

March 23, 2018

Alan W. Friedman, Ph.D.  
Secretary, Faculty Council  
Arthur J. Thaman & Wilhelmina Doré Thaman  
Endowed Professor in English #3  
The University of Texas at Austin  
P.O. Box 7816

Dear Professor Friedman:

I have reviewed the enclosed legislation recommending changes to the Student Discipline and Conduct policy in the *General Information Catalog* (D 15389-15391) approved by Faculty Council at the Sept. 13, 2017 meeting. I have discussed the proposal with Dr. Soncia Reagins-Lilly, vice president for student affairs and dean of students.

Dr. Lilly has provided the enclosed memorandum expressing concerns with certain aspects of the proposal. As a result, at this time, I am not approving the legislation. If the issues implicated by the legislation remain a concern, I recommend that Faculty Council leadership consult with Dr. Lilly and the Office of the Dean of Students to initiate a dialogue on the matters at hand.

I would be very pleased to consider a consensus proposal endorsed by Faculty Council and the Office of the Dean of Students.

Sincerely,

Maurie McInnis  
Executive Vice President and Provost

Enclosure

cc: Debbie Roberts, Executive Assistant, Office of the General Faculty  
Seema Agarwal, Educational Policy Committee Chair  
Soncia Reagins-Lilly, Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students



## VICE PRESIDENT FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS AND DEAN OF STUDENTS

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### MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Dr. Maurie McInnis  
Executive Vice President and Provost

**FROM:** Dr. Soncia Reagins-Lilly  
Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students

**DATE:** February 12, 2018

**RE:** Educational Policy Committee Proposal D 15389-15391

As discussed on February 7, I have reviewed Proposal D 15389-15391 from the Educational Policy Committee. While I find the spirit of the proposal well-intentioned, I believe that the proposed recommendations will create greater ambiguity for students in the conduct resolution process, and will have unintended consequences for all UT Austin students. Listed below are several specific concerns:

1. The rationale section states that only the Faculty Disposition form informs students that they waive their right to Q-Drop by accepting the penalty. It goes on to state, “the complete prevention of Q-Drop or the use of the One-time Exception (OTE), even after the student and faculty involved agree on a disposition, seems like a significant over-interpretation of the written policy.” Both statements are false. Chapter 11, Sec. 11-506(c) states the following:

“Any student who is found responsible for committing academic dishonest and issued any sanction(s) will not be eligible to drop the class associated with the violation.”

Section 11-506 was developed and codified over several years in consultation with college deans, who indicated their faculty expressed concern over students’ continued ability to Q-Drop courses after signing a faculty disposition. Faculty contended that students were regularly using the Q-Drop or OTE after the discovery of an academic violation in order to avoid the appropriate level of academic accountability. The policy has been vetted extensively and approved by the academic and student leadership of the university.

2. The rationale section states, “preventing the drop in such scenarios explicitly prevents faculty from “disposing” of the academic dishonesty cases as they see fit.” Under Sec. 11-700, faculty members retain multiple academic penalties options which include, but are not limited to, requiring a student to resubmit an assignment, issuing half-credit or zero credit on an assignment, receiving no grade higher than a C, and more. The faculty will always maintain discretion as they see fit for their courses as it relates to the student’s grade. However, Q-Drop and OTE decisions are an administrative determination made by the college administration in consultation with the dean of students in order to maintain consistency and fairness across UT Austin. For example, if some students are allowed to Q-Drop or OTE classes after an academic violation and other students are not afforded this option by a different group of faculty members, the University may be exposed to potential legal action.

3. The recommended language for Sec. 11-506(a) states, “students are recommended to continue attending class until any investigation of academic dishonesty is finalized.” Sec. 11-506(a) currently states:

“A student may not drop a class if there are any pending investigations of academic dishonesty.”

The proposed change does not provide any clarity to a student in the conduct process, and in fact creates greater ambiguity. While current policy makes expectations clear for any student in the conduct process, making class attendance optional while a review of academic dishonesty is pending will create confusion and concern for students. If a student chooses not to attend class during an academic dishonesty investigation, and later decides to attend that same class if their incident has been resolved without a finding of a violation, the student will almost assuredly experience negative academic consequences.

4. The recommended language for Sec. 11-506(c) states, “a student may not drop a course if the final sanction is an F in the course.” As listed above, Sec. 11-506(c) currently states:

“Any student who is found responsible for committing academic dishonest and issued any sanction(s) will not be eligible to drop the class associated with the violation.”

It is possible that proposal D 15389-15391 was crafted based on an outdated version of Chapter 11 which did not include Sec. 11-506(c). However, making this proposed change would erode the existing academic penalty for scholastic dishonesty, and provide an enforcement mechanism in only one situation. The change also has the unintended consequence of creating an academic advantage for a student with an academic integrity violation. For example, if two students are enrolled in same course and one earns a “B” without cheating, and the other student is caught cheating and allowed to Q-Drop, the student that was found responsible for cheating can choose to retake the same course the following semester with an academic advantage due to familiarity with course material. This student has increased their odds of receiving an “A” only because the institution granted them an advantage for being found responsible for cheating.

I fully believe the student conduct process as currently constructed meets the high academic standards and expectations espoused in our core values and required of a Tier-One research university. If it is EPC’s goal to provide an alternative to students as it relates to their ability to either Q-Drop or use the OTE after a finding of an academic violation, this request can be satisfied through a written appeal to the Office of the President as outlined in Chapter 11, Sec. 11-800.

It is also critically important to understand that weakening the conduct process will send two messages to our students. First, by moving to accommodate students who intentionally violate the university’s rules on academic integrity, as an institution we send a negative message as it relates to personal accountability, and academic expectations. Second, reducing our standards will have an indirect impact of reducing the perceived value of the rigorous time and effort our students place into their studies. While well intentioned, making the changes proposed by the Faculty Council may unintentionally create a culture that limits personal accountability and minimizes the importance of academic integrity. For these reasons, I cannot recommend approval of D 15389-15391.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Cc: Dr. Janet Dukerich, Senior Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs  
Ms. Michelle George, Administrative Manager, Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost  
Dr. Anel Fils-Aime, Director of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity  
Mr. Andrew Clark, Policy Administrator, Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs