student Affairs in handling complaints against students.
- ❑ There is some concern among faculty and staff with the manner in which the Office of Student Affairs handles complaints against students, with particular regard to the complainant's "need to know" the outcome of the complaint.
- ❑ A strong majority of faculty and staff would welcome further education about safety policies and procedures.

The recommendations of the full report are summarized here:

- ❑ Campus policies and procedures for responding to a disruptive or threatening student should be clearly identified and disseminated.
- ❑ The role of the Office of Student Affairs in the process of responding to such an incident should be clarified.
- ❑ An appropriate advocate for the faculty or staff complainant should be identified.
- ❑ Workshops on the policies and procedures for responding to a disruptive or threatening student should be held on campus; such workshops should be a mandatory part of new faculty/staff orientation.
- ❑ A policy that addresses the complainant's "need to know" and the community's need to be informed about potentially dangerous situations on campus while remaining within the limits of the law protecting student privacy, should be developed.
- ❑ Landline phones should be installed in all classrooms.
- ❑ Timing and placement of security personnel in evening hours should be evaluated and revised for optimum safety.
- ❑ Lighting should be evaluated in nighttime hours and full cut fixtures installed in areas that are dim.

Report of the College of Arts and Sciences Faculty Council Safety Committee March 2009

Introduction

In Fall 2008, several members of the CAS faculty expressed concerns to the CAS Faculty Council about a series of episodes involving disruptive and threatening student behavior over the past two years. Questions about the handling of these events and a need for clarification of the campus' policies and procedures for dealing with potentially dangerous student behavior were raised. In light of national tragedies involving student shootings and stabbings in recent months, the Council appointed a safety committee to investigate the safety climate on campus and to explore opportunities to collaborate with campus Administration and Police in order to increase awareness and safety on campus. This committee consists of Drs. Sheramy Bundrick, Rebecca Johns and Jackie Schneider.

The Safety Committee determined that an information gathering survey would be useful in identifying the specific safety concerns of faculty and staff on our campus. The survey was designed and disseminated electronically to all COB, COE and CAS faculty and staff, the departments of Advising, Enrollment, Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Physical Plant, and the Library, as well as to the Campus Police. The survey focused specifically on awareness of policies and procedures for handling disruptive and threatening student behavior, as well as satisfaction with the handling of such cases by campus officials.

The committee's decision to focus on student behavior was based on both national events and the complaints made by faculty to the Council about how these types of incidents were handled on campus. In addition, the decision was made not to focus on threats from people external to the campus community. External threats can be dealt with in a straightforward manner by the Campus Police by removing or arresting the offending person. Student behavior, however, constitutes a gray area of action because students have a right to be present on campus, and because identifying the appropriate response to threatening or potentially dangerous student behavior may be difficult. Policies and procedures clearly must balance student rights with the right of faculty and staff to a safe work environment.

Objectives

The purpose of the survey was to gather information and prompt discussion in the following key areas:

- The level of awareness of campus policies and procedures for dealing with disruptive or threatening students;
- The level of awareness of the existence of a judicial procedure through the Office of Student Affairs for resolving issues involving disruptive or threatening students;
- Identifying areas of concern about the handling of complaints against students;
- Identifying areas of concern regarding advocacy for, and the rights of, the faculty or staff member filing a complaint against a disruptive or threatening student;
- Opening discussion about the "need to know" concept in regard to the outcome of a complaint against a student;
- Determine the purpose and appropriate application of FERPA; and
- The general climate of safety on USFSP campus

Survey Results

A summary of the survey results is attached (Appendix A). In this report, we will highlight the most significant findings of the report.

Response Rate

Eighty-four individuals completed the online survey. The survey was designed to prevent more than one submission per computer. Respondents could not go back and change their responses once they had submitted the survey.

