

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Faculty Affairs
Tuesday, April 1, 2008
2:30 – 4:15
238A Morrill Hall

Present: Geoffrey Sirc (chair), Stacey Aronson, Ben Bornshtein, Carol Carrier, Dann Chapman, Vladimir Cherkassky, Tom Clayton, Jayne Fulkerson, Andrew Gerst, Kathryn Hanna, Morris Kleiner, Holly Littlefield, Theodor Litman, George Sheets, Roderick Squires, Elizabeth Stallman, Virginia Zuiker

Absent: Arlene Carney, Erin George, Anna Masellis, Luis Ramos-Garcia

Guests: James Meland (Office of Human Resources)

[In these minutes: (1) announcements; (2) academic salary instructions; (3) exit interviews of faculty; (4) written comments on student rating-of-teaching forms]

1. Announcements

Professor Sirc convened the meeting at 2:35 and began by congratulating Professor Hanna on being selected as chair of the Committee for 2008-09.

He also provided an update on an issue that Professor Cherkassky brought to the Committee earlier in the year.

2. Academic Salary Instructions

Professor Sirc turned to Vice President Carrier for a review of the academic salary instructions for 2008-09.

Vice President Carrier began by explaining how the instructions work. The Faculty Senate adopted a Faculty Compensation Policy in 1991 that is still relevant, and there is a similar policy for P&A staff. The policies describe how units set policies for compensation decisions. The salary instructions are sent to unit administrators each year; they provide the salary plan and identify the amount of money to be delivered (approved by the Board of Regents in the spring of each year). For next year, the pool for increases is 3.25% within each collegiate or administrative unit, but not everyone necessarily receives the average. The increases are based on merit so there is a range of increases. Units may add to the available funds if they are able and argue for additional increases based on market competition, inequities, and so on.

Dr. Carrier noted a few other points. All salary increases are based on merit for faculty and P&A staff who are not members of bargaining units (in those cases, the increases are determined by the contract negotiations). Performance reviews are required. There is no minimum or maximum increase,

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so individuals could receive a 0% increase. New for this year, promotional salary increases (assistant to associate, associate to full) are now linked to inflation (HEPI, or Higher Education Price Index).

Professor Hanna asked where one might find the HEPI; it is here: http://www.commonfund.org/Commonfund/CF+Institute/CI_About_HEPI.htm. Dr. Carrier explained that the HEPI is used in a variety of ways by higher-education institutions.

Professor Hanna noted that a former and current Committee member raised a question about cost-of-living and across-the-board salary adjustments. The UEA contract with the Duluth and Crookston faculty provides for such increases, both as a percentage and as a constant dollar amount. So it is possible in the University system to get such increases. With the inflation rate increasing, there should be some across-the-board increases. Professor Sirc noted that others have raised the issue but the Committee has not revisited it. No other governance committee is discussing it. Professor Bornsstein noted that with the promotional increases increased by inflation, a precedent has been set to consider inflationary increases on salaries. Vice President Carrier said that the promotional increases had been fixed for a number of years and needed to be adjusted.

Ms. Stallman asked why everyone except graduate assistants is covered by the 3.25% pool. The coverage goes back and forth, Dr. Carrier said. She agreed, at Ms. Stallman's request, to make more explicit the language about graduate assistants.

Dr. Carrier said she had also heard from the Faculty Consultative Committee about the language covering graduate assistants; they urged that it not call for delivering salary increases on the basis of merit. The language will be changed next year so that departments can use other criteria as primary.

3. Exit Interviews of Faculty

Professor Sirc next welcomed Vice President Carrier and Mr. Meland to report on the results of interviews with faculty who leave the University for reasons other than retirement.

Vice President Carrier introduced Mr. Meland, from the Employee Assistance Program, who conducted the interviews, and recalled that in the past there were not uniform means to obtain contact information. Her office agreed to try out a more systematic approach, and has been interviewing tenured and tenure-track faculty (not contract faculty and not P&A staff) who leave. The first year the interviews were attempted (last year), they did not have timely information about faculty who were leaving and found it difficult to obtain information from individuals who had already left. This year Mr. Meland received the names of faculty who were leaving before or closer to the time they were leaving. Questions the Committee asked were whether the University was losing faculty to more prestigious institutions, what makes other universities more attractive than the University, why do tenure track faculty fail, and what can be learned from faculty leaving for other positions and from faculty who were denied tenure.

