

Minutes*

Senate Committee on Faculty Affairs
Tuesday, December 4, 2001
3:07 – 5:00
238A Morrill Hall

Present: Richard Goldstein (chair), Josef Altholz, Carol Carrier, Robert Fahnhorst, Daniel Feeney, Neil Graf, Darwin Hendel, Roberta Humphreys, Robert Jones, Nan Kalke, Cleon Melsa, Harry Savage, Wade Savage, Tom Walsh, Carol Wells

Absent: Kent Bales, Carole Bland, William Garrard, Joan Howland, George Seltzer

Guests: none

[In these minutes: (1) change of meeting dates; (2) report from the salary subcommittee; (3) minority faculty hiring and programs; (4) report from the retirement subcommittee; (5) retirement plan waiting period, AREPA forms, health care waiting period, health care plan choices]

1. Meetings Changed

The December 18th meeting is canceled and the meeting scheduled for January 29 is moved to January 22.

2. Salary Subcommittee Report

Professor Humphreys reported that a request was made via Gary Engstrand to Peter Zetterberg for data regarding salary bases for faculty over the past decade. The database is problematic because of the various faculty appointments. The subcommittee requested Peter Zetterberg to run the data on the code so everyone would be working with the same numbers. However, the request was initially rejected because his office was too busy. Professor Humphreys then spoke to Provost Bruininks about the matter. Provost Bruininks indicated he did not think it would be a problem but because Zetterberg's office was so busy the data most likely would not be available until the first of the year. Professor Humphreys learned that the data did not include information on directors, department head, etc. So, she asked that data be provided on those groups as well.

Professor Humphreys also wrote to the AAUP and asked for their database for over the past decade. One Committee member asked why the subcommittee was requesting such data. Professor Humphreys responded the reason was to have governance committees have more impact on salary decisions. More consultation by the administration with faculty groups is needed.

3. Report on Minority Faculty

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Vice Provost Robert Jones reported on what the University is doing on hiring and retention of people of color (see reported dated June 7, 2001.) Dr. Jones then walked Committee members through a set of slides. Specific attention was given to slides pertaining to information about faculty.

Dr. Jones pointed out that during the 1990s there was an increase in the number of female faculty hires. During the time when the total number of faculty hires was declining, the number of people of color hired increased. Dr. Jones cited the primary reason was due to the commitment from the deans and department heads regarding the commitment to diversity.

Professor Goldstein inquired why Asian-Americans were included. Dr. Jones responded that the decision to include Asian-Americans was made long ago. He noted that East Indians, Chinese and Japanese are included as well. The analysis shows that there is very good representation of Asian-American females in terms of the numbers, specifically in certain areas. The focus, however, is more on African-American, Hispanic and Native Americans, Dr. Jones noted.

Dr. Jones indicated he would like to have a discussion about climate issues at some point. Some departments do not handle climate issues as well as others. He also talked about the upcoming conference in the spring about "best practices" of recruiting and retaining faculty of color. The conference is also an opportunity to showcase scholarship he said. He hopes faculty involved in governance participate.

Professor Savage said that because the numbers of minority faculty are small, even a small percentage loss of minority faculty is more important than a similar loss of non-minority faculty. Dr. Jones agreed that the effect is magnified.

Dr. Jones said that although the University will not always be able to retain highly talented faculty of color, when such faculty leave they should go away with positive feelings about the University and be a good ambassador for it. That has not always happened, which has perpetuated the perception nationally that this is not a comfortable place for people of color.

In the discussions of civic engagement, Professor Feeney said, one has had the sense that faculty of color sometimes believe their research is marginalized. He has also sensed, however, that this belief extends to more faculty than those of color. But does it affect faculty of color to a greater extent? As the University talks more about civic engagement and the institutional commitment to it, Dr. Jones said, it should be looked at like the institutional commitment to diversity: not everyone needs to work on it but the University needs to encourage individuals who are interested in it, and if they are to do well, the efforts must be funded.

Professor Feeney recalled, by way of example, that a couple of the members of the Faculty Consultative Committee related that they did work in civic engagement that would not have gotten them tenure. The University funds research on issues of diversity, which will help lend legitimacy to it, but there is a lot of work left to do. The funds were originally available only to faculty of color but have been opened up to all.

Professor Savage said it will be difficult to get faculty involved in civic engagement, at least in some departments. Faculty who might do so are those who have already made their reputation and can turn to it; the faculty do not see it as an activity to be rewarded. Dr. Jones commented that major universities with which Minnesota compares itself are taking a keen interest in civic engagement and will

put money into it; faculty will buy in and those institutions will become the national leaders. Minnesota will be left behind unless it finds ways to reward non-traditional scholarly areas. That will come with new hires, Professor Savage suggested. Or if faculty want to redirect their activities, Dr. Jones added.

The tables of data he distributed note an historic high, Dr. Jones commented: for the first time, 13% of the faculty are of color. This took a long time, he said, and he is always concerned when he hears about discussions that do not concur with what is being reported to the Board of Regents. There remains work to do to build a supportive environments in departments--that is clearly work that the faculty must do. He said that he was glad to see strong interest in this subject by the governance system and that he will make a report to FCC as well.

