**Department Minutes: Draft**

English Department Meeting Nov. 20th, 2009

Present

J Simon (chair), P. Bayers, K. Bridgford, R. Epstein, C. Gannett, J.K. Garvey, S. Jourdan, S Kelley, J. Krauss, E. Lopez, S O’Driscoll, E. Orlando, G. Rajan, R. Regan, M. White, T. Xie. Dean Boquet (ex-officio)

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Last Agenda Item: The Mirror

Simon quickly rehearsed the controversy over the recently published “He Said She Said” column and the interventionalist steps taken by the administration. He expressed his frustration over the manner in which the students involved and The Mirror as an organization has been handled. He announced that he had invited dean Boquet

Epstein circulated the pre-prepared Draft Statement (see attached) to the members present. Rajan was bypassed, and Gannett quickly shared her copy with Rajan.

Simon asked for departmental opinions on how to proceed, and Boquet set the context from the administrators’ perspectives: (1) Began with concerns that students had brought charges, (2) difficult to gauge the level at which point the faculty were brought in to the matter, (3) the matter quickly moved from charges brought against individual students to The Mirror as an organization, (4) the dialogues at every level seemed to overlap and not involve all the parties involved, (5) concern that problem solving strategies that have been effective in such matters in similar schools had not been considered/explored, and (6) different processes to address the issue had not been considered.

Boquet said that it is setting a precedent through individual student conduct as a path to target the conduct of organizations on campus is risky. On the one hand, she stated, The Mirror is an academic unit in that students get credit for working on the newspaper, and on the other, it is a student run enterprise, and has some freedom.

Epstein said that he was not aware of the extent of administrators’ involvement. Simon said that he is scheduled to speak in front of the Academic Council on Dec. 7th, 2009, and present his case as (1) academic freedom issue and (2) curricular freedom issue. He welcomed rigorous discussion from department members so as to push back against the administrations’ current processes to deal with the matter. He said he wanted to get the focus back on academic implications in this emergency situation.

Lopez commented that he now understood the matter as an emergency, and asked if the wording in the motion (see attached) to “sever” The Mirror from the department was in the interests of both the Department and the Journalism students.

Simon responded to say it is a very complicated issue; there are several faculty-student publications on campus. The University uses almost all of these as PR, and Bridgford said she has been asked too to keep in-line with the PR machinery. The Mirror has two purposes, Simon said: it stands alone as a student newspaper, and as a part of the University’s PR.

White said that he agreed with Bridgford, because if in the future, Dogwood published a story that caused controversy, the faculty associated with it could be asked to compromise her integrity. Further, faculties associated with such publications are also part of PR. He felt strongly against using the word “sever” instead said the department needs a united front.

Epstein said the many publications do represent the University, but The Mirror is different as it is a student-run newspaper.

Simon concurred and said it is closely affiliated with the Journalism Track in the department, and it trains students in the field. Epstein continued that The Mirror is being asked to pay too high a price as an independent unit to be used as part of the university’s PR efforts. Regan said the PR department is taking an increasingly prominent role and we should resist it. Krauss said it looks like “the iron curtain” on campus.

O’Driscoll said that the column was deeply offensive, and it has been thus for a long time. But, this time it is different because (1) the students designed the initial protest, (2) students had planned to have a panel discussion to address such crass opinions being put into print, BUT both moves were arrested because of the swift intervention by administration. She said that “a teaching moment was lost,” because both moves were student-initiated. She said we another mechanism to deal with such issues. What will be next, she asked, if the Theater Department, which also has a huge budget, put on something controversial? Will they too be censored? She finished by saying that we need to state “enough.”

Boquet said that such structural distinctions are often missed when separating the academic side from the administrative one; here, the students are the most vulnerable.

Epstein asked to work on the draft, particularly if Simon needed evidence of the department’s will behind him to speak to Academic Council. Garvey asked the date of the disciplinary hearing, and Simon said The Mirror students were advised not to attend.

Boquet worked aloud to edit the wording of the Draft Statement 1 as follows:

In an effort to reaffirm faculty control over the curriculum at the university, the English Department authorizes the Chair to determine the department’s relation to the Mirror if the newspaper continues to be subject to administrative supervision by the Student Affairs division. Under current policy, Student Affairs can at any time declare the university’s contract with the newspaper “null and void,” eliminate the annual subscription fee that helps underwrite the paper’s publication, and evict it from its offices. Such policies threaten the ability of the English Department’s Journalism program to link its offerings to the newspaper.

O’Driscoll made the motion to accept the amended draft circulated by Epstein, he seconded and it passed unanimously. Simon thanked the department for its complete support.

O’Driscoll made the motion to adjourn, Rajan seconded.

Respectfully submitted, G Rajan