Mr. Meland distributed three handouts: the exit interview survey, data on the results, and pie charts of the results. He explained that there were three groups of departing faculty interviewed: tenured male and female professors (14, out of 23), untenured females (7 of 14), and untenured males (5 out of 19). He provided the demographic information for each group (college, parent of minor child(ren), minority status, etc.).

Mr. Meland noted that last year, "lacking a representative sample of interviewed faculty on which to report, a related project was conducted to provide the Committee with a demographic picture based on PeopleSoft data. Faculty who left were compared against the faculty as a whole. The most central comparisons discussed with the Committee were:

- Faculty who left the U were proportional to their racial representation at the U.
- Faculty who left the U were proportional to their gender representation at the U.
- Full professors who left the U were proportional to their representation at the U.
- Associate professors who left the U did so in smaller proportion to their representation at the U.
- Assistant professors who left the U did so in larger proportion to their representation at the U.
- The 60 – 69 faculty age group left the U at the greatest rate."

What follows are elements of the report Mr. Meland presented at the meeting. (Committee discussion of the results begins on page 7 of these minutes.)

2008 Commentary [abridged]

Out of a pool of **66** identified faculty from the Twin Cities who left the U for reasons other than retirement, **26 (39%)** were interviewed.

Tenured Faculty (N = 14) [4 from IT, 3 from CLA, 3 from CSOM, 2 from Vet Med, 1 from Design, and 1 from CBS]

1) The most frequent strongest reason for tenured faculty leaving the U (given by **50%**) was **better career opportunities**. Approximately **79%** who left gave this as a factor in their decision to leave. The reason was variously worded as "More prestigious institution, better department, better colleagues, more support, and/or better alignment with research interests."

29% cited **poor relations with administration** as their strongest reason. Represented in this group were some notably accomplished faculty. **36%** gave this as a factor in their decision.

57% indicated that better **compensation and/or benefits** was a factor in their leaving.

14% indicated **better colleagues** (more in the sense of scholarship) as their strongest reason. **43%** gave this reason as a factor in their decision.

4) "Colleagues" was by far the most recited **best part** of the tenured faculty's experience at the U (**57%**). An additional **29%** (86% total) referred to colleagues and students together as a best part. There were three noteworthy aspects – colleagues were respected for their scholarship, they were valued as friends, and the intellectual stimulation from collaboration with faculty across departments was highly gratifying to some.

21% cited research opportunities.

Living in Minnesota came out, across all faculty groups, as being a notable, if not unexpected, plus of the faculty experience at the U. **14%** of the tenured faculty made a point to mention this.

5) Approximately **1/3** (36%) referred to **“poor management”** as a **worst part** of their faculty experience. Deans seemed most directly positioned for criticism – both in the sense of their decisions and in the sense of preventing faculty concerns from being heard farther up the administrative chain.

“Poor priorities” was mentioned by almost **1/3** (29%) of tenured faculty as a worst experience. This could be considered an element of poor management but the areas of concern were less associated with specific administrators or administrative positions. Everyone seems to have their own ideas of what is most important.

Although mentioned by only **1/5** (21%) of the faculty, a sense of **lost standing** seems to run deep among those who believe that faculty should have, and feel, a special status within the university.

And although many faculty, especially untenured, seemed resigned to episodes of **poor collegiality**, a tenured faculty member stated, “Brakes are not put on the really harmful colleagues.”

6) Far and away, at **71%**, faculty most frequently expressed **quality and related reputation** as the best thing that the U has going for itself. The sense of quality was referred to as devoted, excelling faculty. One faculty member stated, “Great people. Excelling was happening all over the place. Caring matched a problem’s importance – hallmark of a great attitude.”

Again, the **Minnesota and Twin Cities** thing came up. Approximately **1/3** (29%) mentioned them as one of the best things the U has going for itself.

Noteworthy mention was also made of the advantages of the U’s **large size** and its **collegiality**. One faculty member said, “I returned to the U because of the general feeling we are all part of something together.”

7) What were deemed the most important areas where the U **needs to improve**?

Approximately **1/3** (29%) referred to faculty relations – i.e. the University’s relations with its faculty. They want to feel listened to (not an unusual wish), supported, acknowledged, inspired, and recognized for their loyalty.

Management and priorities came up again – **1/5** (21%) mentioning both categories.

