

Report by the Academic Affairs Committee of the Faculty Senate on the SPF Proposal

February 1, 2011

The Faculty Affairs Committee of the Academic Council has recommended changes to Article III, Section 3, Subsection (d), the definition of special professional faculty. Specifically, the proposal would change:

Members of the special professional faculty are professionals who make a direct and significant academic contribution to the educational process at the University through teaching, research, or administration.

To:

Members of the special professional faculty are professionals who make a direct and significant academic contribution to the educational process at the University through teaching, research, or creative works.

The Faculty Affairs Committee has circulated the proposal and asked for comments. The Academic Affairs Committee and the Administrative Affairs Committee of the Faculty Senate have reviewed the proposal and are now recommending that the Faculty Senate adopt the following response, opposing the proposed amendments to the Academic Articles:

As the body charged with representing the interests of the faculty at the University of Notre Dame, the Faculty Senate has a strong interest in the definition of a faculty member. In the Academic Articles, the special professional faculty members are defined in part as “professionals who make a direct and significant academic contribution to the educational process,” which accords well with our notion of what a faculty member ought to do. The proposed amendment would narrow this definition, in particular excluding administrators and academic advisors from the faculty ranks. No convincing reason to make this change has been adduced. It will not correct any concrete evil, nor will it leave the University in a better position to complete its mission. We feel that this limitation is unnecessary and will result in a degradation of the quality of the academic experience of our students, and therefore recommend rejecting the amendment.

(1) *The proposed changes are unnecessary.* While past practices have resulted in the appointment of special professional faculty in positions with little or no academic role, the problem has already been addressed under the current definition. The qualifying language of the current definition, “professionals who make a direct and significant academic contribution to the education process,” provides the Provost’s office with sufficient authority to prevent employees who are purely administrative, with no academic duties, from being called “faculty.” The Provost’s office has exercised that authority and no longer allows employees to be inappropriately placed in the special professional faculty category. The proposal attempts to fix

a problem that no longer exists and, in the process, creates new problems.

(2) *The new language offers no improvement in uniformity of application.* The proposed language is vague and will result in less consistency, not more. Many special professional faculty have job responsibilities that include teaching, research, and administration, in varying degrees at different times of the year. For example, a special professional faculty member who is also a director of undergraduate studies may have job duties that are classified as 40% teaching and 60% administrative. Because a special professional faculty member's normal teaching load is significantly higher than that of a T&R faculty member, a 40% load may equal a 2-1 load, a load equivalent to many T&R faculty. The 60% of the job characterized as administrative includes such things as designing courses, coordinating the curriculum, and advising students. It is unclear under the proposed language whether this faculty member will be considered an "administrator" because the time distribution is over half administrative or a "teacher" because the teaching responsibilities are "significant" (equal to that of a T&R faculty member). There is no reason to believe that such cases will be interpreted equivalently across the different divisions of the University.

(3) *The proposal artificially and unwisely separates classroom teaching from advising and other academic interactions with students.* The proposed classification shifts the focus of the classification from whether the individual *make[s] a direct and significant academic contribution to the educational process* to whether a job duty is teaching or administrative. Administrative duties such as designing curriculum, advising students, and supervising capstone experiences are academic duties and the University is better served when these duties are fulfilled by faculty members, not staff. Article III, Section 3 of the Academic Articles does not allow staff members to teach classes. If this proposal is approved, it will create an artificial barrier between advising and administration on the one hand, and classroom teaching on the other, that ignores the benefits of having advisors teach (and teachers advise). This does not make sense in light of how the University is currently, and successfully, operating.

(4) *Reclassifying academic advisors and administrators as staff degrades their ability to perform their jobs.* Special professional faculty who are regularly interacting with students through advising and teaching, but whose primary job may be administrative, will lose valuable benefits under this program. For example, staff have different library privileges, including a limited ability to use inter-library loan. Staff members are unable to attend academic conferences and to apply for grants. These benefits allow faculty members to develop their skills and stay current in their relative discipline. Staff evaluation and career development is very different than that of faculty. Academic positions currently held by special professional faculty, such as administering a master's program and supervising capstone experiences, require an engagement with the academic side of the university and the academic discipline that staff assessment tools and training opportunities simply do not address. Because most of these individuals are considered administrators, their fate and the continued viability of their programs, are unclear under this proposal.

The proposed changes will have an adverse effect on students. Students expect to be advised by faculty members. In our promotional materials, for example in those for the FYS, we stress that our advisors are all faculty members, tacitly recognizing the greater cachet of faculty advisors over staff advisors. Students do not have the same respect for staff as for faculty, and

are less willing to take academic advice from staff. In many cases, graduate programs, and medical schools in particular, do not accept letters of recommendation from staff. Advising for the pre-professional program, the major for many of our students planning to go to medical school, is done predominantly by special professional faculty. These faculty members write hundreds of letters of recommendation each year, resulting in a very high number of placements for our students in medical schools. In addition, the current academic advisors from across the University, in nearly every college and unit, have expressed the opinion that they would be substantially hampered in the performance of their duties were they classified as staff members. This perspective is borne out by the difficulties that units (such as First Year of Studies) have had when in the past they tried to carry out academic advising with staff advisors, and by the fact that every unit of the University except the Mendoza College of Business has currently chosen to have faculty members carry out academic advising.

Finally, the Senate is concerned that removing faculty status from these academic positions will hinder our ability to recruit the kind of highly educated people who are currently in these positions. For hiring Ph.D.-level individuals, faculty positions are much more appealing than staff positions. This proposal will, therefore, make it difficult to find equally qualified replacements for our current employees.