Academic Freedom and Tenure Committee (AF&T)
September 14, 2018
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:** Welcome and Introductions; Administrative Policy: *Faculty Development Leaves*; Discussion of the Reproductive Services Fellowship; Other Business]

PRESENT: Jessica Larson (chair), Anne Barnes, Brian Bix, Nicholas Fischer, Holley Locher, Gopalan Nadathur, Yuichiro Onishi, Gary Peter, Rebecca Ropers-Huilman, Catarina Saiote, Nathan Shippee, George Trachte, Timothy Wiedmann

REGRETS: Jerry Cohen, Karin Quick, Rachna Shah

ABSENT: Anne Barnes, Kristin Hickman

GUESTS: Ole Gram, assistant vice provost, Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs

OTHERS: Austen Macalus, reporter, *Minnesota Daily*

1. Welcome and Introductions

Professor Jessica Larson, chair, called the meeting to order and called for a round of introductions.

Yuichiro Onishi said that Eva von Dassow, chair, American Association of University Professors, University of Minnesota Chapter (AAUP), could not attend meetings this year due to a time conflict. He asked if it was okay if he represented the AAUP, and members agreed that it was.

Larson noted that there had been a lot of changes since the committee's last meeting, including that the president and provost had both announced their intentions to step down.

2. Committee Orientation

Amber Bathke, senate associate, provided an overview of University Senate governance and orientation to committee work.

3. Faculty Development Leaves

Next, Larson turned the floor over to Rebecca Ropers-Huilman, vice provost, Faculty & Academic Affairs, who walked the committee through proposed changes to the Administrative Policy: *Faculty Development Leaves*. She explained that most of the University's peer

institutions offer sabbatical leaves for a full year at half pay and one semester at full pay, after a certain number of years of service. The University currently offers full-year sabbatical leaves at half pay, and gives units the *option* to offer single semester leaves at full pay and benefits. Since units are not required to offer the single semester leaves and a full-year sabbatical at half pay is not financially feasible for some people, some faculty members cannot take development leaves at all. The proposed change is to offer a one semester sabbatical at full pay after six years of service, or two semesters at half pay after six years, and eliminate the single semester leave.

Larson commented that the administration at the Morris campus is working to address the issue that if this policy goes into effect, there will be a possible surge of people who have been waiting to take a leave because they did not have access previously. However, she noted, the 6% cap and proposal requirement will help limit this. Ropers-Huilman pointed out that many people mistakenly interpret the policy to mean that faculty members are entitled to sabbaticals and development leaves after six years of service, but she stressed such leaves are a privilege based on merit of the sabbatical proposal. Members expressed the sentiment that, under the current policy, sabbatical leave was a privilege after six years of service that could be availed of with a suitable proposal for the leave. Moreover, members felt that in any changed policy the process of determining if a sabbatical proposal was meritorious should be better spelled out and not left entirely to the discretion of the unit heads. Ropers-Huilman added that the proposed revisions constitute a compromise with the deans; some colleges do not award single semester leaves at all, and sabbatical leaves are rare. Opening up the opportunity to those faculty will be a major change, and some deans think that it will present significant financial challenges. There are other deans who feel the proposed 6% cap is too stringent. Holly Locher asked whether colleges are expected to absorb the additional costs of this policy change. Ropers-Huilman said that there is about $790,000 allocated to colleges to support sabbatical supplement requests. There is no proposal to increase that at this time. Ole Gram acknowledged that it will be a cost for the colleges, and Ropers-Huilman said that all colleges will implement it differently; the policy is meant to be a framework, she said. Larson pointed out that there may be savings in terms of faculty retention, as hiring a new faculty member is expensive.

Ropers-Huilman reiterated that the problem they are trying to solve with the policy revision is that right now some people never get to take sabbatical because of their financial situation. She clarified that she believed the policy changes would result in more faculty being able to take leaves. She said that she is strongly committed to making sure people's individual financial situations do not prevent them from taking leaves because their only option is to take a full-year sabbatical at half-pay. She stated that she had consulted with the Senate Committee on Faculty Affairs (SCFA) earlier in the week and would consult further with that committee at its next meeting. Then, the policy will be presented to the Faculty Consultative Committee in October and the Faculty Senate in November.

3. Reproductive Services Fellowship

Next, Larson directed the committee's attention to a recent article from the *Star Tribune*, which noted that the University had put a grant-funded reproductive services training fellowship on hold. She said that Professor Joseph Konstan, chair, Faculty Consultative Committee, had asked the committee to look into whether this constituted a violation of academic freedom. Larson

emphasized that so far, the only information available was what the *Star Tribune* had reported, and that much more information was needed. Gopalan Nadathur suggested that the committee should talk to the person who made the decision. If there is a process for making such decisions and the process was followed, said Nadathur, there is no reason to question the decision. Ann Barnes commented that she felt it was an academic freedom issue because the decision seemed to be motivated by public or political pressure. Abortion is legal, she pointed out, and remarked that the University should not shy away from training practitioners in this service. Nathan Shippee agreed that if a faculty member received a training grant, and the administration put the fellowship on hold indefinitely, it is an academic freedom issue. Members wondered what sort of governance procedures (if any) were enacted to make this decision? Brian Bix pointed out that, according to the article, "the university's decision does not eliminate its training involving abortion. Accredited obstetric residency programs are required to provide abortion training, although residents with ethical objections can opt out.

Shippee reminded members that AF&T does not get involved in specific cases; therefore, he said, the committee should focus on finding out whether there is a procedure for making decisions around fellowships and if so, whether it was followed. If the faculty member wishes to file a complaint, he added, they can do so through the Senate Judicial Committee.

Members expressed concern that, according to the *Star Tribune*, "legislators... used the issue to gauge the abortion views of candidates for an open spot on the Board of Regents. Randy Simonson, the candidate with the clearest opposition to abortion, was chosen."

Larson reminded members of the white paper that AF&T drafted in 2011, in the wake of the controversy surrounding the film *Troubled Waters.* She suggested that perhaps the committee simply needs to reaffirm the principles spelled out in that document. Members agreed that the committee should investigate this issue further, but do so carefully.

4. Other Business

Larson informed members topics that may come up later in the year include the Ben Shapiro lawsuit and proposed administrative policy: *Gender Identity, Gender Expression, Names, and Pronouns*, as well as the presidential search and the appointment of an interim provost.

Ropers-Huilman strongly encouraged members to attend the listening sessions that the Presidential Search Advisory Committee was holding. Members also commented that four Regents positions would be up for appointment in the next two years, so the state legislature elections will be very important.

Hearing no further business, Larson adjourned the meeting.

Amber Bathke
University Senate Office