1/5 (21%) mentioned faculty **selection, development, and retention**. One faculty stated, “Highest performers, as a service responsibility, need to draft for everyone else.”

And **1/5** (21%) mentioned support for **interdisciplinary work**. Interest for interdisciplinary work was not mentioned by the majority, but among those who did, keen enthusiasm could be heard in their voice. Perhaps they make up a special group that should be helped to remove impediments they have experienced.

Untenured Female Faculty (N = 7) [3 from the Medical School, 2 from IT, 1 from CSOM, and 1 from Vet Medicine]

1) The most frequent “**strongest reason for leaving the U**”, given by **43%**, was better career opportunities. **71%** who left gave this as a factor in their decision to leave. The reason was variously given as academic misfit, overly challenging environment, and better professional opportunity. **Two (29%) of the seven** in this group indicated they were unsure of receiving tenure.

29% responded that “**better career opportunities for partner**” was their strongest reason for leaving. **57%** gave this as a factor in their decision.

4) As with the tenured faculty “**colleagues**” was by far the most recited “**best part**” of the untenured female faculty’s experience at the U (**71%**).

Unique to the overall sample of interviewed faculty, approximately **1/3 (29%)** of the untenured female faculty mentioned **support staff** as one of the best parts of their U experience.

5) **57%** referred to **poor management** as a **worst part** of their faculty experience. There was general reference to the personal ramifications from exposure to what was felt to be poorly hired and unprofessional persons placed in leadership positions.

As new faculty, **57%** referred to receiving poor support in the form of graduate student assistants, guidance, and research financial security. One faculty member stated that “The younger faculty didn’t have a sense of community. The over-50 group made it their place.”

6) **Reputation (43%) and large size of the U (29%)** were cited as the best things that the U has going for itself.

7) Female tenure track faculty were in most agreement (**43%**) over **mentorship** as the most important area where the U needs to **improve**. Reference was made to needing defined mentors with defined roles. One faculty member offered that “Young faculty need help getting on their feet without worrying that the tenure committee would see it as being lost. My department had a mentoring program but meetings with your mentor would be once a year right before the tenure committee met. Mentors seemed to not know what to do.”

29% stated that access to research equipment and space was one of the most needed improvements at the U. Simply stated by one as, “In the AHC you need equipment and space to do research.”

Untenured Male Faculty (N = 5) [3 from CLA, 1 from CSOM, 1 from CBS]

1) All four of the untenured male faculty not reviewed for tenure stated “**better career opportunities**” as their reason for leaving the U. **Three of the four** stated that better **compensation and/or benefits** was a factor in their decision. **Three of the four** indicated they were **unsure of receiving tenure**. **One** saw better opportunities at another university.

4) “**Colleagues**” was by far the most recited **best part** of the untenured male faculty’s experience at the U (**60%**). Colleagues were referred to as excellent quality. Some found them always willing to help.

5) Noteworthy, in contrast to colleagues being cited most often as the “best part” of their U experience, untenured male faculty most frequently referred to **poor collegiality** as the **worst part** of their faculty

experience. The **60%** response matched the 60% indicating colleagues as the best part. An apparent contradiction is explained by their references not so much to how they were treated but by department wide fractious behavior and incivility. Nonetheless, all felt negatively affected by the resulting dysfunction.

One faculty member referred to **poor mentoring** for incoming faculty. He stated, "I never felt quite sure what needed to be done to attain tenure."

Another faculty member stated, "My division didn't believe in **mentoring**. Before choosing Minnesota I had offers that included two from the highest ranking institutions. But mentoring could have helped me avoid pitfalls that ended my career here."

6) As with the tenured faculty and untenured female faculty, **quality and reputation** are seen as the **best thing** that the U has going for itself (**40%**). Reference was made to "A great research culture that creates diverse ideas. An atmosphere of curiosity."

And again, the Minnesota and Twin Cities thing came up. **40%** mentioned them as one of the best things the U has going for itself.

And again, mention was also made of the advantages of the **U's large size**.

7) There was no consensus among tenure track males on the most important area where the U needs to **improve**.

(Question 31) **Women faculty** were asked, "As a woman faculty member, did you experience gender-related barriers to success at the U of M?"

56% reported Yes and 44% reported No.

(T) Work-life balance issue. Women typically have more family care responsibilities.

(UF) Raising an infant affects the entire faculty experience.

(UF) Comments were made that I was putting my family before my career.

(UF) In (an AHC unit) male colleagues were treated better across the board.

