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Minutes

Senate Committee on Faculty Affairs

Tuesday, September 12, 2006

2:30 – 4:15

238A Morrill Hall

Present:

Geoffrey Sirc (chair), Matthew Bribitzer-Stull, Arlene Carney, Carol Carrier, Vladimir Cherkassky, Tom Clayton, A. Saari Csallany, Janet Ericksen, Erin George, Kathryn Hanna, Morris Kleiner, Theodor Litman, Steven McLoon, Luis Ramos-Garcia, Kelly Risbey, Roderick Squires, Larry Wallace, Timothy Wiedmann, Virginia Zuiker

Absent:

Dann Chapman, Jane Miller, Oriol Valls

Guests:

none

[In these minutes: (1) new faculty orientation; (2) department head/chair development; (3) issues pending; (4) faculty culture task force recommendations]

1. New Faculty Orientation

Professor Sirc convened the meeting at 2:35, welcomed Committee members to the first meeting of the year, called for a round of introductions, and then turned to Vice Provost Carney for first of three items she was reporting on.

Dr. Carney explained that she was the Provost's representative on the strategic positioning Faculty Culture Task Force and worked with a number of groups that were part of the task force effort. Faculty they spoke with said they felt isolated and not connected with other faculty.

At the central administrative level, the Provost's office decided to lengthen the new faculty orientation. Last year it was two hours; this year it was three days (one day each on the West Bank, East Bank, and St. Paul, so at least once all the new faculty will have been at all three Twin Cities locations); this first year it was for new Twin Cities faculty only because each campus has its own program and there was potentially a problem with having members of the bargaining unit at Duluth participate.

She said they will investigate the usefulness of having perhaps a half-day program for all new faculty from all campuses.

The invitation went to all new faculty, 134, and to all with a faculty designation (tenured, tenure-track, contract, visiting, etc.).

Names were supplied by departments and colleges (because the new faculty were not yet in PeopleSoft; their appointments did not start until the week following the orientation). They had a very good response: 96 new faculty came to at least one day and 72 came to all three days. Those who attended were paid \$200 for each day and were also provided breakfast, lunch, and a reception each day.

One of the goals was to provide new faculty with the broadest possible picture of the University. The reactions were very positive.

The new appointees came from colleges across the campus (30 CLA, 33 AHC, 12 CFANS, etc.); there were 51 males

and 45 females; there were an estimated 21 faculty of color.

Dr. Carney reviewed the agenda for each of the three days of the orientation, which included, inter alia, teaching and learning, research services, human resources, online resources, diversity, public engagement, mentoring, University organization, governance, and promotion and tenure. Dr. Carney related that she relied on a faculty advisory committee in developing the program; that group was split on whether time should be spent having the new faculty introduce themselves to each other.

She asked them to do so; the reaction was overwhelmingly positive and a number of them were amazed to learn what their colleagues do.

The evaluations of the orientation, besides being very positive, also contained a number of suggestions that Dr. Carney said she intends to follow up on.

One interesting one (from several) was that the new faculty be invited to regroup during the year and that there be an annual social event for the cohort.

Dr. Carney has set up three lunches, some focused on a topic and some not, to which the participants will be invited. There is also now an email address for new faculty who have questions that they can't get answered.

Professor Litman asked if there would be a follow-up after the new faculty have been here for a year, to see what their suggestions might be then.

Dr. Carney said she is preparing a proposal for the IRB so she can send a questionnaire (1) to faculty who started last year to ask what they would have liked to have known, and (2) next fall to faculty who went through the new orientation session this year, to see if there is a difference. The Faculty Culture Task Force found that faculty are most connected to their departments, some to their college, but few to the institution; she would like to combat that disconnect. They also intend to track the retention of the cohort.

This is a big improvement over what was offered before, Professor Hanna commented. Dr. Carney agreed and added that it helped to have the Provost and the President participate. By the end of the three days, the new faculty understood that the University intends to be one of the top three public institutions in the world and many of them talked about that goal in terms of their own work.

