Commission on Faculty Affairs (CFA)
Minutes
April 18, 2008

Members present: H. Odendaal, P. Hyer, E. Lener, K. Eriksson, J. Finney (for Chang), D. Kniola, S. Easterling, Dennis Welch, K. Hunnings (for Sorenson)

Guest: Terry Wildman (Director of CEUT), Jim Collier (Faculty Senate)

Odendaal called the meeting to order with two agenda items: 1) University Committee on Evaluation of Teaching, and 2) Updates on CFA Policy Initiatives. The minutes and agenda were approved.

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON EVALUATION OF TEACHING
The current teacher evaluations have been in place for the past 40 years. The University Committee on Evaluation of Teaching was created by the Provost last year to explore a new system for student evaluation of teaching. The committee, which consists of eighteen representatives from various departments, hopes to produce a final report by the end of the first summer session. Electronic copies of minutes from committee meetings and the final report will be made available upon completion. Wildman provided a working outline for the report and talked CFA members through six components (executive summary, introduction/background, literature on evaluation on teaching, methodology, data interpretation/discussion, and recommendations) of the document.

Wildman explained that the research on teacher evaluation is extensive; it is the most researched topic in education with over 2000 studies conducted. The section of the report that addresses the literature will focus on answering 13 frequently asked questions (e.g. Are students qualified to rate their instructors? Are student rating forms valid and reliable?).

A mixed-methods approach was employed to gather faculty opinions about the current teacher evaluation process. A survey containing 20 open-ended, Likert scale questions was distributed throughout campus. Five hundred faculty members responded. Focus groups of randomly selected faculty (various disciplines) were also conducted. The data collected will inform the development of the teacher evaluation instrument.

Questions on any new instrument should reflect a learner-centered paradigm and the multi-dimensional character of teaching. A factor analysis will need to be conducted to ensure that the questions are in fact measuring the dimensions identified, before the university fully adopts a particular questionnaire.

Wildman maintained that there is a need to determine effective use of the data collected from teacher evaluations. There are inconsistencies in how this information is currently being presented to faculty, and the committee questions whether the data are being used to improve teacher performance. Another issue is ownership and maintenance of whatever system is adopted. Wildman explained that there is a growing belief by many...
faculty members that teaching is not highly valued and this makes many faculty members cynical about efforts of this nature. Identifying a department or senior official responsible for maintaining the system will be important to its usefulness and effectiveness in improving teaching.

One limitation of the committee’s work is that they are focusing exclusively on improving student evaluation of teacher performance. There is also a need to assess the effectiveness of the peer review process. There are inconsistencies in how this process is currently being facilitated in various departments.

Questions/Comments Regarding Wildman’s Report

- Evaluation format: Will there be a universal mandate of an online system? Should faculty have the option of using paper versus an electronic version of the evaluation? What is the response rate or participation level for online versus paper evaluations? Do online evaluations encourage more reflective or thoughtful comments? Do online evaluations encourage collusion among students? The committee has reviewed this literature and will comment on many of these topics in the report.

- Student Buy-In: Faculty should explain the importance of teacher evaluations in an attempt to increase participation and encourage thoughtful responses.

- What is currently being done with the data: Wildman explained that this varies across departments. All faculty members receive a copy of their evaluations. A copy also resides in the faculty member’s personnel file. Teaching scores are also included in the P&T dossier and nomination packets for major teaching awards.

- Teaching Narrative: Is there literature that examines the overall narrative of teaching at institutions where there is more of a focus on research?

- Project leadership: What will be the direction of the project after Wildman goes on sabbatical? Collective vision is important to address at the university level.

- Benchmarking: Wildman explained that the committee collected information on practices at other institutions.

UPDATES ON CFA POLICY INITIATIVES

Lead Investigator Policy
Faculty Senate voted in favor of the resolution. After the Commission on Research reviews the document this fall, it will be sent to the University Council for approval.

Reduced Academic Year Assignments for Pre-Tenure Faculty
Hyer proposed the idea of establishing a policy to reduce the teaching load for pre-tenure faculty to the recent University Promotion and Tenure committee. Members of the committee were not especially supportive of a policy. The concerns were not with the idea of a pre-tenure teaching release per se, but more so with a universal mandate.
policy guaranteeing a reduction in teaching load could present legal implications or other liabilities in situations where tenure is not granted.

Hyer solicited feedback on alternatives to addressing the concerns noted in the COACHE survey. One suggestion was to craft language on how candidates can approach these types of concerns. This information could be uploaded to the prospective faculty webpage as a negotiation resource. Mentoring was brought up as a possible solution. There was also a discussion about the impact of the policy passed last year that requires a two and four year review for pre-tenured faculty.

CFA COMMITTEE REPRESENTATION ON OTHER COMMITTEES/COMMISSIONS:
Dennis Welch agreed to continue to serve on the Commission for Equal Opportunity and Diversity. Ed Lener will extend his appointment on the Employee Benefits committee.

ANNOUNCEMENTS
Odendaal will communicate with members via email on whether there will be a meeting held on May 2nd.

Recorder: Tracey Cameron, Office of the Provost