11/10/2008

MEMORANDUM

TO: Dr. Doug Whitlock, President, Eastern Kentucky University  
    Dr. Rodney Piercey, Provost & Vice-President for Academic Affairs

FROM: Ad Hoc Committee on Early Registration  
      Dr. David Eakin, Dr. Linda Frost, Dr. Karin Sehmann, & Dr. Steffen Wilson (Chair)

RE: Addressing the Needs of the Student with Exceptional Circumstances

ATTACHMENT: Comments from Faculty Indicating Concern for Students with Exceptional Circumstances

In their written comments on the Early Registration Policy made to the Ad Hoc Committee on Early Registration, many faculty mentioned their concern about students with exceptional circumstances. Such students were frequently described as: (1) single working parents balancing the demands of a family and work while completing their education, (2) students caring for seriously ill family members, and (3) students with unusual work circumstances. These comments are attached.

Because of the significant number of such comments, the Ad Hoc committee on Early Registration would like to recommend that a University-level committee be appointed by the President and/or Provost to investigate and design a policy to address the needs of such students.

Activities of this committee could include:
- Defining exceptional circumstances
- Estimating the size of this population of students
- Determine the types of services that can accommodate these students at EKU
- Investigate the methods our benchmarks and other Kentucky schools use the accommodate such students
- Design and implement a strategy for meeting the needs of these students

Such a committee could include representatives from the following units:

Distance Education  
Counseling  
Career Services  
Extended Campuses  
Registrar  
University Research  
Faculty representative

Thank you for your consideration of this request.
Comments from Faculty Indicating Concern for Students with Exceptional Circumstances

From informal conversations with the SSEM department faculty, they are evenly split with some indicating they have students who must work and we provide no special consideration for them. ... I feel that some students must work to be able to earn enough tuition and gas money to attend but some students choose a lifestyle with new vehicles and expenses that force them to work to pay for their toys. I don’t feel this latter group deserves any special registration consideration.

I am very strongly against special pre-registration accommodations for other groups, such as athletics and service-based situations. This goes to the heart of fairness for the student community at large. Many, perhaps most, students have other legitimate activities and distractions in their lives that affect course selection, academic progress, and registration concerns, e.g., necessary employment, student organizations, family-related matters, transportation issues, medical issues that do not fall within the stated policy, or myriad other "needs" that are expressed to us instructors on a weekly basis. Imagine how a working mother or father who is trying to earn a hard-fought degree feels as athletes or cheerleaders or students in designated service roles are permitted to advance in line ("butt in ahead") for registering, thereby potentially disenfranchising him/her from a fair chance at a necessary course, particularly one that may force another semester or two at the university in order to graduate.

There are many, many "special needs" unrecognized by policy that could easily compete with the various discretionary special activities should fairness be used as a defining process in policy development. Athletes must maintain certain academic minima, but that parent must do so, also. Disabilities are not discretionary; the other policy-protected activities are. It appears that the policy-makers have made exceptions for those groups that have strong "lobbies" in the discussions, but have not given equable consideration to many other situations that could deserve protection. For the sake of fairness to all of our 16,000 students, all non-disabled students should stand in line together according to the class level organization in place (seniors first, etc). I am willing to fight for this.

Bruce Davis

There are many other students with family and job responsibilities who could use the advantage of early registration, and justify their cases just as strongly. Everyone can’t be first! Stewart Farrar

Overall, I agree with the plan, but what about non-traditional students who have jobs or children (particularly if they have children with special needs). I completed my BS and MS  and now PhD with kids and it can be very challenging to schedule classes so parents can be successful students. I did not see this population addressed. Was this group discussed as the policy was being revised? I realize that there are probably a lot of parents on campus and that might seem an unfair advantage, but anyone classified as non-traditional ought to be able to register early. Stephanie Adamovich

One of our faculty members questioned the early registration policy – as it pertains to student athletes. My colleague was wondering whether they get priority registration in semesters when they are not actively competing or traveling (e.g., football players in the spring semesters – or basketball players in the fall semesters). Her concern was that there are students out there (e.g., single parents) who might not be able to access classes because a cheerleader/spirit group member or athlete (who is not actively traveling/competing that semester) got a seat in a class. Correctional and Juvenile Justice Studies

There was some sympathy for the plight of student athletes and others, but the consensus was that there are many students who have difficulty fitting classes into their schedules (those who work full time or have primary responsibility for the care of children, for instance) and it would be unfair to favor some over others. Most of us think the fairest system is one in which students are allowed to register in order of their closeness to graduation, i.e. seniors/graduate students first (as you can see from the comments included below, one of us actually thought freshman should be allowed to register first, but no one else agreed with that!). Chemistry
This stirred up considerable discussion at the CAS chairs meeting last week. I have mixed feelings. I have sympathy for the athletes who often have a horrible game/practice schedule that they have to work around (hence the need to register early to get the classes that fit the athletics schedule the university creates). But, I also think it seems unfair that other groups with tricky schedules not get the same privilege. The problem then becomes where to draw the line without having so many groups included that it leaves the non-privileged students (which includes students who are working many hours or have family responsibilities) at a real disadvantage. Robert Brubaker

Rationale for non-support of groups other than those with disabilities

It is a hard line to draw and thus should be avoided. Why should the university try to judge the contributions of athletes vs. artists vs. musicians vs. etc. And why are any of these activities more noble than jobs? Many students have school-work-child care conflicts that we expect them to figure out on their own. Health Promotion and Administration