Commission on Faculty Affairs  
Minutes  
January 20, 2006

Members present: Redican, Ball, Eriksson, Zahm, Hagen, Hyer, Hardcastle, Sanders, Kelly, Robinson, Stephens, O’Keefe, Porterfield

Redican called the meeting to order with five items on the agenda: 1) Draft revision of Faculty Handbook Section 2.9.1, 2) Draft revision of Faculty Handbook Sections 1.5.1 and 2.13.1, 3) Draft of Modified Duties Policy, 4) Draft revision of Stop the Clock Provisions, 5) Update on Faculty Senate Discussions and approval of 1.5.1 and 2.13.1 6) Draft of proposed revision to 2.8.4.2, 5) Meeting Dates and Times for Spring, 2006.

Minutes from the previous meeting were approved.

Draft revision of Faculty Handbook Section 2.9.1 on annual evaluations

Kerry Redican reported on the recent discussion at the Faculty Senate meeting of proposed changes concerning annual and probationary period evaluations. A brief survey was completed by 34 senators with the majority stating that they met with their department head annually and they received a letter about their performance on an annual basis. Senators were generally supportive of the policy revisions proposed by CFA, but were divided about the recommendation to require involvement of a personnel committee in the annual evaluation of colleagues. Senators thought it would be useful to develop a best practices manual that could be used by department heads to improve annual evaluation processes. Redican will revise the policy to reflect the editorial changes suggested by CFA and the Faculty Senate and circulate the revised draft.

Draft of Modified Duties Policy

Hyer provided an overview of the draft Modified Duties Policy which provides faculty members a reduction in teaching load (or other workload accommodation) for one semester in order to deal with extraordinary personal or family circumstances. A central fund has been proposed to help cover the projected cost for hire backs. The deans are concerned about allocation of scarce new funding to this proposal, but are supportive of the policy in general. CFA members felt that establishment of a central fund is important to demonstrate administrative support. Further discussion related to the policy will take place at the AdvanceVT conference on February 3. CFA members are asked to be present so that feedback in regard to the draft can be collected from conference participants. Redican will notify the Faculty Senate that the draft will be circulated during the Advance event if they would like an opportunity to provide feedback.

Revision of the Stop the Clock Provisions (Faculty Handbook section 2.8.2.1)

Hyer reviewed the suggested changes to the Stop the Clock provision. Commission members remain supportive of the policy revision to make new parents (either mothers or fathers) automatically eligible for an extension upon completion of a form/notification of
the department head. A few changes were proposed and will be incorporated in the version going to the Advance conference discussion.

Reconciliation Committee and Valid Issues for Grievance (FH sections 1.5.1 and 2.13.1)

Revisions to sections 1.5.1 (charge of the Faculty Senate Reconciliation Committee) and 2.13.1 (Valid Issues for Grievance) were also vetted at the recent Faculty Senate meeting. The discussion at CFA focused on the nature of the formal grievance process which is designed to deal with complaints by faculty members against supervisors or other university administrators. Kevin McDonald, the new director of EO, is leading an effort to create a mediation service, which would be available to help with disputes between colleagues or peers. Ken Eriksson is serving on that planning committee so that the Reconciliation Committee will be well connected with this effort.

CFA members suggested editorial changes to the policies as well as urging more general language to clarify where the reconciliation committee fit in the process. Hyer will revise the language for both sections; CFA will revisit these at the next meeting and approve the change if the revisions are satisfactory.

CFA members agreed that it would be helpful to have a website, eventually, that outlined the different procedures and resources that are available to resolve conflicts, who to contact, and what venue is appropriate for the grievances based on the circumstances.

Draft of Proposed Revision to 2.8.4.2 (College level P&T Evaluation)

Revisions to 2.8.4.2 (College Evaluation) will be discussed at the next meeting due to time constraints. CFA members were provided with a summary of the colleges’ committee structures and appointment processes that were collected by the Provost’s Office in 2004.

New Business

Based on the procedures outlined in 2.14 in the Faculty Handbook, full-time faculty at Virginia Tech must appeal to the CFA in order to seek approval to enroll in a degree program at Virginia Tech to avoid conflict of interest. After review of the appeal, the CFA must then make a recommendation to the Provost as to whether approval to pursue the degree should be granted or not. CFA members reviewed a recent appeal by a faculty member. Members recommended provisional approval based upon the information they had been provided, and asked that the letter of approval from the Provost simply urge the faculty member to avoid any perception or actual conflict of interest by careful selection of committee members, for example.

Meeting Dates and Times for Spring, 2006

Redican circulated the meeting times and dates for Spring 2006.

Recorder, Catherine Amelink