

## FACULTY SENATE MINUTES

February 11, 2016

**Call to order:** A regular meeting of the Faculty Senate of the University of North Alabama was held in room 330 of the University Commons on February 11, 2016. The meeting convened at 3:30 p.m. with President Sarah Franklin presiding.

**Proxies:** President Franklin recognized the following proxies: Chris Purser for Leah Graham from Politics, Justice and Law; Frank Diaz for Amanda Coffman from Chemistry and Industrial Hygiene; Lynne Rieff for George Makowski from History; and Marilyn Lee for Will Brewer from Nursing.

**Members in attendance:** Rae Atencio, Doug Barrett, David Brommer, Amy Butler, Lisa Clayton, Katherine Crisler, Paul Davison, Mohamad Elmasry, Sarah Franklin, Bob Garfrerick, Mark Greer, Clarissa Hall, Dan Hallock, Felecia Harris, Richard Hudiburg, Scott Infanger, Keith Jones, Lisa Kirch, Ian Loeppky, Lamont Maddox, John McGee, Janet McMullen, Michelle Nelson, Johnson Ogun, Alaina Patterson, Lesley Peterson, Jeffrey Ray, Lee Renfroe, Craig Robertson, Pat Roden, Richard Statom, Daniel Stevens, Jessica Stovall, Alexander Takeuchi, Karen Townsend. President Kitts and Vice President Thornell were also in attendance.

**Members not in attendance (without proxy):** Shane Banks, Daryl Brown, and Michele Derouen.

**Approval of agenda:** Doug Barrett moved to amend the agenda to move Nick Lang's remarks before those of President Kitts. Richard Statom seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. Richard Statom moved to amend the agenda by adding Diversity Week to New Business. Lee Renfroe seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. Richard Statom moved to approve the amended agenda. Marilyn Lee seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**Approval of minutes:** Doug Barrett moved approval of the minutes of the January 14, 2016 meeting. Lee Renfroe seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**Remarks from SGA President Nick Lang:** Mr. Lang reported that the SGA is trying to recruit students to attend Higher Education Day on Thursday, February 25. There will be two buses available to transport students and faculty to Montgomery. The buses will be leaving at 6:00 a.m., and breakfast will be provided. President Lang asked faculty to help in efforts to increase student participation. He asked them to excuse absences for students who attend. Attendance will be kept so that faculty will be able to verify which students attended.

**Remarks from President Kitts:** President Kitts reported on Board of Trustees appointments, enrollment, the Executive Committee forums, and the smoking/tobacco policy. The Alabama Senate confirmed the appointment of Todd Ouellette to the Board of Trustees. He replaces former trustee Lisa Ceci who did not seek reappointment. The reappointment of the other eight members of the Board were also confirmed. Regarding enrollment, the news is good. Total headcount is up 4.65% from last spring. Credit hour production is up 6.4% Numbers for the upcoming fall semester are trending higher than last year. Applications are up 63% over the same point last year. The freshman acceptance rate is also higher than last year. The faculty and student forums with the Executive Council went well. Because the faculty forum was cut short due to the weather, the EC was not able to address all questions submitted. President Kitts plans to make these forums an

annual event. An issue with vaping has brought the University's tobacco policy into consideration. While the EC made the decision to ban vaping because they felt it would be in line with the spirit of the policy, President Kitts would like us to consider the adequacy of our existing policy. He reported that about 1400 college campuses in the US have gone tobacco-free or smoke-free, including local institutions NWSCC and Heritage Christian.

**Remarks from Vice-President Thornell:** Vice President Thornell gave an update on the status of the tenure and promotion revisions. The group reviewing the policy had a final meeting on February 4 to review the policy in light of feedback received from university legal counsel. The group is doing one final review. The policy will be sent to department chairs next. The chairs will be asked to distribute the draft policy to all full-time faculty and to convene a faculty meeting to gather feedback. The feedback will be compiled at the college level. Dr. Thornell stressed that the changes do not relate to qualifications but instead to processes. The changes that he noted were: coupling tenure and promotion to Associate Professor; reducing the number of years in rank before faculty are eligible for promotion; and sending notifications about each stage to the candidates and giving them a chance for rebuttal. He reminded the Senate that existing faculty are grandfathered in under the existing policy. However, faculty still in their probationary period will be given the option of staying with the current policy or following the new policy.