(UF) (The AHC unit) was not used to females being there.

(Question 34) Faculty who were parents were asked, "Did the U of M provide you with reasonable **support as a parent raising children?**" (**U day care** is a public relations problem with these faculty. There was considerable voiced disappointment and frustration that they could not get their children into the U's daycare. The situation poses a dilemma – recruitment/retention tool for faculty versus an egalitarian philosophy?)

(UF) No support. Worried about asking for special treatment.

(UF) Faculty with children should have a year rather than three months to decide about stopping the tenure clock.

(UM) Faculty with children were treated like all others. Maybe it should be that way.

(T) From a faculty perspective it may be better to not have U daycare if faculty cannot get their children in.

(UF) Can't get into the University's daycare.

(UF) Long waiting list for University daycare was frustrating.

(UF) Never was able to get into University daycare.

(UM) U daycare needs to be expanded.

(Day care > N = 6)

(Question 26) Most faculty (**71% for tenured, 71% for untenured females, and 60% for untenured males**) replied “Yes” to the question, “If you **were to do it again**, would you have accepted you position(s) at the U of M?”

RECOMMENDATIONS

#1 - Mentoring of new faculty needs a serious look.

#2 – Enhancing the existing spirit of camaraderie (great word to use in the faculty context – a spirit of friendly good-fellowship) may well help compensate for funding limitations associated with a small population state like Minnesota (which may call for psychological consultation for leaders).

#3 – Administrators and good citizen faculty need to step up to neutralize fractious faculty behavior so that vulnerable faculty are not damaged.

Professor Sheets thanked Mr. Meland for his report and commented that since the numbers were small, and limited to one year, it may not be prudent to draw conclusions or take the results into account in policy planning. Mr. Meland said "yes and no." He agreed the number was small and self-selected (those who agreed to participate). A lot of good things were said; even those who were leaving because of difficulties with administrators expressed a lot of affection for the institution and the views were not colored by their departure. He said he was surprised, especially with the tenure-track faculty, that there was no sense of bitterness or pathos. Even the one faculty member who had been denied tenure still believed this was a great institution. He said he was pleasantly surprised at the degree of objectivity from people who had decided to leave.

Mr. Meland said that one could view these results as a set of case studies, which can provide good information. The results raise good questions but he agreed they may not be representative of all people leaving the University.

Professor Sheets also noted that there has been a subcommittee appointed to evaluate the need for an ombuds service for faculty. There was such a service in the early 1990s, Mr. Meland recalled; it was eliminated, Professor Sirc said, because it had been created as a result of the Rajender consent decree. When the decree lapsed and the funds ran out, the position was dropped. Professor Sheets wondered if the data from the exit interviews suggest the need for an ombuds service. Mr. Meland referred to the three recommendations: faculty satisfaction or dissatisfaction is not influenced by institutional vision or priorities but by faculty collegueship and fractious or uncivil behavior. Faculty can harm each other and make a department dysfunctional.

For those who said they were going to more prestigious institutions, did they say something different from those who were denied tenure or who the departments did not seek to retain, Professor Kleiner inquired. They said they had the opportunity to get to the top tier and to continue excelling, Mr. Meland reported. So there is a different reason the stars left compared to those who were denied tenure or not seen as top performers, Professor Kleiner concluded. They wanted to be with like-minded people, Mr. Meland said, people who support scholarship across the board. The pattern is that many who left referred to having been recruited over time. Why leave now? It was the interaction of the opportunity, a readiness to take the next step, and a sense that they or their department was not appreciated.

The sample size is too small to draw conclusions, Professor Zuiker agreed, but it is important to identify general systemic issues rather than why men or women or individuals left. Some will leave for personal reasons the University cannot control.

Professor Cherkassky commented that even though it may not have been a major reason, the sense that faculty have lost standing provides context for some decisions.

Professor Kleiner asked if it was possible to compare the results with what happens at other universities. Have other studies been done? It would seem that this is a common issue, he said. The point is well-taken and that could be a next step, Mr. Meland said.

Professor Squires said that there will always be a small N and the results will be different each year because the conditions do not remain constant. Mr. Meland agreed but said his guess is that the factors that lead people to leave are probably not going to vary from year to year.

