

Minutes*

Faculty Consultative Committee
Thursday, April 25, 2002
12:00 – 2:00
471 Mondale Hall

Present: Joseph Massey (chair), Muriel Bebeau, Arthur Erdman, Daniel Feeney, Richard Goldstein, Marti Hope Gonzales, Candace Kruttschnitt, Leonard Kuhl, Marvin Marshak, Judith Martin, Scott McConnell, Paula Rabinowitz

Absent: Wilbert Ahern, Susan Brorson, Les Drewes, Marc Jenkins, Jeff Ratliff-Crain, Charles Speaks

Guests: Executive Vice President and Provost Robert Bruininks

Other: Florence Funk (Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost)

[In these minutes: (1) use of Senate mailing labels/lists; (2) faculty access to budgets; (3) discussion with Executive Vice President Bruininks (funding for academic infrastructure items, elimination of waiting period for faculty retirement plan and health care, political issues)

1. Mailing Labels and Lists

Professor Massey convened the meeting at 12:15 and drew the attention of Committee members to a draft protocol on the use of Senate and committee mailing lists and labels. The Committee unanimously approved the protocol, which generally limits the use of the Senate lists and labels to actions by a committee or at the direction of the chair of the Senate/Faculty Consultative Committees and limits the use of committee lists to items approved by the chair or distributed by staff because of interest to the committee.

2. Faculty Access to Budgets

Professor Feeney related that one of the faculty at one of the events for new faculty inquired about faculty access to department budgets. One reason they may want to see the budgets, he speculated, is that the faculty lack confidence in the department's ability to shepherd its resources; another reason may be that they are interested in becoming administrators and want to see how the budget works.

Committee members made a number of points.

-- Even with access to the numbers, it is often difficult to know what they mean. The former chief financial officer of the Academic Health Center reviewed budget data with the AHC Finance and Planning Committee; some of the information went over the heads of committee members and some of the data were soft (but do permit general outlines, such as percentages of funding from O&M, sponsored research, etc.).

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-- There was an effort to identify unexpended balances; even with access to the numbers, it is not easy to do so. The (Senate) Finance and Planning Committee has talked with Mr. Pfitzenreuter about differentiating between balances that are committed (encumbered) and those that are not; this is a topic that will continue to come up.

-- All the budget data are public, so faculty can have access to them. Perhaps there is access through one's X.500 identification. It was agreed that Professor Marshak would try an experiment, to see how much information he could discover.

-- The real issue is whether people in departments are aware of the financial status of the department. Faculty are told there is no money for something and they wonder if that is true. One wishes there could be more transparent way to understand the budgets; decisions could be sound but without evidence, faculty cannot argue with them or accept them. It is the responsibility of the department head to provide faculty the information they should have.

-- It would be helpful for chairs and heads to have a template on how to share information, and to have information that they could use to compare their departments with others. There is such a template for colleges, but not departments. At the same time, comparisons can obfuscate as well as clarify when different systems are used by different colleges.

-- The faculty's interest is in their own department as well as comparisons with other departments.

-- The grants management system can generate different reports for different needs, which suggests that the capacity for preparing reports does exist.

2. Discussion with Executive Vice President Bruininks

Professor Massey welcomed Dr. Bruininks to the meeting.

Dr. Bruininks said he wished to review several issues, and began with one that he said he felt strongly about: erosion of the academic infrastructure. He said he would like to begin to tackle the issues before he leaves office; he identified several areas requiring investment (and tentative commitments).

-- The libraries: They will not be subject to cuts, funding will be increased by at least \$750,000 from the colleges and campuses and the central administration, and there will be a start on building an endowment. Professor Rabinowitz spoke about the need for space for faculty to work and about the atmosphere of the libraries, which she described as unappealing.

The Senate Library Committee is also considering a proposal for an academic emphasis on the libraries in undergraduate programs; while the Library School should not be revived, there are career opportunities that suggest a minor in library science would be appropriate.

-- Modernization of classrooms: There is a need for \$1.5 million in recurring funds to maintain classrooms; Dr. Bruininks will add \$250,000 to the \$500,000 in recurring funds already available, so the effort will be half-way to the funding needed for replacement of equipment.

-- Merit scholarships: The University has few funds for merit scholarships compared to its peer institutions; in terms of funds that can be used to recruit freshmen, the University is last in the Big Ten. It also ranks low in funding for Study Abroad. Dr. Bruininks said he is adding \$425,000 to merit scholarship funding, with some of the funds as a match for a new \$900,000 Bush grant for study abroad.