### **Reports:**

**Academic Affairs Committee:** No report.

**Faculty Affairs Committee:** The committee's report is addressed under unfinished business.

**Faculty Attitude Survey Committee:** President Franklin reported that the survey will be going out to faculty very soon. She asked Senators to encourage their departmental faculty to complete the survey.

### **Unfinished Business:**

**Sick Leave:** Faculty Affairs Committee Chair Lisa Kirch presented her committee's recommended policy. The Senate voted to approve the policy as presented (See Attachment A).

**Office Hours/Communication:** Faculty Affairs Committee Chair Lisa Kirch presented two choices of wording from her committee (See Attachment B). The Senate voted to consider the first choice.

Richard Statom moved to amend the proposed policy by adding "except that office hours in excess of seven hours or on days that the faculty member does not have scheduled classes is at the sole discretion of individual faculty members" to the end of the third sentence. Jessica Stovall seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Richard Statom moved to amend the policy to add "of full-time faculty" after "subject to a majority vote" in the third sentence of the amended policy. Doug Barrett seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Clarissa Hall moved to amend the policy to add “academic” before “needs” in the second sentence. Daniel Stevens second the motion. The motion failed.

Richard Statom moved to amend the policy to remove “After approval by the department chair” from the last sentence. Craig Robertson seconded the motion. The motion passed by a vote of 29-3-1.

The Senate voted in favor of approving the policy, as amended, by a vote of 32-0-1 (See Attachment C for a copy of the policy with all approved amendments).

**New Business:**

**Smoke Free and Tobacco-free Campus:** Richard Hudiburg moved that UNA adopt a tobacco-free campus policy. Lee Renfroe seconded the motion. The motion was withdrawn. Ian Loeppky moved that UNA Faculty Senate advocate for a smoke-free and tobacco-free campus. Lee Renfroe seconded the motion. Lesley Peterson moved to postpone the vote until the March meeting to give Senators time to consult with their departments. Richard Hudiburg seconded the motion. The motion to postpone carried.

**Diversity Week:** President Franklin informed the Senate that ODIE would like Faculty Senate to be a partner with them on Diversity Week. Richard Statom moved for Senate to support Diversity Week. Daniel Stevens seconded the motion. The motion carried.

**Information Items:** None

**Adjournment:** Lesley Peterson moved adjournment. Richard Hudiburg seconded the motion. The motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 5:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Amy Butler  
Secretary  
Faculty Senate

Approved March 10, 2016

**Draft Sick Leave Policy  
Faculty Affairs**

The University provides sick leave to eligible faculty in order to prevent loss of income when the faculty member is unable to work. For precise, up-to-date information, faculty should consult the [UNA Employee Policy Manual and Handbook](#). As outlined there, categories of sick leave include personal illness/accident leave and physician appointments; maternity leave; family illness/accident leave; bereavement leave (death of a family member); funeral leave; personal leave; on-the-job injury leave; and miscellaneous uses.

Faculty who miss class time and office hours for any of those reasons (and are thus unable to complete their assigned duties) should report sick leave when they are unable to arrange substitute means of teaching missed classes (e.g., through lectures posted online) or when they are unable to reschedule the missed office hours.

## FACULTY AFFAIRS DRAFT POLICY, Jan.-Feb. 2016

### 3.2.3 Office Hours

#### 7 committee members; chair abstaining

**First Choice of Committee** (4 votes as first choice; 4 votes for amendment in bold; 2 votes against amendment)

Faculty-student interactions outside of the classroom are among the most important relationships on a college campus. Interactions of faculty in diverse colleges require meeting needs of individual students in multiple contexts. To promote flexibility, College Deans and Departments, in collaboration **and subject to a majority vote in individual departments**, will determine appropriate, regular hours that will facilitate student-faculty interaction for consultation, discussion, and advisement. After approval by the department chair, faculty members will list their office hours on all syllabi at the beginning of each semester.

**Second Choice of Committee** (3 votes as second choice)

Faculty-student interaction outside of the classroom is one of the most important relationships on a college campus. The purpose of clearly defined, publicly posted office hours is to facilitate this interaction through consultation, discussion, and advisement with individual students. In keeping with that goal, it is expected that faculty members will maintain regular office hours for student consultation in addition to their teaching assignments. Establishing individual guidelines for office hours is left to each department in accordance with its needs and in consultation with its dean. After approval by the department chair, faculty members will list their office hours on all syllabi at the beginning of each semester.

