

Navajo County Community College District Governing Board Study Session Minutes

February 21, 2012

2251 East Navajo Boulevard, Holbrook, Arizona, 86025

Governing Board Members Present: Bill Jeffers, Ginny Handorf, via telephone Louella Nahsonhoya.

Staff Present: President, Jeanne Swarhout; Vice President, Blaine Hatch; Vice President, Mark Vest; Information Services Director, Eric Bishop; Institutional Effectiveness Director, Leslie Wasson; Recording Secretary to the Board, Kristin Thomas.

Report:

1. Study Session Agenda Item 1.: Request to Approve Reaffirmation of Policy 1810 and Policy 1102- President Swarhout

Chairman Jeffers stated the background information in respect to the agenda item as presented. Chairman Jeffers reported that some community members voiced concerns during the NPC theatrical performance of *Grease*. The NPC legal counsel and Mr. Hatch conducted a thorough internal investigation into some very serious allegations. Chairman Jeffers stated that some procedure changes were made in response to community concerns. Mr. Hatch summarized the investigation of allegations regarding sexual abuse, sexual abuse of a minor, along with additional concerns voiced by the individual that initiated the allegations: NPC strongly solicits participation of minors, religious harassment and pattern of pressure by NPC instructor to coerce students to perform in a certain manner contrary to individual standards. Mr. Hatch reported an outcome of no substantiation and no evidence found for any of the allegations. Mr. Jeffers asked Dr. Swarhout to review recommendation to the board. Dr. Swarhout stated the recommendation on reaffirmation of Northland Pioneer College Policy 1810, Academic Freedom and Policy 1102, Equal Employment and Educational Opportunities noting the institution's support for Procedure 2710, Statement of Non-Discrimination. Dr. Swarhout defined Academic Freedom as allowing the instructor to develop course content and production content according to the needs of the course, not subject to censorship from the outside; it does define responsibility of the instructor and differentiate instructor from a private citizen. Academic Freedom protects the faculty from having to conform to specific values that may not be consistent pedagogy or curriculum content. Policy 1102 is the College's non-discrimination compliance statement. Dr. Swarhout stated that NPC is required to adhere to both policies according to federal and accreditation mandates.

Mr. Jeffers asked Dr. Swarhout to state the changes in procedure in response to community concerns. Dr. Swarhout responded with two existing procedures and one new procedure: Performing Arts productions with adult content will be disclosed to the purchasing public; potential performers, have full disclosure of role content at the beginning of the audition process; parental permission is now required, including full role disclosure, for performing arts participants under the age of 18 (new procedure). Mr. Ryan Montgomery stated his concerns based on his viewing of *Grease*. Mr. Montgomery stated he appreciates and is happy with the outcome of the investigation. Mr. Montgomery denied knowledge of any of the allegations with one exception based on a letter from a former scholarship student who felt the scholarship was forfeited based on her unwillingness to participate in production content she was uncomfortable with. Mr. Montgomery stated the views and opinions he expressed are those in the majority of the Taylor/Snowflake area, which is predominately morally conservative. Mr. Montgomery stated his wish is for taxpayers who fund the community college to not feel alienated but to support and participate in future NPC productions. Mr. Montgomery stated his primary request is that NPC change direction and promote moral, respectful and sexually discreet performances. Mr. Montgomery stated this request is with the support of area civic leaders and religious leaders. Mr. Montgomery requested that productions conform to the standards and morals of the community. Mr. Montgomery stated respect and understanding of the First Amendment. Mr. Montgomery said he is asking for a common respect. Mr. Montgomery stated that censorship does exist in community colleges in the form of production directors normally avoiding controversial plays. Mr. Montgomery stated his main point was the need to explore a definition of the program. Mr. Montgomery stated that Dr. Swarhout has started this process. Mr. Montgomery said he is the representative from the Taylor/Snowflake Town Council to voice these concerns.



- Rick Fernau from Show Low said he is impressed by and appreciates the NPC Performing Arts Department productions. He suggested individuals exercise choice; if the performance looks controversial to an individual then they shouldn't go see it. He said he appreciated all public input and encouraged a committee to be formed to incorporate other areas that NPC serves. He said he wished there were a theatre facility of this stature in Show Low.
- Janet Fish from Winslow said that students are the main focus of a college and are often presented with controversial issues. She said *Grease* is historical fiction and an important piece of American history and that trimming back the theater program to nice things would not adequately prepare students for university and entertainment jobs. She said that NPC encompasses a larger area than Southern Navajo County.
- Jan Van Dierendonck from Snowflake said she is the past president of Northeastern Arizona Fine Arts Association (NAFAA). She said NAFAA has donated over \$40,000 to the arts in this area, with a large percentage going to NPC. She said she is a local cable television host who promotes the arts. She said she was aware and familiar with the conservative perspective from which the concern stems and that she agrees with some of it. She stated that Snowflake/Taylor is not the center of universe; there is a much larger world. She said we should be grateful for the affordable college and quality education NPC gives our children all while staying at home. She said that because the theater was built in Snowflake/ Taylor does not mean it is Snowflake/Taylor's theater, but that the theater was built to serve the entire NPC community from one end of the mountain range to the other. She said controversial subjects help people to grow and to think.
- Eli Blake from Winslow said his daughter has been involved with NPC theatre department since she was small child in children's theater camp. He said the level of professionalism she has encountered during this time is of the highest level. He said he would not send his 15-year-old daughter to the theatre department if he ever had any doubt in the program. He said the level of expertise experienced is amazing and that his daughter is considering pursuing the arts as a career as a result of the inspiration received from Dr. Solomonson and the NPC theater program. He said that when someone is inspiring young people, that is a true measure of a job well done. He said he is very active in the same church as the concerned community members.
- Laney Rhineheart said that as a member of the NPC theater program she has gained tremendous confidence. She said she had auditioned as a Disney character performer, which was a direct result of the confidence given to her by Dr. Mike Solomonson. She said as a *Grease* cast member she was grateful to be able to learn pertinent things about a time period that she did not live in. She said that we can not be shielded from the world we live in; it would be like trying to censor our library or media in general.
- Terry McConville said the college is supposed to create controversy, art is meant to challenge us to think; art is meant to show us the broader world. He complimented the college and the NPC theatre arts department. He said he agreed with 90% of what was said by the concerned community members because he shares the same spiritual belief system. He said an individual may not want to do the same things a character in *Grease* does, but it helps them not to feel alone in the world we live in by learning more about the world.
- Joshua Heath from Winslow said he travelled a great distance regularly to be a part of the NPC theatre department because it has positively changed his life. He said that under and alongside Dr. Mike Solomonson he had participated in all areas of theater from stage manager to lighting to actor to playwright. He said that since becoming involved in the NPC theater department, theater has become a major part of his life. He said he wanted to pursue a future career in theatre arts. He thanked Dr. Mike Solomonson for broadening his horizons.

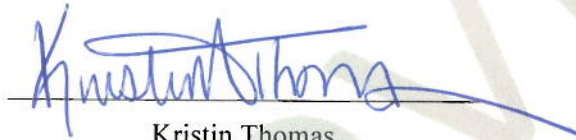
Mr. Jeffers asked Dr. Swarthout to describe the theatre planning production process. Dr. Swarthout asked Dr. Mike Solomonson to present the process so the public could gain a better of understanding of the lengthy timeline involved in production development. Dr. Solomonson stated he applied for the performing rights to *Grease* in December 2010 and received the rights on March 31, 2011. Loyal patrons of NPC theatre expressed a desire to see a Valentines Day Dinner Theatre. Dr. Solomonson and staff decided to do a ninety-minute comedy. Dr. Solomonson applied for and received the performance license for *The Underpants* adapted by well-known comic Steve Martin. The performance rights were granted on July 20, 2011; a full 6 months prior to actual performance dates. The *Grease* Musical Director, Ms. Neish, joined NPC in August and acclimated quickly. She approached Dr. Solomonson in October with her idea of directing a musical production titled *Edges*. Her recommendation was based



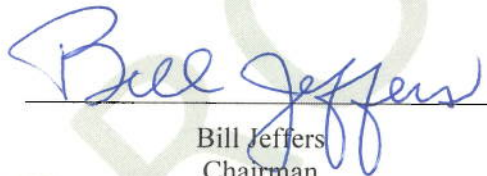
on a previously positive experience at George Mason University in Virginia while working as a member of their staff. Dr. Solomonson stated the production planning approach is sometimes 6 months but generally 9-12 months in advance of actual performance. Dr. Solomonson noted *The Underpants* performing rights were purchased long before *Grease* controversy erupted, with no truth to the rumor of an intentional insult to the community based on current controversy. Dr. Solomonson added that he does self-censor his production choice based on the community we live in by deliberately choosing not to perform certain works even though he may think they are great works of art. Dr. Solomonson listed all theatre offerings over the past 5 years: he identified three family friendly events for every one mature audience event. Dr. Solomonson stated his job as an educator is to prepare his students for the world stage of literature, to transfer to a university and to work in a world outside of where we live.

Study session ended at 10:31 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Kristin Thomas
Recording Secretary to the Board



Bill Jeffers
Chairman



Ginny Handorf
Board Secretary

