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AAUP Chapter, Illinois Wesleyan University

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Illinois Wesleyan Chapter of the AAUP

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NEWSLETTER

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Executive
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On CC's Gateway Proposal and Academic Freedom by Joerg Tiede

The Curriculum Council's proposal to reform Gateway has as one its components a strengthening of the role of the writing program director. While the role of the director in providing oversight for the Writing Program is undoubtedly a good thing, requiring faculty to submit Gateway syllabi for review to the director prior to teaching Gateway, as the proposal calls for, is plainly a violation of academic freedom. Thus, faculty may, and, in my estimation, should, refuse to comply with it, in spite of faculty approval of the policy.

Clearly, the faculty is authorized to set standards for the curriculum: one of the core functions of the faculty is to exercise primary responsibility for the curriculum. Individual faculty members are required to adhere to such standards, that is, I am not at all advocating that an individual can simply cite academic freedom to disregard curricular standards set by the faculty. However, the faculty's responsibility for the curriculum does not give it the authority to empower a single administrator to police the faculty's compliance. While the writing program director is appointed from among the faculty, the functions performed by the director are administrative. Furthermore, the director is neither elected nor subject to regular review by the faculty.

While individual faculty members are required to maintain the standards set by the faculty collectively, they are also at liberty to interpret these standards using their professional judgment. But that judgment is not subject to review by a single administrator, because doing so would shift the faculty's responsibility for the curriculum to the administration and interfere with the faculty member's individual academic freedom. Rather than the faculty, the director would now be in charge of curricular standards and of assessing the professional judgment of faculty members. Assigning such a role to an administrator is incompatible with widely-accepted standards of academic governance and principles of academic freedom.

Rather than being subject to the policing of one's compliance, the

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presumption should be that faculty are in fact maintaining curricular standards. Only if concerns are raised over the conduct of a faculty member should the professional judgment of that faculty member be subject to review -- with the safeguards provided by academic due process. The review by the director provides no such safeguards, short of filing a grievance against the director. Furthermore, adjuncts, whom the director reviews, have no provisions of academic due process at Illinois Wesleyan University. A proposal approved by the Hearing Committee to add appropriate language to the Faculty Handbook in 2010 has still not been acted on by the administration.

Since requiring prior review of syllabi by the writing program director violates academic freedom, faculty are, under IWU regulations, at liberty to refuse to comply with the provision. IWU has adopted the AAUP *Statement on Professional Ethics*, which permits faculty to refuse to comply with institutional regulations that violate academic freedom. I urge my colleagues to exercise this right in defense of their academic freedom.

Review of Gateway Syllabi by Becky Roesner

As a member of the AAUP, a three-time member of Curriculum Council, a nine-time instructor of Gateway, and a leader in General Education assessment, I am attune to both the importance of academic freedom and the perennial struggles with our Gateway Colloquium: staffing, consistency, and oversight. I have always valued the freedom that IWU Gateway instructors have in meeting the course goals and criteria through creative topics, materials, pedagogy, and assignments. It would not be an exaggeration to say that I came to Illinois Wesleyan in part because of this freedom – freedom that would allow me, a chemistry professor, to pursue additional interests in history and writing by teaching an interdisciplinary Gateway focused on medieval medicine.

As I have enjoyed this freedom, I have also been keenly aware that my Gateway is just one of the approximately 40 Gateway sections offered each year and that teaching in a multi-section course carries with it special responsibilities. Just as my science colleagues count on me to address very specific theories and skills in Chemistry 201, and to do so with a certain level of rigor, my campus-wide colleagues count on me, as a Gateway instructor, to teach writing as a process and to provide a well-specified introduction to the conventions of academic writing and discourse. Whereas the shared specifics of Chemistry 201 are agreed upon by a handful of faculty in Chemistry Department as they prepare their syllabi, the specifics of Gateway are part of the General Education program and thus belong to the faculty as whole.