#### **Rationale**

How and why did we go from discussing communicating with students to office hours, when the COAD-revised policy made no changes to the number of office hours? COAD broke the existing policy into two parts: "Office Hours and Communication." We've dealt with the latter and are now dealing with the former because COAD's insertion of communication revealed a significant problem.

In its addition to the policy, COAD removed original wording about the relationships formed through faculty-student interaction outside the classroom. Nowhere did COAD's revision mention such relationships, which faculty members know to be critical in supporting learning and retention.

This is why we're talking about office hours. Colleagues within and outside the Senate have commented on the existing policy, and scholarly studies confirm that office hours fail to achieve the goal of building relationships—they're not even good as a means of merely communicating with students. Rather than focus on X number of office hours, we should reimagine what role office hours play in UNA's teaching mission. If traditional office hours

don't work, what works better? How else can we connect with students to help them succeed and stay at UNA?

### The new policy

1. Empowers the deans and departments to set individual policies;
2. Encourages each department to start a conversation on how best to reach students;
3. Respects differing disciplinary/departmental needs, e.g., faculty like those in art who work hands-on with students in the studio 6 hours per course each week; other faculty whose teaching involves intensive one-on-one student contact such as teaching observation or supervising fieldwork; online faculty (MBA; nursing); night classes; and library faculty, who do not keep office hours (see colleagues' comments below);
4. Takes into account research showing that office hours do not improve student retention; what works is informal interaction (see further reading below);
5. Provides greater flexibility: anyone who wants to keep longer hours is free to do so;
6. Considers how a non-academic audience sees us: not attaching specific numbers promotes a more positive perception of faculty ("These people teach 12 hours and are in the office for 7 hours. They work only 19 hours a week!");
7. Recognizes that technology has changed how students communicate; they prefer virtual contact (see further reading below);
8. Encourages innovation in faculty-student interaction;
9. Acknowledges that strict office hours hamper faculty as we prepare for teaching or as we conduct our research;
10. Improves retention and recruitment of new faculty members by showing trust and respect;
11. Prevents policy from conflicting with spontaneous interaction, e.g., "I'm so sorry, I can't talk to you right now; I have to get to my office hours."

## SUPPORTING MATERIAL

### COAD REVISION

Faculty-student ~~interaction~~ **communication** outside of the classroom is ~~one of the most an~~ important ~~relationships on~~ **part of student learning outcomes** ~~a college campus.~~

~~This interaction~~ **communication** should include both availability during office hours and communicating with students through the learning management system, and email, and telephone.

**Office Hours.** The purpose of clearly defined, publicly posted office hours is to facilitate this ~~interaction~~ **communication** through consultation, discussion, and advisement with individual students. In keeping with that goal, faculty members will be available for consulting and advising with individual students. As a part of their regular assignment, faculty will schedule a minimum of seven hours per week during the regular fall and spring semesters and three and one-half hours per week during the summer term.

These hours will be scheduled at times that best accommodate student access. Faculty with reduced teaching loads may schedule a reduced number of office hours. ~~Faculty members are not required to have office hours on days when they do not have classes on campus. Faculty members who teach fully online will satisfy the office hour requirement by~~

~~identifying seven hours of online office hours.~~ Faculty with online and face-to-face classes ~~courses~~ may ~~partially~~ proportionately satisfy the requirement with online office hours. Faculty members who teach fully online will satisfy the office hour requirement by identifying seven hours of online office hours. During online office hours, faculty members will be available to communicate with students via the learning management systems or email. ~~Faculty members are not required to have office hours on days when they do not have classes on campus.~~

After approval by the department chair and consultation with the dean, faculty members will post their office hours on all syllabi at the beginning of each semester. ~~The syllabi for all online or hybrid courses will be posted in the learning management system.~~ Office hours shall be posted on or near office doors (as appropriate), ~~course syllabi, and made available to students on course syllabi,~~ in course syllabi, and in the learning management system if any online office hours are offered to students.