One Committee member made the point that it can be small things that affect camaraderie. In one case, the financial people took away the department coffee. This was something they had had for years and years. Mr. Meland agreed that food and beverage experiences can contribute in important ways to the fellowship and sense of community that the interviewees valued. That faculty campus clubs have gone the way of the dinosaur is too bad. [Note: the Campus Club in Coffman Union is doing very well by most measures.]

Professor Hanna maintained that there are themes in the results and there is good information that should not be ignored. Some reveals poor mentoring or management priorities or style. An important question, Mr. Meland said, is whether the faculty who are still here have fewer complaints than those who left. He said they do not know.

Dr. Littlefield inquired when the study would cease to be a pilot and include P&A staff. Dr. Carrier said that Mr. Meland and his staff spent about 200 hours on the interviews and obtained 26 responses. That is a lot of time to capture information from 25-30 people. There are interesting themes, it is a small number of people, and requires a lot of work to get the information. Would it work better to obtain the information at the college level? Does the Committee wish to pursue the effort? If participation could be increased, the survey would take even more hours. (And it interferes with the limited number of hours that the Employee Assistance Program has to provide other services, Mr. Chapman said.)

Professor Sirc said he hoped that they would also be able to obtain information through the PULSE survey. The Committee, he noted, has tried to address the child-care and mentoring issues. Professor Fulkerson commented that given what the Committee has heard about child care and mentoring, the exit interviews appear to be representative of faculty sentiments. This university is so outstripped on child care, in comparison to peers, that it can't even begin to compete, Professor Sirc commented. That may not be the reason someone leaves the University, Professor Cherkassky commented, but it is a factor.

Another factor, Professor Cherkassky said, is how new faculty are treated by the institution. At Texas, for example, new faculty are given special parking; here they are told to wait in line. There could be a tipping point, Mr. Meland said, when several factors accumulate to serve as impetus for leaving:

they are not given the opportunity to become part of the University community, deans prevent access to the administration, daycare is not available, and the institution acts as if faculty are not special.

Professor Hanna said it would be better if colleges or units do not try to gather the information; it would be better if the request comes from a neutral or third party, such as Human Resources. Professor Sirc said he was sympathetic to the idea that any data are good, but being mindful of costs, does the Committee wish the effort to continue? Dr. Littlefield suggested the PULSE survey provides the same information. It does, Dr. Carrier agreed, but not the stories. The two efforts get at the same category of issues but not with the same level of information. (There has been a paper survey in place for employees who leave, and about 20-30 faculty fill it out each year, but it does not provide a lot of information because people do not write a lot, Dr. Carrier said, so there isn't the same richness of information.) Professor Kleiner said the interview information can be useful in two ways: (1) identifying individuals who act on their own initiative to leave, about whom the University can do nothing, and (2) what the institution can do to help retain people who are the verge of becoming "stars," because these faculty can help the University toward its goal of being a top three public research university. That information will not come from the PULSE survey, but to the extent information can be obtained about those two groups, it will be very useful.

Mr. Meland said that it became obvious to him that one factor that affects high-performance and new faculty was the lack of a critical mass in their field. The comments were that a department that is losing critical mass is at risk for losing good faculty. Faculty then do not have colleagues to consult with, find it difficult to get graduate students, and cannot mobilize their career because they are isolated. Colleagues (are) may be sympathetic but a department might be unable to hire anyone else in an area.

This is important information for the University to know, Ms. Stallman said; how will it be used—university-wide or given to the colleges? What is done with the PULSE survey information, Dr. Littlefield added. It will be sent to units this year, Dr. Carrier said.

Dr. Carrier said she was inclined to continue the exit interviews for one more year. If they get the same participation rate and the same themes, she would ask the question about continuing after that. Professor Sirc accepted that as a reasonable proposal. Professor Cherkassky said that from the point of view of statistical analysis, it is impossible to collect enough data, but if there are specific questions that can be pursued, those should be identified.

Professor Sirc thanked Mr. Meland for his work and for his report.

4. Written Comments on Student-Rating-of-Teaching Forms

Professor Sirc next noted that the Senate Committee on Educational Policy had asked this Committee to take up the question of what to do with written comments on student rating forms that are obscene, racist, sexist, etc. It is those comments, especially the ones directed at women faculty, that generated the initial task force to review the rating forms and to develop new questions and scales. But none of the committees was able to come up with a satisfactory solution to inappropriate comments. The Senate policy on evaluation of teaching allows each college and campus to set its own policy about how the written comments will be used. Some may provide that only the instructor sees the comments; others may include the comments in the faculty member's dossier. Committee members related the practices in their colleges, which varied widely.