Professor Hendel inquired about the effect of people who identify themselves as belonging to more than one group? It changes the way the University thinks about recruiting students, Dr. Jones said; there is a large number of students who do not want to identified with the majority minority group. They see themselves as individuals but may check two or three groups on the forms. There are, however, not enough people in the faculty ranks who do so to affect what the University is doing. Some do not want to be identified as people of color so are not included on mailing lists, etc., for faculty of color.

Professor Goldstein thanked Dr. Jones for his report.

4. Report from the Retirement Subcommittee

Professor Feeney next reported that there were two items from the Retirement Subcommittee. First, the VEBA--voluntary employee benefit association--a plan through the Minnesota State Retirement System to which the members of an employee class can elect to join which could be used to cover employee health care benefits after retirement. Once an employee group has elected to join, it is NOT voluntary; different employee groups at the University (faculty, P&A, civil service, etc.) can act independently. The benefits from the VEBA are tax deferred and are not taxable when withdrawn.

The subcommittee has also discussed with Minnesota Life the 457 plan, allowed under the new tax law; Minnesota Life will develop a fact sheet for employees. The 457 plan is essentially a clone of the University's 403(b) optional retirement plan. Effective 2002, employees can contribute to both plans, which in essence doubles their annual limit.

Dr. Carrier said the University is committed to offering this option and is working to get the PeopleSoft program to accommodate it. She said she was not sure the program would be available January 1 but it would be as soon after that as possible. Delaying beyond January 1 would not mean lost opportunities, Professor Feeney pointed out; one can catch up at the end of the year because the 457 plan does not require equal contributions spread out over the year.

The 457 plan has no downside for the individual, Professor Goldstein said; it is entirely voluntary. Some might not see the VEBA the same way, because it would mean a small deduction from the paycheck for a benefit that young faculty will not see for 30+ years. Do these plans need to be approved by the Board of Regents, he asked? They do, Dr. Carrier affirmed; she noted that VEBA participation at the State has been agreed to by such divergent groups as judges, bargaining units, and teachers.

There is need for communication about these plans, Professor Feeney pointed out; they need to be brought to FCC and the Senate so the sentiments of the governance system are made known.

5. Other Business

-- Professor Goldstein inquired about the status of eliminating the waiting period for new faculty for the Faculty Retirement Plan. There will be a decision by March 15, Dr. Carrier said. The P&A staff are also interested in it; there will be discussion with the deans on December 10.

-- There is concern about the complexity of the AREPA forms for those who have no outside consulting to report. It could be a lot simpler; there should be an option for individuals to check "none" on the electronic form, which would mean they need do no more. There should also be an alternative to the electronic form, Professor Goldstein added. The problem mentioned several time was finding out from whom the next signature on the form must come.

Why must this be done each year, Professor Walsh asked? Because Regents' policy requires it, Dr. Carrier said. What percentage of the faculty report no consulting, he asked? About 75%, Dr. Carrier said. The Board has dictated that one must do this year in and year out, even if there are no changes in what one does, Professor Wiedmann asked? That is why he came onto this Committee, he exclaimed!

Dr. Carrier said she would refer the concerns to Assistant Vice President Hamilton; she also suggested that the Committee invite him to talk about the issue.

-- Professor Goldstein next asked about eliminating the 30-day waiting period for health care benefits for new faculty hires. Dr. Carrier said they have asked consultants about the cost of doing so; the administration favors eliminating it. The concern was that someone would be hired with a serious disease that the University would then have to pay for; does this mean, Professor Goldstein asked, that someone would be seriously ill but arise from their sickbed and start work? There was a concern by the state that someone would hire a friend who was terminally ill; that concern has largely dissipated, Mr. Fahnhorst said. And if the University hired someone with AIDS, for example, they would still be in the system 30 days later and the University health care system would still have to cover them, Professor Altholz observed.

There is no longer any language about pre-existing conditions, Mr. Fahnhorst said, which means the whole waiting period is silly, Dr. Carrier agreed. It is simply a carry-over from many years ago, Mr. Fahnhorst concluded.

-- Health care choices: Dr. Carrier reported that the selections of health care providers were as follows (approximately): HealthPartners was chosen by over half; Definity by about 4%; Preferred One was third and Choice Plus was second.

One problem was that every time one called with a question about Definity, one got a different answer, Professor Goldstein said. Dr. Carrier said she has told Definity it has a problem with customer service issues. The other big problem was with which account one had to use first (personal care account, provided by the University, and then the reimbursement account, funded by the employee); if one could reverse the order in which one must use them, Definity might have a lot more customers, Professor Goldstein said.

Dr. Carrier said she wished to compliment the staff, who got 17,000 pieces of paper processed 10 days before the deadline. 1400 employees are not yet in a system; the University is notifying them.

Professor Goldstein adjourned the meeting at 4:40.

-- Vickie Courtney & Gary Engstrand

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