-- The minority faculty bridge program funds have not been adjusted for 10 years and they have not had the flexibility to allow spousal hires. Dr. Bruininks said he would add \$250,000 to these funds.

-- Funding outside the capital request for remodeling research space has been limited; Dr. Bruininks said he is making \$125,000 available.

Professor Rabinowitz said that one resource never provided for is TIME, something that faculty need and do not have enough of.

Professor Kuhi said that single-semester leaves are another resource; they must be funded 100% by the home department and are a burden on small departments. Sabbatical leaves have some non-departmental funding which makes them easier to handle. It would be helpful if he would build up funding for single-semester leaves.

Dr. Bruininks then said that he would be unable to support the proposal to eliminate the waiting period for the faculty retirement plan. The deans and chancellors do not want more IOUs at a time of budget uncertainty. He has proposed that there be more flexibility in negotiations so that if a faculty or P&A staff member has vested in a retirement plan elsewhere, the waiting period could be waived. Vice President Carrier is exploring this issue.

Why not think about eliminating waiting for new Ph.D.s, Professor Kruttschnitt asked; they are sometimes the best and the brightest? Dr. Bruininks said he does not like the current policy, which provides for immediate participation in the retirement plan for higher-paid P&A staff but not to those who are paid less; if anything, it should be the other way around. To change the policy now, however, would mean raising costs without raising revenues. Fringe benefit costs at the University are already high compared to peer institutions. Fringe benefits are high but salaries are low, Professor Gonzales pointed out.

Professor Goldstein, noting that the funds for faculty retirement plan contributions are already in the colleges for each personnel line, even if not spent on retirement funds, said that it is a misappropriation of those funds to allow colleges to use them for other purposes.

Professor McConnell suggested that Dr. Bruininks declare, on his departure from office, that there would be a phase-in period of a few years, perhaps up to five, at the end of which the waiting period would be eliminated. Dr. Bruininks expressed doubt that he could issue such a directive, but Professor Kuhi pointed out that the administration raises the Internal Revenue Sharing tax by a directive to colleges; why could it not do so with this? Dr. Bruininks said he would think about a phase-in period and discuss it with administrative leaders.

Professor Feeney said the current policy sends the wrong message. If a department hires a P&A staff member above a certain salary, that individual starts in the retirement plan immediately, but a faculty member hired at the same salary must wait two years. That suggests that P&A staff are more important than faculty.

Professor Goldstein next inquired about eliminating the 30-day waiting period for health coverage, left over from a time when individuals with existing medical conditions would be discouraged from seeking employment only to obtain medical coverage. Since everyone is covered now in any event, the waiting period does not make sense and causes difficulties for some new employees. Dr. Bruininks said he was unaware of a proposal to eliminate the waiting period and promised to ask Vice President Carrier to review the issue.

Dr. Bruininks next reported that he has made provisions for the Regents' Professorships to be true endowed professor appointments at \$25,000 per year. There will be funding for research as well as the salary supplement. This funding will come largely from external sources.

Professor Martin noted that the winners of the Morse-Alumni award receive varying amounts of support, depending on the year they won the award. Dr. Bruininks said he has asked the Foundation to consider a proposal to endow the Academy of Distinguished Teachers, which would go a long way to eliminating disparities, but the differences cannot be made up now.

Professor Rabinowitz observed that publishing a book when salary increases are very small works to the disadvantage of faculty. While departments can adjust merit evaluations to cover more than one year, Professor Kruttschnitt pointed out, that just means that the belt is tightened for others, Professor Rabinowitz said; it is a zero-sum game in which one competes with colleagues for funds. At other institutions, there is a bonus or other gesture to recognize significant scholarly accomplishment. Dr. Bruininks agreed that the University has not been sufficiently creative in how it raises outside funds for scholarships and professorships to supplement salaries; such funds could often be used in different ways. Rather than endow a single professorship, for example, funds for an endowed chair could be used on a rotating basis to recognize merit among several faculty.

Following discussion of the extent to which the University is (or is not) engaged enough in the political process, and whether it is relatively weak at the state capitol, it was agreed that relationships with legislators should be a discussion topic at the FCC retreat.

And even when there are positive steps taken, Professor Kuhl observed, then athletics blows up. Professor Martin added that she found offensive the enormous amount of time that the President and Vice President Brown have had to spend on athletics recently--many of their regular activities simply stop during such periods. That is a bad use of the President's time, she maintained; all that time spent on athletics is not time spent thinking about other more important things. To say nothing of the financial implications of athletics, Professor Kuhl added.

Professor Massey adjourned the meeting at 2:15.

-- Gary Engstrand