

February 24, 2016

To: Jose Wudka, Chair
Riverside Division

From: David Lo, Chair
Graduate Council



RE: VPAP Request for Senate Consult: Professors Assigning Their Own Texts to Students

At their February 18th meeting, the Graduate Council (GC) discussed the question of faculty assigning texts authored by the teaching faculty member, especially in cases where student purchases of the assigned text may provide financial benefits to the faculty member. Many of the issues raised by the AAUP discussion were also discussed by GC. The GC determined that there are a few issues raised, but we feel that they appear to be relatively easily addressed.

1. The first concern is a matter of academic freedom for the teaching faculty. It is natural that the faculty are expected to teach topics that they are expert in, and when this also involves the publication of texts or related material by the teaching faculty member, it would of course seem to be intuitively obvious common sense to encourage the use of these materials in teaching. These materials are the product of the faculty's academic scholarship and achievement, and it would be irresponsible and indeed educational misconduct to consider banning these materials from the classroom. That the sale of the material to students may provide some potential economic benefit to the faculty member would appear to be an irrelevant criterion for changing the appropriateness of the material in classroom use, since it is very likely that in many cases this material (e.g., textbooks) was generated expressly for the purpose of educational use. So from this point of view it would be inappropriate to prohibit the assignment of faculty texts from the classroom.

2. It can be appreciated that in situations where faculty may stand to gain financially from any of their activities, one may reasonably be concerned that an appearance of conflict of interest may arise. Certainly, it can be appreciated that faculty who put effort into writing a textbook are expecting some personal benefit from this investment of time and energy, including financial benefit. However, we should actually be very supportive of this effort, as it stands to directly help the university, as the popularity of these texts used across the country in educational settings enhances the academic reputation of our faculty and by extension, the university. It is certainly not viewed as a conflict of interest for the faculty to gain financial benefit from the sale of their

texts at other educational institutions, but it can be a concern if at our own institution the purchase of the text is required for a specific course taught by this faculty member. There would seem to be a fairly simple way to insure that any appearance of conflict of interest is removed, by reducing the potential financial benefit to any faculty assigning their own texts in a course that they are teaching. One simple way to accomplish this could be to have the teaching faculty insure that there are sufficient quantities of texts provided to the library reserve desk, so that all students can gain access to the material at no cost. We feel that this is a reasonable request that not only relieves the students of the financial burden of purchasing the texts, but also minimizes any additional financial burden on the teaching faculty, since we should not penalize them for developing worthy teaching materials.

In sum, while we can appreciate the need to address any potential conflicts of interest in any required purchase of educational materials developed by the teaching faculty, we are loathe to stand in the way of academic freedom of our teaching faculty. Moreover, we do not want to discourage our faculty from developing teaching materials that may be of significant value to students at educational institutions across the country.