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Each time the university has attempted to improve the Gateway Colloquium, faculty on CC have received substantive input from Student Senate. Our students value the diversity of Gateway topics and experiences, but also rightly expect each section of Gateway to prepare them for academic life at the university in ways that are consistent with the Category Goals and Course Criteria. Over the years, students have been frustrated by Gateway sections that fall outside the stated parameters of the course.

Although the Writing Program has always fostered the desired consistency through workshops and assessment, it hasn't, until now, been asked to provide instructors with specific feedback on their courses. With academic freedom in mind, CC was very deliberate in asking the Writing Program Director to "review the syllabi for consistency with the Gateway Goals and Criteria and provide feedback as needed." CC very purposefully limited the scope of the review to our agreed upon Goals and Criteria and left control of the syllabus in the instructor's hands. Instructors will now know if the Writing Program Coordinator sees a mismatch between their syllabi and stated Goals and Criteria. Instructors can take that feedback under advisement as they exercise their professional responsibility and judgment in teaching Gateway.

It has been my understanding that the issue of individual vs. collective academic freedom in multi-section courses has been a complex one even within the AAUP. In a 2009 *Academe* article titled "Whose Academic Freedom," the then AAUP President Cary Nelson explored the boundaries between an individual faculty member's academic freedom and the department's collective ownership of multi-section courses. And, although Nelson clearly favors personal academic freedom over the constraints of collective curricular endeavors, even he acknowledged that, "The AAUP has surprisingly little advice to offer on this fundamental conflict between individual and institutional academic freedom, the latter often exercised by departments supervising multisection courses." (<http://www.aaup.org/article/president-whose-academic-freedom#.U08bU8eLmBA>)

A current AAUP posting also acknowledges the challenges of multisection courses in the context of textbook selection and includes this guidance:

"In a multisection course taught by several faculty members, however, responsibility is shared among the instructors for identifying the text(s) to be assigned to students. Common course syllabi and examinations are also typical. The shared responsibility bespeaks a shared freedom, which trumps the freedom of an individual faculty member to assign a textbook that he or she alone considers satisfactory. Your freedom in other respects, however, is undiluted." (<http://www.aaup.org/i-need-help/workplace-issues/contours-academic-freedom>)

Gateway is a multi-section course and one for which we, the faculty, have designed and voted on rather specific goals and criteria (a framework not unlike that provided by a common text or common exams). Our vote on April 21st was a vote to strive for greater adherence to our own Goals and Criteria. It is crucial that we limit our goal of Gateway consistency to those agreed upon Goals and Criteria (2013-2014 Catalog, p. 82) and that our freedom in other aspects of the course remain undiluted.

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Announcements:



The 2014 Dougan Award

The 2014 James D. Dougan Award for Contributions to Faculty Governance was presented to Professor of Computer Science and Director of Cognitive Science Joerg Tiede at the faculty meeting on April 21, 2014. Congratulations, Joerg!

Previous award recipients are
2013: Alison Sainsbury, Associate Professor of English
2012: Larry Stout, Professor of Mathematics
2011: Mike Young, Professor of History

The complete text of Dr. Tiede's award citation is available at http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/iwuaaup_win/4. For details on the award criteria, see http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/iwuaaup_act/9/.



Our Chapter Delegate for the annual *AAUP Conference on the State of Higher Education* on June 11-15, 2014 in Washington, DC will be Joerg Tiede. His report of the meeting will be published in a future edition of the Newsletter



Mark your calendars for these Fall 2014 meetings:

A new series called "IWU AAUP presents...." This all-faculty (adjunct and full time) meeting will take place on the Wednesday before the monthly Faculty Meeting at 4PM, location TBD, and will be a gathering of an informal, social nature or on some timely topic related to the curriculum or governance issues. The first meeting in this series is set for September 3.

Bring your energy and ideas—this time is set aside for us to get to know each other's concerns *before* they emerge in a Faculty Meeting!

The first IWU AAUP Chapter meeting is set for September 16 at 4PM, location TBD. We will decide which specific governance-related issues Chapter members would like to address in the coming year.