The majority of respondents were tenured faculty (26.8%), followed closely by untenured faculty (25.6%) and staff (22%). Adjunct faculty constituted 11% of responses (18 reporting) and Administrators constituted 9.8% (8 reporting). The largest group responding was from the College of Arts and Sciences (43.9%), which is the largest administrative unit on campus. Participants from CAS were followed by equal numbers from COE (13.4%), COB (13.4%) and Enrollment Services (13.4%). Five individuals from the Campus Police responded (6.1%); four from Academic Affairs (4.9%) and 2 from Student Affairs (2.4%). Sixty-three percent of respondents were women, and 41% have worked at USFSP for 6 to 10 years. Thirty-three percent have worked at USFSP for 1 to 5 years, and 21.7% for more than ten years.

Incidence rate for episodes involving disruptive or threatening students

More than half of the respondents (53.7%) indicated that they have had an experience with a disruptive or threatening student in their years at USFSP.

Lack of Awareness of Policies and Procedures

The survey clearly highlights the general lack of awareness of the campus policies and procedures for dealing with disruptive or threatening students. Sixty-three percent of respondents were *not familiar* with campus *policies* concerning disruptive or threatening students, and 67% were *not familiar* with campus *procedures* for dealing with disruptive or threatening students. While the majority of respondents were aware that the Office of Student Affairs is the unit through which faculty and staff may pursue action against a student whose behavior is disruptive or threatening, 33.7% of respondents were not.

Sixty-seven percent of respondents *disagreed or disagreed strongly* with the statement “I feel well-informed about the steps available to me in the event that I encounter a disruptive or threatening student.” A majority of respondents did not feel that policies and procedures for dealing with threatening situations are either *clearly stated* or *disseminated* (see questions 23, 24, 25, and 26).

Perhaps even more disturbing than the overall lack of familiarity with campus policies related to student behavior was the fact that only 2.7% of respondents thought the campus administration has adequately “prepared employees for dealing with potentially dangerous, disruptive or threatening students.” Only 31% of respondents indicated that they “know where to obtain the procedures to follow” when a dangerous situation occurs.

Use of the Office of Student Affairs Judicial Process

Of those individuals who indicated that they had experienced an episode of disruptive or threatening student behavior, 93.3% did not file a complaint with the Office of Student Affairs.

Some of the comments made by respondents in this section are included here:

I had the experience at another institution where student affairs could not maintain confidentiality nor deal with the issue when it embarrassed the institution. Sounds good, but Student Affairs can only respond to minor issues and SA are not lawyers, nor law enforcement, nor protective of faculty.

Was not informed that filing judicial charges was an option.

It was handled by the student being referred to the counseling services

Successfully convinced student to leave the class

I don't think that I knew the exact process that was in place and I also left it up to my superiors to make certain that the situation was handled properly.

I did not realize that was part of the procedure.

My experience is that they do not take such charges seriously and only advocate for the student.

Campus police removed the student from the classroom and I never saw him again.

I was not aware that the Office of Student Affairs handles these issues.

I was told that it would do no good. As I stated before, all of a sudden I was the trouble maker and not the student. "We can't do anything about him," was all I was told.

These comments highlight a lack of knowledge on the campus about the role of the Office of Student Affairs (OSA) in handling complaints against students who have violated the campus Student Code of

Conduct. The comments also raise questions about what exactly the role of the OSA is, i.e., to protect students or to enforce the Code of Conduct.

Effectiveness of the judicial procedure in the Office of Student Affairs

While the strong majority of respondents did not have an opinion about the effectiveness of the Office of Student Affairs' handling of complaints against students, 33% of respondents indicated that they did not feel the Office of Student Affairs has been handling such complaints effectively. However, of the three individuals completing the survey who had filed complaints against disruptive or threatening students with the Office of Student Affairs, one was *satisfied* with the process, one was *dissatisfied* with the process, and one was *very dissatisfied* with the process. Responses were the same for the related question of how satisfied the respondents were with the *outcome* of the process of investigation through the Office of Student Affairs.

Specific concerns raised in the comments sections include:

NO FEEDBACK ON WHAT ACTION IS TAKEN (if any)

I believe the student needed to speak with someone to call attention to the fact that their behavior was problematic and they needed to bring it into line. I do not believe anyone, other than myself, went out of their way to have a discussion with the student. The student blatantly ignored my request to speak with him, but did settle down, probably sensing their behavior was out of line. I believe an important opportunity for personal growth and development was missed because Student Services "dropped the ball".

I was NEVER given an update on the case. When I would ask--I was told I was not entitled to know. I found the Office to be uncaring about potentially dangerous situation I was facing. I found the Office to hide behind FERPA when FERPA clearly does not exclude the sharing of certain information. I found that Office to down-play safety and seriousness of situations. I had faith in the system and because of my experience I will NEVER go to that office again. I'll simply call police and take formal action.

These comments highlight concerns about the concept of "need to know" once a complaint has been filed, which is discussed below.

Discussion of "Need to Know"

Another issue of concern raised with the Council and included in the survey is the question of who should be informed of the *occurrence* of an incident with a disruptive or threatening student, and who should be informed of the *outcome* of a judicial hearing or investigation into disruptive and threatening student behavior.

When asked who should be informed of an incident on campus involving a disruptive or threatening student, the most common answers were:

The employee's immediate supervisor (80.5%)
The Dean of the employee's unit (79.3%)

The Campus Police (76.8%)
The Office of Student Affairs (73.2%)
The Office of Academic Affairs (54.9%)

Forty-seven percent thought the advisor for the student should be informed of such incidents, and forty-five percent of respondents also thought the Counseling Center should be informed.

When asked to indicate who they actually informed of the incident when one occurred, the responses were:

My immediate supervisor (46.7%)
Campus Police (35.6%)
The Dean of my unit (28.9%)
The Office of Student Affairs (24.4%)

Only 8.9% informed the student's advisor of the incident, and only 4.4% informed the Office of Academic Affairs. Eleven percent did inform the Counseling Center.

Seventy-two percent of respondents strongly agreed with the statement that the Campus Police should be informed of the outcome of an investigation into disruptive or threatening student behavior when the police referred the case to the OSA initially.

The survey indicates that there is some agreement among the respondents about who ought to be informed about these types of incidents. Comments indicate concerns about the lack of a process in which the appropriate people are notified when a potentially dangerous situation has arisen, and the lack of a timely or transparent line of communication between the Office of Student Affairs, the Police, and the person filing the complaint. Since the complainant is presumably the primary person in potential danger, it would seem reasonable that the complainant be informed when the process of investigation into his or her complaint is completed and what general actions have been taken to ensure his or her safety. Clearly further discussion is needed among the campus community to rectify the potential conflict between the laws that protect a student's privacy, the community's "need to know" about potentially dangerous persons or situation, and the right of the complainant to be assured that his or her safety has been protected.

Discussion of Advocacy for Complainant

The Faculty Council was made aware of concerns about the apparent lack of advocacy or support for a faculty member or staff member filing a complaint against a student. While it is clear that the Office of Student Affairs serves as an advocate for student rights, no comparable office could be identified to protect faculty and staff rights in the event of a conflict with a student. Hence, the survey was designed to probe this issue further and evaluate the extent of this concern among the campus community.

In response to the question, "When charges are filed against a student for threatening a campus employee, who do you think is responsible for advocating the EMPLOYEE's rights?", the most frequently chosen answer was "The Dean of the employee's unit" (62.2%). This was followed in frequency by "the employee's immediate supervisor" (52.4%) and "the Office of Academic Affairs" (46.3%). The employee's union representative was also chosen frequently (41.5%). However, 23.2% of respondents felt that there was no one else responsible for advocating the employee's rights except the employee.

We recommend further discussion of this issue within the campus community. There is clearly no consensus about the identification of an office or individual that advocates an employee's rights during a conflict with a potentially dangerous student. Based on complaints filed with the Faculty Council and the survey responses, the Safety Committee feels that such an advocate should be identified and made known to the campus community.

General Climate of Safety on the USFSP Campus

While 74% of respondents indicated that they feel very safe working at USFSP, 23.4%, nearly one in four, indicated that they did not feel safe. Over sixty percent of respondents felt that telephones should be installed in all classrooms to allow faculty and students a quick line to 911 in case of an emergency.

