

MUHLENBERG

COLLEGE

Peyton R. Helm
PRESIDENT

TO: The Muhlenberg Community
FROM: Randy Helm
DATE: April 30, 2015
RE: Observations on Policy Development at Muhlenberg

Recent reactions to the discussion draft of the protest and demonstration policy, including the suggestions generated at Tuesday's forum, have raised the broader question of how policies are currently developed at Muhlenberg and how policies might be developed in the future. A number of people have asked me how the discussion draft was created and how policies at the College come into being. I thought it might be helpful to address some of those questions by describing how policies have been developed *in the past*. **It is certainly appropriate for the community to revisit the question of process from time to time, and I am sure that President Williams will recognize the importance of this question as he begins to plan for the fall semester.**

Under our system of shared governance, policy development has been a distributed responsibility. Departments, for example, have routinely developed policies for how shared resources may be used (think of instruments in the Music Department, athletic equipment in the Athletic Department, and the like) or other matters. Some policies have been developed primarily by the faculty (particularly those pertaining to the academic program, the faculty handbook, our academic standards, tenure and promotion procedures, academic integrity standards, etc.). Others have been developed primarily by the Board of Trustees (examples would include endowment management and spending policies and others that are directly related to the Board's fiduciary responsibilities). Still others have been the primary responsibility of the administration: human resources matters, operational matters, the social judicial code, and sexual misconduct procedures, for example. Student Government has developed policies for allocating resources to student groups and, at times, originated policy recommendations related to student life. In some cases, policies have been developed in response to changing regulatory requirements (such as Title IX, Sarbanes-Oxley, and the like) and have been designed to bring the College into compliance with local, state, or federal regulations. The College frequently consults with its attorneys in the development of policies that need to be in compliance with such regulations.

In the case of the recent draft of the protest and demonstration policy, representatives of the Dean of Students staff suggested an updating of the policy in the wake of recent campus demonstrations, threatening behavior by a bystander at one such demonstration, and anonymous threats against demonstrators. That revision was undertaken by members of the Dean of Students staff, and further reviewed and edited by the College attorney and by senior staff.

In an academic community, of course, policies – regardless of where they are created – may be questioned and debated. And significant proposed changes in policy should be communicated to those affected by them so that questions can be raised and discussed. It was in this context that I informed the faculty at its March 13 meeting of our plans to revise the existing policy on protests and demonstrations, and that I invited questions. Once the draft policy was distributed I received dozens of comments and suggestions, which resulted in Tuesday’s forum and my assurance that the discussion will continue next fall to ensure that full consultation can occur.

Tuesday afternoon’s forum endorsed “equal participation for students, faculty, and administration in the discussion, creation, and implementation of policy.” How this recommendation might work going forward will provide many opportunities for discussion in the coming months.