The IFC met for an abbreviated telepresence meeting on November 19, 2010. We discussed the proposed policy on academic dishonesty. UM legal counsel Kate Markie summarized case law concerning allowable actions that faculty may take in response to confirmed instances of academic dishonesty, primarily plagiarism and cheating. She stated that while faculty may fail a student on a test or assignment that is compromised by dishonesty, a faculty member cannot punish a student for this dishonesty, for example, by failing the student in the course. In other words, faculty have the right to evaluate a student in terms of the quality of her work – which includes whether the work was performed in an honest way – but cannot act as “judge and jury” to punish the student. This must be handled through a separate, deliberative process. Several IFC members raised the question of whether indicating in the course syllabus that a student must adhere to professional standards (and spelling out these standards or giving a reference to them) would permit a professor to fail a student in a course if even one instance of academic dishonesty arose – for example, a journalism student that plagiarizes another writer. Markie admitted that this might be a way in which what might appear on the surface to be punishment – an F in the course – is really a grade that is reflective of the quality of a student’s academic work.

The IFC briefly discussed the pilot grievance process that has been tried at all of the UM campuses except UMSL. We agreed that there would be a special session – to be held on Friday, December 10 at 1 p.m. at UMSL – to explain the proposed changes and the experience of the other campuses with this new system during the past year.

The IFC discussed and voted on a modification to the current rules related to the award of an endowed professorship. This modification would permit an endowed Chair to be awarded as part of a focused effort of a campus to develop a specialized program or niche, whether in the teaching, research or outreach mission of the campus. The endowed professorship program has already been modified to permit these positions to be given to current faculty to recognize research or teaching accomplishments.

Finally, there was discussion about modifying the collected rules and regulations related to faculty-authored textbooks and selection of course materials. The concern that was raised had to do with development grants that have been given to faculty to “encourage” their use of certain textbooks in their classes. The IFC agreed to consider a change in the rules to prohibit such blatant conflict-of-interest while still permitting faculty to receive grants and other modes of compensation to review manuscripts, participate in the development of new textbooks, and so forth.