**Communication.** CoAD-added section omitted here (voted down in Senate; not stipulated in manuals of peer institutions)

### COMMENTS SENT TO COMMITTEE CHAIR

**Colleague A:** From my perspective, and based on feedback from my department, the less rigidity, the better. ... Unless there is evidence of a problem ... I would lean strongly toward less regulation rather than more. Office hours: I strongly [agree] that we should [not] increase beyond seven hours per week. In fact, I find that to be on the high side ... . [Some] schools would consider themselves strongly teaching-focused; they are not “research” schools, although they try to provide faculty with enough balance to work on research. UNA does not in my experience. Although some of our “peer” schools indicate 10 hours per week, I find that very much out of touch with today’s climate. Given today’s online environment and the fact that many (most?) of us find ourselves responding to emails during the evenings and weekends from home, even over breaks, it seems unnecessarily rigid to set large minimums as if we are not otherwise responsive to students. As is probably the case with most here at UNA, I am here far more than the seven hours anyway. There is no need to take away what few “perks” we have as academics. With the increasing loads being placed on faculty at UNA ... and the lack of COLAs, why take away the flexibility that drew most of us to the academic route? Each year, our purchasing power decreases while the expectations increase. One further point is that NO office hours should be required when one is not teaching, e.g. during the summer. That is our only time to work on research or take an extended break, so I won’t be here during the summer except when I decide to be.

**Colleague B:** UNA says it wants to become a bit more research-focused, yet continues to act as though the school is exclusively (or primarily) a teaching institution. Given the extent to which UNA focuses on teaching at the expense of research, it is perhaps no surprise that there is a lack of research productivity on campus. In my department, we do not have a problem meeting student meeting demands — in fact, professors complain that students rarely come to office hours. We do have a research productivity problem, however — collectively, our department publishes very little. Based on conversations I’ve had with ... colleagues, I get the sense that the situation may be similar in other departments. I was recruited ... on the explicit expectation that I would be an active and aggressive publisher, and that I would work to encourage peers to conduct research. I think research productivity

will continue to lag behind as long as UNA continues with policies that are consistent with teaching-exclusive objectives. Office hours is, of course, only one small piece to this larger puzzle, but I do think it is an important issue.

Similar institutions ... routinely require only 3-4 office hours per week, and some do not list a minimum number. I think a more thoroughgoing analysis would bear this out. I'm certainly not suggesting that UNA go to a tier-1 research institution approach — tier 1 schools may only require 1-2 office hours per week. Nor am I suggesting that UNA only require 3-4 office hours per week — that would represent a dramatic decrease from the current seven hours. I do think, however, that five weekly hours would be entirely sufficient, especially given the following:

- To my knowledge, faculty members and students are not having a problem fitting students into their current 7-hour load. In fact, the opposite problem exists — students often do not show up for office hours. I don't understand why we would consider increasing office hours ... if students rarely show up for the current load. Arguably, the fact that many students never show up to office hours should be taken as a justification to decrease, not increase, hours.
- Office hours end up being less productive for research-oriented faculty members. With the office door open, students and colleagues often pop in ... .
- Faculty members generally include an “and by appointment” line next to their stated office hours. Students would have plenty of opportunity to meet with faculty members during five listed office hours and during other meetings scheduled “by appointment”.

I realize we try to separate ourselves by offering a more personalized experience for students. The fact that most office hours are left with very little substantive student-professor activity suggests that offering seven hours does not help facilitate our student experience objectives. Decreasing office hours by two hours per week, and instead encouraging faculty members to those two hours as “research or creative work time,” may aid research productivity.

**Colleague C:** The subject of the current discussion over office hours being led by your committee came up during our English Department faculty meeting last week. As I'm sure you've experienced with other departments, this is a very important subject to members of the English Department. There are a number of reasons why our faculty passed a resolution supporting more flexibility in office hours, which I am passing on to you. We have a number of faculty teaching overloads, and sometimes these include teaching five first-year composition courses. Adding additional office hours to these faculty members' workloads would make their ability to teach overloads nearly impossible. Additionally, my faculty receive and answer emails from students around the clock, and this flexibility on the part of faculty should be met with and addressed by the same type of flexibility within the office hours policy. Additionally, at least half of my faculty teach online courses. Having taught an online literature course myself ..., if I am to ‘meet my students where they are,’ I will be answering their emails at the times that are convenient for the students, and rarely if ever will they find a need to visit me during regular office hours. Again, flexibility based on the type of teaching delivery is important. We also have three faculty members who live in and teach

from cities too distant to allow them to hold traditional office hours (St. Louis and Nashville), and [the department chair] needs the flexibility to decide in these unique circumstances what an appropriate office hour policy is. Overall, [the] department understands the importance of making ourselves available to our students, but we believe flexibility in the policy will allow us to address our students' needs in the manner which serves our students best, which an overly prescriptive 'in office' policy does not seem to do.