Additional comments include the following:

Security between 8 - 10 pm needs to be more visible as students and staff walk to parking.

The lighting on campus is too dim; I feel unsafe walking to my car in any of the USFSP lots. Training should be required, not optional, for all employees including administrators, supervisors and managers. Our security guard in the COB building, Lee, is wonderful! We need more people like him.

I don't have the feeling that the administration really cares. I had two cases of threatening students so far, and I felt I was pretty much on my own. In the first incident, the student's father left threats all over the place because I dared to assign his daughter a final grade of "D." These threats weren't even sufficient for the university to try to get a restraining order for the man. I was told campus police would keep their eyes open for him. Great, how reassuring. In the second case, a student threatened his group members and their parents. Everybody in the COB was upset, the Office of Student Affairs did NOTHING. The next time something like this happens, I will not even bother with following USFSP procedure, I will go straight to St. Pete's police department. There, things like this are being taken more seriously. This is very important for me not just because of my own safety, but because I also feel responsible for my students' safety.

I had a serious medical situation (a student situation) in my course last semester and I was unclear as to what to do. When the campus student safety officer came he never identified himself. The police and the paramedics never asked who was in charge. The police officer even gave me a weird look for trying to talk to him. I think they should have determined who the professor was in this situation so there was clear communication among all responsible parties. Overall, it took a long time for the police to arrive and the situation left me feeling we were very ill equipped to deal with serious situations.

There is no policy for student disruption with distance courses or dealing with mental illnesses where both safety and confidentiality are balanced. All potential safety issues should be public, but that might violate confidentiality. Generally, institutions hide crimes. There should be a policy that allows background checks on students (and faculty). All employees should have a criminal conviction background check. Some form of criminal check and mental health check should be conducted for all students, also. Frankly, if something is potentially embarrassing or

leads to a student threatening a lawsuit, I would not trust USFSP to make it public or pursue it. Regular police are more likely to baker act or take action.

Like most things here on campus; everything, including safety, a well kept secret. Interesting that in your list of options, Human Resources was not on the list. Why? They should be conducting workshops and informing new employees of policies and procedures. This would include safety!

Have a permanent site that is devoted to procedures related to threatening students or non-students.

I think that the emergency phones around campus should be checked monthly and that each building should have at least one emergency phone in the halls. If there is a violent student, a faculty member would not be able to get to a phone in a classroom, but an escaping student or one that heard the commotion could get to one in the hall.

Telephones or something should be installed in classrooms and offices that deal with students around campus. If you are dealing with a difficult student and stop to pick-up the phone and dial the police department you could be DEAD by the time they get to your office.

Wish there was more visible police presence at the beginning and end of the working day. Now, most of us have to part in more remote lots. That brings concerns for safety.

Quit hiding behind FERPA. Put into action things that will PROACTIVELY protect university employees from harm. NO VIRGINIA TECH here!

Suggested Actions

Based on the complaints brought to the attention of the Faculty Council and the survey data, we make the following recommendations:

- The CAS Safety Committee work with the appropriate administrators to ensure that campus policies and procedures for responding to a disruptive or threatening student be clearly identified and disseminated among the campus community for discussion. This would include a review and clarification of the role of the Office of Student Affairs and the identification of the appropriate advocate for the complainant.
- Over 70% of respondents indicated they would be interested in attending workshops to discuss campus preparedness for dealing with disruptive or threatening student behavior; we recommend that the Faculty Councils work with the Administration (including Human Resources if appropriate) to hold such workshops
- The CAS Safety Committee or other designees work with the administration to develop a policy that addresses the complainant and the community's need to know about potentially dangerous situations on campus while also remaining within in the limits of the law protecting student privacy.

- Campus administration investigate the feasibility of installing land line phones in all classrooms.
- The timing and placement of security personnel after hours be evaluated and revised for optimum safety. Security personnel should know when and where classes are released in the evenings.
- Lighting should be evaluated and areas that are dim should have new lights installed.

Respectfully submitted,
Sheramy Bundrick
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Jackie Schneider