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Dean

April 30, 2008

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To: Louis Marvick, Chair  
Academic Standards Committee

Stephen Rock, Chair  
Faculty Senate

From: Kathy Boardman, Associate Dean  
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**Subject: Comments on the Year End Report of the Academic Standards Committee (Charge 1)**

This memo is in response to a suggestion that feedback on the draft report of the Culture of Completion Subcommittee should be directed to you at this time. During the past few weeks, at meetings of the Academic Affairs/Student Services Council, Target 500 Retention Subcommittee, and University Courses and Curriculum Committee, members of the culture of completion subcommittee have reported on the committee's findings and suggestions, but there has been little opportunity for thoughtful input from advisors and academic units that might be affected (and whose majors will be affected) by the suggested policy changes. We would like to provide a portion of that input now.

**Probation, Disqualification, Suspension and Dismissal**

Serious resource and procedure issues arise from the two recommendations made by the committee in this area. Required contracts and de facto mandatory advising for students on probation as well as students on disqualification would be impossible to enforce, given current college resources.

**1. Resources:** Personnel and resource issues need to be examined before, not after, college advising staff are charged with coordinating study contracts and performing required advising services for significantly larger numbers of students.

For example, the College of Liberal Arts currently has 81 students on academic probation and 65 students on disqualification. **The total number of potential "contract" students for CLA, then, would be 146.**

It should also be noted that, in this college alone, 103 students are now on academic warning and thus on their way to becoming "contract" students under the proposed model. In addition, our *current* practice is to send a letter to every student in the college who earns <2.0 for the semester; this letter lists relevant campus resources and urges the student to meet with a college advisor. In Fall 2007, CLA had **307** such students. Approximately 13% contacted the college advisor for help.

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In accordance with recently instituted policies, college advisors also take the lead in first- and second-semester mandatory freshman advising. In addition, like departmental faculty advisors, college advisors have additional duties beyond advising (including increased expectations for their recruitment roles). Our college and departmental advisors are not reluctant to meet with students—quite the contrary—but they are concerned with creating reasonable conditions (and numbers) that allow quality advising to occur.

**2. Questions about process and implications:** The “Summary and Rationale” on p. 15 of the subcommittee’s report indicates that the committee “received recommendations from Student Services staff that probationary & disqualified students should receive more frequent, structured advisement (perhaps following an established protocol. . .)” Student Services staff, however, do not perform academic advising and thus may not be aware of the questions and problems that academic advisors themselves might point out.

For Recommendation 1: What is the reason for requiring a department chair and dean’s signature on the (proposed) contract? Would Admissions and Records remove all the holds on the students’ registration, once the dean’s signature is received? What can be done about the inevitable time gap between the advisement session (in which the contract is drawn up and signed) and the removal of the hold after the contract has made its way to three additional offices for signatures?

For Recommendation 2, “Students not raising their GPA above the threshold for disqualification after two semesters should be suspended from UNR for two years and not readmitted until they can present a record of 15 semester hours of transferable credit at a community college or other accredited institution, with a minimum GPA of 2.5.” If we allow approved students to enroll in more than two classes (there is currently a 6-credit limit for DQ students), then this may not be a serious issue. However, what if a student has already met or exceeded the number of community college credits that may be used toward UNR graduation? Such a student would not have an option in Northern Nevada of attending another four-year institution. What if the courses the student needs are not offered at a community college? Must the student simply take random courses until the 2.5 is achieved?

In brackets in the Recommendation 2 paragraph: “The subcommittee’s other recommendations in this category were not voted on.” We have questions about these other recommendations, specifically #5, #6, and #7, but will not raise them here as the full committee has not sent them ahead to the Faculty Senate.

### **Instructor Permission Required to Drop between the Second and Eighth Weeks**

We argue that the stated rationale—“to compel dialogue between student and instructor regarding this important decision”—is rather sad and does not outweigh the counter-rationale: students who do not wish to be compelled into dialogue and students who cannot locate their instructor for a signature in time for the drop deadline will take an F in the course, thus further imperiling their scholarship and college completion prospects.

Incidentally, a similar purpose—encouraging dialogue between student and professor regarding this important decision—might be more effectively facilitated by midterm progress reporting (see committee report, p. 3): if instructors gave midterm (*eighth week*) notice of mediocre and failing grades,

and if the drop deadline were also moved back to the *tenth week* of the semester, this would allow both student and professor a reasonable time during which to accomplish these important discussions.

### **Revisions to Grade Replacement Policy**

Recommendation 2: "Students may not repeat a course for which a grade of C or better is earned (except where specific degree programs require higher grades; honors courses may also be excepted.)" How will this affect student pre-majors for programs that require certain GPAs for entrance? If honors courses are excepted from this policy, will this raise an equity issue? Why should honors students have chances to try for impressive GPAs when non-honors students are no longer allowed to do this?

Recommendation 3: "...repeating a course withdrawn from does not count as a grade replacement attempt." This appears to encourage course-dropping rather than perseverance. In another context, many complaints have risen about students who repeatedly sign up for classes and then withdraw prior to completion—thus taking up seats that other students might otherwise have used.

Recommendation 5: "Allow only one grade replacement attempt per course, although more are permissible with approval from the Dean/Chair and academic advisor. . . . [with] a plan for improvement, drafted and signed by both student and advisor. . ." This threatens to involve meaningless paperwork for chair and dean (unless they wish to be involved in order to monitor class size and registration priorities)--and the advisor will become embroiled in still more contract-making (see resource issues). A similar desired effect might be achieved by allowing up to two grade replacement attempts for one course (perhaps counting both attempts against the 5-course maximum) without requiring approval of dean/chair.

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