2. Department Head/Chair Development

Dr. Carney turned next to the program for department chairs and heads, a program that is being expanded. It has typically consisted of evening events 6-7 times per year. She went through it when she became a new chair, and learned a great deal from it, but concluded that there was not enough about leadership and promotion and tenure (the latter in particular is a key topic for chairs).

This year they will have three mini-retreats as well as evening events for 17 new chairs. The President and Provost will talk to them and they will be provided a book on chairing the academic department.

The topics of the sessions during the year will be:

Leading the Academic Department; Mentoring Faculty in Your Department; The Life Cycle of Faculty: Hiring, Promotion & Tenure, and Post-Tenure Review; Fostering a Productive, Supportive Department; Planning and Managing Finances; Dealing with Difficult Issues; and Strategic Planning and Change. Dr. Carney said they are trying things they haven't done before and that in the past they have not paid enough attention to faculty development—in one of the most jobs in the University.

Most of the chairs are brand-new to the job and they come from all colleges (and it is helpful for them to have cross-college views).

This is not the first time there has been a program for chairs, Dr. Carney said in response to a question, but it expands on what Human Resources has offered in the past.

The new events contain more philosophical discussion about what it means to be a chair. Previously, there was an excellent program on how to do the job; the new program simply offers a broader view (and the job is more

complicated than it was in the past).

Professor Hanna said that this is very important because department leadership is critical to the success of the University.

She said she has seen too many instances when a chair was hired because of a stellar academic record but who was not very good with people. Dr. Carney said she hoped to make this a two-year package for the chairs: get to know the job the first year and then meet twice per semester the second year to talk about cases. She said she was open to suggestions about how to make faculty jobs easier, whether as faculty or as chair.

Professor Sirc suggested it might be useful for chairs to have the chair of the Senate Judicial Committee talk about when things go wrong and about procedural issues.

The CIC also has programs on academic leadership and department executive officers. The Academic Leadership Program is University-wide; faculty on all campuses are eligible to participate. Dr. Carney said that she tracks college, campus, gender, and ethnicity and tries to spread out the opportunities. The program is aimed at tenured faculty; the University picks younger faculty who might be interested in administration while some institutions send assistant deans.

Some faculty may not want to acknowledge an interest in administration (the waste of a good mind), but some faculty participants come out of the governance system.

There are five participants from each CIC institution per year; they travel for three weekends to other CIC schools where they meet the president and provost as well as a lot of other people from the institutions. She also meets with the five participants during the year and uses past participants as an advisory body.

The CIC Department Executive Officer program, for chairs, is one weekend at the Big Ten headquarters with five chairs.

The CIC program provides a forum to meet chairs from other institutions and helps them realize the issues are broader than just the University.

That is what she has to tell about faculty development programs, Dr. Carney concluded, and she said she was open to suggestions about what else might be provided.

One of the things high on her list of tasks is preparation of a faculty handbook; Dr. Carney said she would look to this Committee for help in compiling it.

She said it is striking that this is one of the few major research universities not to have a handbook. She said she would like it to be online, with links, but not just a collection of links. She said she would write elements of it and bring the drafts to the Committee for reactions.

She also invited anyone who was interested in doing so to help her work on it; she wishes to produce a useful document.

Professor McLoon said a list of links would not be all bad; Dr. Carney said that UCLA has a lot of links but it also has pithy notes.

Professor McLoon commented that there is an extraordinary amount of resources to help faculty that they do not know about; if she could compile a list, in some reasonably organized way, that would be a great help. People do have to spend a lot of time searching, Dr. Carney agreed.

Some don't even bother to start searching, Professor McLoon said, even though they know resources for teaching, research, statistics, shops, equipment, etc., are there; a good and thorough database on what is available would be helpful, even if it is just links.

Was there a handbook in the past, Professor Hanna asked? There was, Dr. Carrier said, but it was paper, not electronic (and the Faculty Consultative Committee, at the point when the handbook needed to be updated and rewritten, in the age before widespread web use, advised the administration to drop it because it could never be kept up to date and cost too much).

Now it can be kept electronically, Dr. Carney said, although it might take nearly one full-time employee just to keep it up to date.

Having a handbook would help in recruiting faculty, she said; if they are interested in the University, they would click on it because it typically provides a good idea of what the faculty think of themselves. The University does not know who is looking, she said, so while it would help people already here, it would also help get people to come.

Professor Sirc thanked Dr. Carney for her presentation to the Committee.

3. Issues Pending

Professor Sirc drew the attention of Committee members to the list of issues pending, the accumulation of items from previous years plus new items that the Committee could take up. He asked Committee members to identify those that they believe warrant spending time on. A number were suggested.

-- Post-retirement health care savings accounts:

Professor McLoon said that while Vice President Carrier could be asked to discuss it again, the faculty and staff will not see any benefits added without subtracting other benefits.

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Increased workloads due to larger classes, increased emphasis on external funding, or higher performance expectations:

Professor Kleiner said this is a carry-over item that this Committee should monitor, but thus far it has been unable to obtain any data.

-- Professor Clayton said that he was interested in how faculty-salary increases are distributed. In the relatively distant past, they were partly across-the-board (cost-of-living) and partly merit, with the across-the-board being sometimes proportional, sometimes lump-sum, sometimes both. That practice ended during President Keller's term, and ever since salaries have been distributed entirely on the basis of merit. He said he had argued, as chair of this Committee at the time, for some cost-of-living adjustment but was unable to persuade enough SCFA members to support it..

-- Endowed chairs:

Professor Kleiner recalled that there was a subcommittee last spring that developed a proposal to identify the role of faculty in evaluating those who hold endowed chairs.

There was a lot of disagreement in the Committee so the report was tabled. Professor Wiedmann took suggestions and edited the report, so the Committee could take it up again, although there may still be disagreement over it. They also did not resolve where the policy should go if it is approved by this Committee—to the Faculty Senate? The Board of Regents? That decision will require a conversation with the administration.

-- Data on faculty/P&A appointments: Dr. Carrier will bring the data.

-- Use of outside review of grievance process decisions: The Committee should pursue this.

-- Inconsistency across departments in allowing/providing parental leave: The Committee has scheduled a larger discussion on family-friendly policies later in the semester.

-- Sections 7.11 and 7.12 of the tenure code and post-tenure review: The Academic Freedom and Tenure Committee is revisiting these items; what is the role of this Committee? SCFA should work with Academic Freedom and Tenure once it has completed its work.

4. Faculty Culture Task Force Recommendations

Professor Sirc asked Committee members to review the list of recommendations from the Faculty Culture Task Force to identify those that they believed SCFA should consider.

-- Number two, invest in more family-friendly benefits: what is in the offing and what is SCFA's role in discussing them?

Dr. Carney said that the Faculty Culture Task Force recommendations are framing the discussion at Academic Freedom and Tenure about revision of tenure code Sections 7.11 and 7.12; this Committee should talk about the family-friendly policies.

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The task force also recommended (number ten) that every 7.12 statement should say something about mentoring (the practice now varies widely). She will have the data from the "Collaboration on Academic Careers in Higher Education" national study (a survey of tenure-track faculty), which will provide a way for the University to benchmark itself against peer institutions.

One item that came up in the national survey was mentoring (the lack of it and the frustration faculty felt), and it comes into play at two levels:

for probationary faculty going up for tenure and promotion and for associate professors going up for promotion to full professor.

There were presentations about mentoring at both the new faculty orientation and the program for chairs; those who are experts on mentoring, Professor Carole Bland and Associate Dean Ann Taylor, could come to the Committee to discuss it. Professor Clayton asked if she would find out what is being done elsewhere. Dr. Carney said she would ask her colleagues in the CIC; she surmised the practices would be quite diverse. Some departments do it well, some do not, and some departments think they do it well but the faculty do not. There are not a lot of data available. The task force felt that this Committee could provide a service to many at the University by pursuing this issue, because it is important; it has gender, race, and generational issues wrapped up in it.

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Number 13, seeking an exemption from the "open letter" law to protect the anonymity of external reviewers in order to get more honest reviews. The Committee may have a point of view. Professor Seybold asked if the Provost was looking into this recommendation; Dr. Carney affirmed that he is.

Professor McLoon said there are two sides to the issue. It is standard to use anonymous peer review in research, but this is personnel.

Professor Csallany said that the reviews should not be secret because they can do great harm to faculty. But many will not write letters if they know they will be available to the individual, Professor Kleiner pointed out. An anonymous letter should not determine someone's future, Professor Csallany insisted. The idea that one can try enemy combatants without providing all the information is an interesting parallel, Professor McLoon commented; he said he would dislike not being tenured and not know who wrote what about him.

To bar anonymity biases the letters in favor of the employee, Professor Kleiner said. Professor McLoon said he writes letters; each discipline has its own language and often it is what is NOT said that is important, not what is said. He will not go on record saying something negative, but he may not be enthusiastic. He said he believed the letters should be open.

Professor Wallace agreed and said he will sometimes send a warm letter, one that is neither hot nor cold, and will add that he would be glad to discuss the candidate further on the telephone.

Professor Wallace then asked whether, in some units, the candidates may name their outside reviewers. They can, Dr. Carney said, and she found that there is an interesting mix of letters as she reviewed the files last year. Sometimes there are unequal numbers of letters:

the candidate may have more or fewer than wanted and the department may have more or fewer than it wanted. Whose choice is the actual number of letters, Professor Wallace asked? It varies, Dr. Carney said; IT and CLA are very clear, for example, in identifying letters as from candidate choices of reviewers and from department choices.

Professor Seybold said she assumed that the second sentence of the task force recommendation ("Further, depts should request external review from colleagues who lead their discipline and who work at institutions or in depts with equal or greater ranking than that of the candidate's unit") is generally being followed. Dr. Carney said that varies greatly.

She tracked last year where the letters came from for all promotion and tenure files and the results vary by discipline; faculty in agricultural disciplines, for example, would seek letters from institutions that English faculty would. Many of the letters came from the University's aspirational peers and from the CIC, but some did not. She said it helps when a department explains that a renowned scholar is at what might be considered a lower-tier institution. She said she would bring to the Committee the data by college.

Professor McLoon argued against pursuing the recommendation of the second sentence. He said he did not see a way to force people to use good judgment. Dr. Carney said there is to think about what the recommendation means. College promotion and tenure committees are considering it; it may not be in the faculty member's best interest to have letters from non-peer institutions or from people who are not leading scholars. Are there such letters in the files, Professor Csallany asked? A few, Dr. Carney said, some with explanations. If there are a lot of such letters, Professor McLoon said, the University needs better department chairs.

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Should the Committee consider number three, develop search policies that secure the best candidates, conduct a system-wide review of HR policies to determine if they advance or obstruct institutional goals, enhance the ability to seek candidates who have not applied, provide resources to hire several faculty at once, and develop a mechanism to facilitate spousal/partner hires, Professor Sirc asked?

Professor McLoon said he believed there is a serious problem with hiring but the Committee is not in a position to fix it.

He said that fear of losing a position (or the funding for it) forces departments to hire faster than what might be in the best interests of the institution. He said he has seen multiple hires that did not go as well as they could have if the department could have waited a year. That varies by college and dean, Dr. Carney said. The University's search mechanics are similar to its peer institutions, Dr. Carrier said—regular searches, exceptions, spousal hiring—but they do not go to the funding question that Professor McLoon raised.

Professor Sirc asked Committee members to review the recommendations and let him know if there are ones they believe the Committee should address. He adjourned the meeting at 4:10.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota