Request to Reexamine University Regulations Regarding Availability of Syllabi

Candice Greaux, New Brunswick Student Executive Committee, October 2008

Background:

  In October of 2006, the University Senate Instruction, Curricula and Advising Committee issued a report addressing the issue of the availability of course syllabi, which called for the syllabi of courses to be made available to students by the meeting of the first class date. Additionally, the report recommended that Departments make available up-to-date course descriptions, "including information on expected work and grading structure (assignments, papers, projects, exams and other methods of evaluation) on their departmental web sites and then make those descriptions available via the Course Synopsis System" [1]

  To date, the recommendations of this report have yet to be fully implemented. To that effect, in the spring of 2008 the Rutgers University Student Assembly passed a resolution reiterating the key points of the 2006 report, calling for the recommendations of the report to be fully implemented. Additionally, the resolution called upon Academic Department Chairs as well as the Office of the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs to utilize their positions in an effort to make course syllabi more readily available and easily accessible to students in a reasonably timely manner.

Proposal:

  This proposal will charge the University Senate Instruction, Curricula and Advising Committee to reexamine the implementation of their 2006 report on the availability of course syllabi. Additionally, the committee should be charged with the duty of examining feasible options for ensuring that course expectations are made available to all prospective students within a reasonable time frame prior to the beginning of classes, ideally during the registration period.

Issues to Consider:
- Time frame of the selection of course instructors.
- Accountability with regard to the availability of syllabi?

Rationale:

  Though recommendations were passed by the University Senate in 2006, a widespread interest in the issue exists both amongst students as well as within the administration of the University with regard to this issue. As an institution of higher education, where the measure of a students' success is directly correlated with the ability to complete tasks in an effective and timely manner, a similar expectation should be imparted upon those instructing courses at the University. Additionally, the availability of course syllabi prior to the first day of classes may result in less dropping and adding of courses, which manifest in less dropping and adding of classes, and less logistical difficulties resulting therein.

Final Comments:

  The recommendations of the 2006 report have been implemented to some extent; however there are still improvements and modifications that need to be made. In recent years, the University has greatly expanded their utilization of web-based interfaces as academic tools, and that expansion should lend itself to be compatible with the goals set forth by the 2006 recommendations issued by the University Senate Instruction, Curricula and Advising Committee. In light of the aforementioned technological and web-based advances in academics at the University, the issue of the availability of course syllabi should be re-examined, juxtaposed with the 2006 recommendations.