### **FACULTY-STUDENT INTERACTION OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM/OFFICE (NON-COMMITTEE COLLEAGUES)**

**Culinary Arts:** “[T]eaching in our department ... is very similar to [Art] in that our teaching is very hands-on and involves a lot of contact hours outside the classroom and outside office hours, as follows:

1. We instruct for more hours than the 3 hours on many of our 3-credit courses, especially those with lab.
2. We support recruitment for the University and our programs through representation at various area middle and high school career fairs, often preparing food to offer as samples, the Alumni association at fundraising dinners, students outside of class with competitions, fundraisers for other non-profit groups, etc.
3. Field trips to various locations to offer students the opportunity to network and to provide learning opportunities outside the traditional classroom. E.g. raising and harvesting of free range chickens at Jack o Lantern farms, same for beef at Auburn, with Alabama Cattleman's Association, DeKalb International Farmers Market in Atlanta, Southern Living Test kitchens in Birmingham, Waynes' Farms Decatur, Sysco facilities in Celera, Alabama and Food Show in Birmingham, Alabama, etc.

“Doing these events and field trips takes a lot of organization, but we strongly feel that these are experiences that enrich the quality of our program.”

**Education:** “[W]e do visit interns in the schools. Most of the schools are local, but we sometimes travel an hour or more to visit a school. Each intern is visited 2-4 times per month and an individual visit may last from 30 minutes to 2 hours. The schedule of the visits depends on the intern's school schedule and can easily take a full workday. I visited two interns in a school last week where I met with the first intern at 9AM, but I had to wait until 2PM to see the second intern. Because of the distance, it would not have been efficient to travel back to UNA so I spent the time in between visits responding to e-mails and working on my on-line classes. Via e-mail, my students are in constant contact and that extends beyond the hours of a typical workday. Many of our graduate students work in schools during the day so we must be available to these students via phone and e-mail. We also make special appointments as needed.

“There are many other ways in which we are in contact with our students. Faculty in our departments sponsor student organizations and participate in activities with the students. Some of these activities involve many hours of planning. Faculty in our departments also work with students on research projects and on honors projects.

“In addition to the internship, all students who are a part of the Educator Preparation Program are required to complete a minimum of 150 clinical hours in the schools. As faculty, we work with the local schools to arrange these clinical hours. In some cases, the faculty member travels with their students to the schools to conduct teaching sessions within the Preschool - 12th grade classrooms. In addition to visiting interns in the schools, we are required by the Alabama State Department of Education to volunteer a minimum of 10 hours per semester in a classroom. We also develop training sessions for the parents, students, and teachers in the schools. Some of these sessions include current UNA students as presenters. Many of the teachers in the local schools are alumni of UNA or are in the graduate program. By being a constant presence in the schools and community, the faculty in the COEHS serve as ambassadors for the university.”

**HPER:** “My time with students outside of class varies greatly week-by-week but can exceed 15 hours per week if data collection is taking place or during advising (I advise close to 100 students). I have posted office hours, but like all faculty in my department I have an open door policy. Students drop into my office frequently throughout the day from 8:00-5:00 or later most days. I also respond to e-mails pretty much anytime I am not sleeping.”

**Music:** “You could set the office-hour-plus-other-contact minimum to TWENTY-seven hours a week and (and I say this with a certain pride) every single full-time faculty member in my department would meet it. And that’s a regular week, not a performance week! (My guess is that theatre and athletics wouldn’t be far behind.)”

**Nursing:** “When students are here (mostly on Tuesday and Thursday for classes) they come in and get mentoring all the time, regardless of whether it is your office hours or not. I suspect that is like most departments. And ... our online faculty ... set office hours but ... constantly are checking emails and our office hours are just the [required] 7 hours. [Online faculty] check and usually respond frequently not just during office hours.”

**Science:** “I am ... at a conference ... with a student. We won't back until [weekend]. I have taken students to conferences on occasion. Every semester, I take students on a ... field trip and camp at least one night on a weekend. I also take them on day trips to the field ([writer’s discipline] is best in the field!).

**Theatre:** “I typically teach 15-16 credit hours each term, with three hours being release time for designing productions. And then I have the 7 office hours each week too. I do actually teach 1-2 ‘traditional’ classes each semester, but most of my work is design/performance oriented. My design classes meet during normal class periods, but I have to maintain some studio hours (more in the middle to end of the term) for the students to work outside of class. I do my best to schedule the studio hours while I am also here for ‘shop’ hours so I am not overwhelmed. The ‘shop’ hours are in connection with the ... course that builds the designs for the shows. I usually schedule 12-15 hours each week just for the scene shop. If I am also directing a show (which doesn't happen every semester), then I put in another 16-20 hours a week for rehearsals. None of those hours for the shop or rehearsals reflects prep time--it is 100% contact hours. So the research, rendering, shopping parts of the performance work are in addition. It is not unusual, during a production period, to put in 60-70 hours/week for everything. In addition, there are times of the year where I help coach students and alumni for their auditions/interviews for internships, grad school or

festivals/competitions. There are also semesters where I am helping guide a student designer or director. It is really hard to assign an actual number of hours to some of that because it depends upon the actual production and the student's experience level.”

### FURTHER READING

- Griffin, Whitney, *et al.* “Starting the Conversation: An Exploratory Study of Factors that Influence Student Office Hour Use.” *College Teaching* 62 (2014): 94-9. Students come to office hours more in courses with lots of shorter assignments and quizzes.
- Gross, Liz. “An Examination of the Relationship between the Communication Methods Used in Out-of-Class Student-Faculty Interactions and the Content and Frequency of Those Interactions.” Ph.D. dissertation. Cardinal Stritch University, Milwaukee, 2015. Students in her study had twice as many contacts with faculty who used a social network such as Facebook.
- Jackson, Linda Eckstein, and Aimee Knupsky. “Weaning off of Email: Encouraging Students to Use Office Hours over Email to Contact Professors.” *College Teaching* 63 (2015): 183-4. 2011 study showed that 99% of students used e-mail rather than office hours; article lists strategies (bribes) for getting students into faculty offices.
- Kitsantas, Anastasia, and Anthony Chow. “College students’ perceived threat and preference for seeking help in traditional, distributed, and distance learning environments.” *Computers & Education* 48/3 (2007): 389-95. Students were more likely to ask for online help and to feel less threatened in so doing.
- Li, Lei, and Jennifer P. Pitts. “Does It Really Matter? Using Virtual Office Hours to Enhance Student-Faculty Interaction.” *Journal of Information Systems Education* 20/2 (2009): 175-86. Students don’t use virtual office hours more but are more satisfied with the courses where they’re offered.
- Pfund, Rory A. *et al.* “Is the Professor in? Faculty Presence during Office Hours.” *College Student Journal* (2013): 524-8. See esp. 525, “Students typically prefer seeking help through email in both online and traditional courses (Kitsantas & Chow, 2007). Although there is substantial student satisfaction with virtual office hours, student use of them appears to be as limited as traditional office hours (Li & Pitts, 2008).”
- Reeves, Philip M., and Rayne A Sperling. “A comparison of technologically mediated and face-to-face help-seeking sources.” *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 85 (2015): 570-84. Higher-performing students prefer face-to-face; lower-performing students prefer virtual interaction with faculty.
- Robinson, Risa J. *et al.* “Understanding the Causes for Low Student Office Hour Attendance.” ASME 2014 International Mechanical Engineering Congress and Exposition, vol. 5: Education and Globalization. doi:10.1115/IMECE2014-38698 The authors surveyed engineering students to discover why they didn’t attend office hours. The major reasons were the belief that they didn’t need help; procrastination;

and lack of commitment. To their surprise, the authors found no correlation between grade and office-hour attendance.

Thachil, Shoba Anne. "Factors that Relate to the Persistence of First-Generation Undergraduate Students in a Public University." Ph.D. dissertation. Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, 2013. One factor was not office hours, which the students in the study underused.

## OVERVIEW OF ONE ARTICLE AND CONCLUSIONS

From a quick review of some research, namely the following article (which includes a fairly comprehensive review of current research in its opening pages):

Li, Lei, and Jennifer P. Pitts. "Does It Really Matter? Using Virtual Office Hours to Enhance Student-Faculty Interaction." *Journal of Information Systems Education* 20, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 175-85. ProQuest.

- Review of the research: it is well documented that *informal* contact between students and faculty is highly predictive of student persistence and success. "A key challenge for colleges and universities is to understand how to better engage students in the communication processes that stimulate more substantial and frequent interaction with faculty" (Li and Pitts, 176).
- Office hours are not generally an effective way of facilitating this contact. It is widely documented that students do not attend office hours: "Studies have shown that, in practice, students rarely take advantage of the opportunity and, when they do, the duration of the visits tend to be brief and concise in nature" (Li and Pitts, 176).  
**This is not a problem unique to UNA and it is not going to go away.**
- In Li and Pitts' 2009 study, students identified a number of reasons for not seeing faculty during their office hours: 66.3% said the particular hours weren't convenient, but nearly as many (51.7%) just said they don't have time.
- Li and Pitts cite several studies that "found positive benefits of utilizing virtual office hours in terms of effectiveness and participation of students" (177).
- However, drawbacks have been noted, including "increased workload and time commitment for faculty as a result of student expectations of 'ubiquitous instructor access'" and also "issues related to miscommunication due to the lack of verbal cues" and other drawbacks (Li and Pitts, 177).
- Students said they would like to have virtual office hours (IM chat via Facebook was the medium tried in this study), but they actually didn't take advantage of them very much at all. In this 2009 study, Li and Pitts found that "students' use of virtual office hours is not significantly different from their use of traditional office hours; however, participants in classes that offered virtual office hours reported higher levels of satisfaction with office hours than students in classes that offered only traditional face-to-face office hours" (175).
- In their study of three classes (a total of 47 students enrolled), Li and Pitts recorded 3 total virtual office hour visits, four regular office hour visits, 8 before/after class visits, 106 emails, and 75 Discussion Board postings (179). "When students had a question related to the class, they preferred to email the professor of the course

- (57.3% of responses) or ask the question before or after class (24% of responses). Only 11% of the students choose to stop by the professor's office during office hours" (Li and Pitts, 179).
- Students report different ways of getting their questions answered: they send emails to their professors, and they ask questions before/after class. (This doesn't facilitate informal contact, but most f2f office visits are very short and to-the-point anyway.)

### Conclusions

- There is no research-based justification for increasing office hours. Students don't come and they still won't come. The more time we spend with our doors open waiting for the occasional (rare) drop-in, the less faculty will be able to either close their doors and concentrate on the kind of work that requires deep, slow thought (whether research or lesson planning); and the less they be able to close their doors behind them to go elsewhere for serious research (field, archival, whatever).
- The research supports encouraging faculty to replace some f2f office hours with virtual office hours: it won't increase student utilization of office hours, but it will increase their satisfaction.
- Reducing office hours is supported by research in at least two ways: it would acknowledge the fact that students overwhelmingly choose to communicate via email and would compensate faculty for that significant demand on their time; it would free faculty up to do things like sponsor an RSO so they can engage in the *informal* faculty-student interaction that really makes a difference.
- Perhaps we need to look at revising policies with an eye to acknowledging the significant amount of time faculty spend meeting student needs via email and in those before- and after-class conversations, since these are the modes of communication that students overwhelmingly prefer.

## FACULTY AFFAIRS DRAFT POLICY

### 3.2.3 Office Hours

Faculty-student interactions outside of the classroom are among the most important relationships on a college campus. Interactions of faculty in diverse colleges require meeting needs of individual students in multiple contexts. To promote flexibility, College Deans and Departments, in collaboration **and subject to a majority vote of full-time faculty in individual departments**, will determine appropriate, regular hours that will facilitate student-faculty interaction for consultation, discussion, and advisement, except that office hours in excess of seven hours or on days that the faculty member does not have scheduled classes is at the sole discretion of individual faculty members. ~~After approval by the department chair, faculty~~ Faculty members will list their office hours on all syllabi at the beginning of each semester.