The problem, Professor Sirc said, is that it will not always be clear where to draw the line on when a comment is inappropriate. One example given was "you're the worst teacher I ever had, the readings were terrible, and you're ugly." Is the entire comment removed? Part of it?

Professor Squires related that in some cases the instructor can cherry-pick the comments that are included, and they are weighted accordingly (that is, they get no attention). Professor Kleiner said for some, inappropriate comments might not matter, but for some on the bubble, negative comments in the hands of an unscrupulous or incompetent administrator could have a disproportionate weight. This is a key issue for promotion-and-tenure committees, Professor Sirc commented.

For many, the student ratings are the only evaluation of teaching they receive, Dr. Littlefield commented. There is no neutral reviewer and it is only the Likert-scale results and the comments that matter.

Professor Squires said he has believed for 34 years that the University has done a terrible job of evaluating teaching. Where are colleagues from the College of Education to help with techniques? Units have tried to put faculty in the classroom to do evaluations but no one has the time for that—who will compensate them for the 2-3-5 hours it takes? Professor Fulkerson said they do faculty evaluations in classes twice per year in her college and she finds it helpful.

Can the comments be interpreted as harassment, Professor Zuiker inquired? Who can someone show them to? They can be bullying but one doesn't know who wrote them. Professor Squires related that he reads the student comments on his forms to the department office staff, who find them hysterically funny.

Professor Clayton recalled that in the 1970s the Daily created something it called (accurately) a "Student Opinion Survey." He said he would not support eliminating comments or not include them, because they can help a reasonable person understand more than is communicated by numbers alone.

Ms. Stallman suggested considering the manner in which the forms are administered. It is the last day of the semester, people are tired and want to be done, so it is not surprising there are a few inappropriate comments. Administering the surveys mid-semester, and again at the end, would be more helpful. There is good evidence that if one gives out chocolates the same day the forms are distributed, the results improve, Professor Clayton noted.

Professor Sirc read from a message from Vice Provost Carney, who was unable to attend the meeting. "I have the names of faculty from SCFA, AF&T, and SCEP to begin the discussion this month about both the analysis of the results for the new questions and student comments. . . . Colleges do vary in their use of student comments. Some colleges—IT for example—put in all the student comments in the primary file with few exceptions. They may edit out inappropriate comments because I have not seen any in the final P & T files that are demeaning to women, minorities, etc., the way that faculty have reported them. I am not suggesting that these comments are not in the original reports that faculty get. Other colleges like CLA recommend that student comments are put in the supplementary file. Most departments include them. The CLA departments typically give a sample of comments in the primary file. The remaining colleges vary in how they may put in student comments. Some include comments provided by the candidate; others have more of a sample of comments from the range of responses. Departments may

see more of the body of "raw" comments as they deliberate for P & T. If teaching scores are particularly low, department or collegiate P&T committees have asked to see all of the student comments available as has the Provost. At the Provost's level, he is very careful (as am I) to examine them for exactly the types of inappropriate comments that have been mentioned. These are not considered as part of the decision. The negative comments that do carry weight have to do with actual teaching performance and not personal characteristics."

Professor Squires inquired if comments in general are abusive. They are not, it was said. Professor Kleiner said that even if a small number are abusive, they can create an impression disproportionate to their number. Professor Sirc agreed there could be an effect on psychological perception of someone because of the comments.

Professor Bornshtein said he was generally opposed to inviting comments on the form and then acting as a censor after the fact. The form could say that inappropriate comments will not be considered. He also said he believed the process was more rational that allowing an egregious comment to affect a promotion-and-tenure decision. If a form included slurs or abuse, and is in the dossier, would not the faculty in a unit give appropriate weight to it—and discard it? Professor Squires said he would favor either getting rid of all the comments or retaining them all. What if one person in a large class says an instructor is racist, sexist or ageist, Professor Kleiner asked; what weight would be given to the comments? If something like that, or a vile comment, is included in the context of important decisions, or if they are unfiltered, there could be an effect, especially when those comments are anonymous.

This issue only arises, it was noted, for colleges and campuses where written comments are included in the dossiers. In units where only the instructor sees the comments, presumably he or she can discard them.

Professor Sirc suggested the Committee seek advice from social psychologists who have studied these kinds of behavior.

He adjourned the meeting at 4:15.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota