

**Faculty Consultative Committee (FCC)**  
**March 4, 2021**  
**Minutes of the Meeting**

*These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a meeting of a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate; none of the comments, conclusions, or actions reported in these minutes reflect the views of, nor are they binding on, the senate, the administration, or the Board of Regents.*

[**In these minutes:** YOU@UMN Initiative + Pilot; Administrative Policy Review: Evaluation of Teaching; February FCC/BOR Meeting Recap; FCC Chair Update]

**PRESENT:** Phil Buhlmann (chair), Ned Patterson (vice chair), Mark Bee, Tom Chase, Carol Chomsky, Lester Drewes, Will Durfee, Colleen Flaherty Manchester, Carl Flink, Jayne Fulkerson, Frank Gigler, Jennifer Goodnough, Michael Kyba, Keith Mayes, Barbara McMorris, Gopalan Nadathur, Marcia Nichols, Julie Olson, Amy Pittenger, Donna Spannaus-Martin, Clifford Steer, Tracy Twine

**REGRETS:** Rob Blair

**GUESTS:** Maggie Towle, senior associate vice president, Office for Student Affairs; Julie Reuvers, assistant to the vice provost, Office for Student Affairs; Lisa Lemler, associate director for wellness and programs, University Recreation and Wellness

**OTHERS ATTENDING:** Vickie Courtney, Bri Keeney, Ole Gram, Rebecca Ropers

**1. YOU@UMN Initiative + Pilot**

Professor Phil Buhlmann reminded members that he briefly introduced the [YOU@UMN Wellbeing Initiative](#) at the February 25 FCC meeting, and asked FCC members to explore the platform and bring feedback to the committee. He explained that the initiative is managed by the Office for Student Affairs (OSA), and then invited Maggie Towle, senior associate vice president, OSA, and Julie Reuvers, assistant to the vice provost, OSA, to discuss the initiative further.

Towle explained that YOU@UMN is a new systemwide tool, championed by chief student affairs officers representing each campus, that will emphasize individual wellbeing and self-awareness in order to connect students to information, campus resources, peers, and opportunities. The initiative, she said, is in the pilot phase, and OSA is interested in receiving feedback from faculty members about the platform. A document addressing [frequently asked questions \(FAQs\)](#) was also distributed to members.

Reuvers explained that OSA is currently working on a sustainability plan to ensure that the information provided within the application is current and regularly updated. The plan will include regular audits in addition to the application regularly web scraping to identify outdated links.

Michael Kyba noted that when he clicked on the link to open a profile, he was prompted to agree to privacy settings, and he asked what user data is being shared with the application. Reuvers

assured the committee that the application vendor went through a vigorous process to identify security protections, and that the vendor will never match any user behavior to individual outcomes, and nothing will ever be identified by a user's x.500. Additionally, University email accounts cannot be used by the vendor for any outside activity. She said that the purchasing and risk analysis departments both reviewed the vendor for privacy concerns, and reported no issues to OSA. Towle pointed out that Kyba's comment was appreciated, and a good reminder that the University should be sure to communicate privacy protections more broadly to potential users. She also informed the committee that OSA would engage the Office of the General Counsel (OGC) for another review, beyond what was completed per the contract agreement. Carol Chomsky added that it would be helpful if the privacy agreement was available to users at any time for review.

McMorris commented that there is overlap with the Virgin Pulse Wellness Program app used by faculty and staff members, and that she likely would not use both applications. McMorris asked if students were involved in the development of the initiative. Lisa Lemler explained that while all individuals with an x.500 can use the application, the vendor was specifically picked because it was tailored to students. She added that there were listening sessions with the students during the Request for Proposal (RFP) process to identify what features students would be interested in having. Lemler told members that the vendor provided a number of the recommendations made by the students. McMorris suggested that student champions would likely need to be identified to help get students engaged. Lemler thanked her for the feedback and agreed that student buy in will be important as the application rolls out.

## **2. Administrative Policy Review: Evaluation of Teaching**

Buhlmann then gave a brief overview of current policy work, noting that the Senate Committee on Educational Policy (SCEP) has completed a number of policy reviews over the academic year as the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost has prioritized completing past due comprehensive policy reviews.

Buhlmann reminded members that the [Administrative Policy: Evaluation of Teaching: Twin Cities, Crookston, Morris, Rochester](#) was previously distributed electronically to FCC members, and that he received some concerns about the policy during the electronic review that he wanted to discuss further. Buhlmann also invited Rebecca Ropers, vice provost, Faculty and Academic Affairs, to hear feedback from the committee.

Buhlmann and Ropers shared a statement drafted by the Academic Freedom and Tenure Committee (AF&T), which outlines faculty concerns with the current policy. The statement, titled [A Holistic Approach to the Evaluation of Teaching and the Role of Student Rating of Teaching \(SRT\) Forms in the Process](#) was approved at the AF&T meeting on February 26, 2021.

Following an overview of the AF&T statement, Buhlmann proposed that the FCC vote to endorse the statement. He told members that an electronic vote will be held after the meeting so that members have adequate time to review the language. Pending approval of the statement, Buhlmann asked members to consider how the policy changes should be handled by governance. (Note: following the meeting, FCC members endorsed the statement electronically, 8:0.) He

suggested that FCC could direct the policy back to the Senate Committee on Educational Policy for action, or the FCC could provide feedback directly to the policy owner.

Jenn Goodnough explained that while she agrees with the AF&T statement, the issue she sees is about implementing the policy correctly. She pointed out that the policy does specify that SRTs are not supposed to be the only evaluation tool, however that is not always followed, and it is difficult to legislate good behavior. Just because a directive is documented in a policy, she cautioned, doesn't mean it will get done. She urged committee members to think about how the recommendations made by AF&T would be reasonably implemented in evaluation processes. Ropers agreed with Goodnough's point, and noted that the College of Liberal Arts submitted exemplary promotion and tenure files, and she was considering using them as examples for other colleges. Ropers offered that another option could be to tell colleges that submit files without some form of peer review that the files are not complete. Her concern, she said, is that it might penalize the individual that is being reviewed.

Carl Flink noted that there are often inconsistencies in how units conduct SRTs and very little standardization in the process, and asked the group if the SRTs are as effective in evaluating teaching as the time and cost put into doing them. He suggested that it may be a better use of time and money to focus on a community service devoted to learning and evaluating better teaching.

Ropers pointed out that students may feel as though they do not have another mechanism to share their perspectives about the teaching they experience, and suggested that the faculty owe it to the students to listen to student feedback. She explained that while students may not be experts in pedagogy, they are experts in their own experiences. Flink acknowledged that the feedback loop is very important and should exist, and offered that perhaps discussions with individual faculty about better teaching outcomes should not be tied to faculty merit. He explained that he hears teachers discuss pulling back from risk taking in the classroom because they do not want to receive a negative evaluation from students. He added that faculty are afraid to make students unhappy, even if they know that what they are teaching will be helpful to the students in the future. Committee members then discussed alternative mechanisms to capture student feedback.

Gopalan Nadathur, AF&T chair, told members that one of the main reasons why the AF&T drafted a statement about SRTs is out of concern for an over reliance on SRT data. He explained that, especially in term faculty cases, this is impacting academic freedom.

Amy Pittenger offered another concern that faculty have, which is that if an instructor pursues educational innovation techniques in the classroom and it is not successful, they may receive negative reviews from students. For this reason, she said, her department has asked faculty members to speak to their innovative pursuits during their reviews to highlight their efforts and contextualize potential comments made on SRTs.

The committee discussed that it is already in policy that faculty can report that they took a risk and it did not work out, and that what is most important is that the promotion and tenure committee (P&T) be aware of that policy language, and consider it when appropriate. Members also commented that it is fairly common for new teachers to get low SRT ratings at the beginning

of their careers, and typically those evaluations improve over time, which likely demonstrates that those teachers are responding to the feedback.

Mark Bee submitted the following comment via chat:

“Given just how biased SRTs are, particularly against women and other underrepresented groups in academia, it would have been great if the Evaluation of Teaching policy had incorporated a small change of a "should" to a "must" in section A.4.:

"When used for salary, promotion, and tenure decisions, information from student ratings should [must] be used in conjunction with other relevant metrics to assess instructional effectiveness.”

Some members agreed with Bee’s suggestion. Ole Gram, associate vice provost, told members that if the policy language does change to “must,” then it will be incumbent on the administration to ensure compliance. He opined that the institution is well positioned to support the language change, but cautioned that it may result in additional faculty work, and there may be instructors that consistently get good ratings that feel additional feedback on their instruction is not needed.

Buhlmann thanked the committee for the discussion and explained that a poll will be distributed to vote to endorse the AF&T statement. He also pointed out that he did not hear pushback for Bee’s suggestion to turn “should” to “must” and assumed that meant that the FCC was favorable to that change. He encouraged additional feedback to be sent to him electronically.

### **3. February FCC/BOR Meeting Recap**

Buhlmann reported that the February breakout sessions with members of the Board of Regents were well received by the board office, and that regents suggested that the meetings continue. The meetings were previously held at Eastcliff, and were more informal, social events; Buhlmann suggested that the Zoom breakout rooms be the approach moving forward, as they led to more formal, action oriented conversations.

### **4. Chair Update**

Buhlmann then provided the following updates to committee members:

- Colleen Flaherty Manchester was elected to serve as the 2021-22 FCC/SCC vice chair.
- Amy Pittenger provided helpful comments for the Campus-Specific Credit Requirements policy, which was distributed electronically to FCC members for feedback. Pittenger’s comments have been provided to the policy owner.
- The Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost is building a survey to distribute toward the end of the spring semester to request feedback about what worked well and what didn’t work well in the COVID environment. The survey will be sent to all faculty, students, and staff on all campuses, and FCC will be part of the pilot survey.
- The Office of Public Engagement will be launching a website of resources to help the University community through the difficulties of the Chauvin trial, scheduled to start on March 8.

### **5. FCC Nominating Subcommittee**

FCC Nominating Subcommittee members met in a closed session to discuss the 2021-22 FCC ballot.

Bobbie Erichsen  
University Senate Office