Commission on Faculty Affairs (CFA)
Minutes
February 29, 2008


Guest: Tom Inzana, Associate Vice President for Research

Odendaal called the meeting to order with four agenda items: 1) Policy on Removal of Lead Investigators, 2) Reduced Teaching Load for Pre-Tenure Faculty, 3) Faculty Recruitment-Related Proposals, and 4) Proposal for Research Incentive Plan. The agenda and minutes were approved.

POLICY ON REMOVAL OF LEAD INVESTIGATOR
Revisions were made to the policy on the removal of lead investigators following discussion at the last meeting. The resolution was then voted on and unanimously approved. It will be sent to the Commission on Research for review and approval, as well as to the Faculty Senate.

REDUCED TEACHING LOAD FOR PRE-TENURE FACULTY
The deans discussed the proposed policy on reduction of teaching load for pre-tenure faculty during a recent meeting. The deans preferred not to have a university-wide policy, allowing them to continue with varied strategies to support the research endeavors of pre-tenure faculty. Other concerns include:

- Implementation of such a policy might provide one more avenue for appealing negative tenure decision if the faculty member claimed that they were not given adequate teaching release.
- Unclear whether Colleges need a policy of this nature. Is there another way to address the need without a policy? Are individuals not receiving promotion and tenure because there is no reduction in teaching? Are there data to support this finding?
- Colleges have different models, assignments, and teaching schedules. Deans may be more receptive if they were allowed autonomy in creating their own policy. The Faculty Handbook could then speak to best practices to assist in the implementation of the policy.
- Policy should convey the flexibility of when the reduction would occur (which it does). The subsequent sentence suggesting that it may be more productive during the second or third year could be deleted.

Hyer will attend an upcoming deans’ council session to review some of the findings from the pre-tenure focus group and COACHE survey. It is not clear that the deans have received and/or internalized the need to address concerns coming from the pre-tenure faculty. Having such a policy provides greater transparency and visibility for pre-tenure faculty, a much-repeated theme in discussions with them. It would also be a positive contribution to recruitment efforts. A discussion with the Faculty Senate will also be scheduled for mid-March.
FACULTY RECRUITMENT-RELATED PROPOSALS
Hyer reported on proposals created to assist in the recruitment of faculty. These proposals are linked to the recommendations from the Race Task Force -- some of the suggestions are already underway; others will require additional funding. The following programs were suggested to improve recruitment outcomes through building relationships:

Recruitment Enhancement Grant
Program would provide extra funding for constituency groups to host receptions or other events so that candidates can find a community during the recruitment process; makes real something that is already happening.

VT Visiting Scholars Program
Program is a pre-search activity designed to identify potential candidates for current or future faculty positions. Provides $1,000 per person for travel; an estimated $10,000 a year for ten prospects. This program is open to people from underrepresented groups and individuals whose research is diversity related. Departments host scholars for a campus visit to introduce them to VT and build relationships that may lead to a hire.

Proposed Future Faculty Initiative
Intent is to identify prospective faculty by inviting 8-12 doctoral candidates who are close to degree completion to participate in an all-expense paid, two-day conference. The conference would look a lot like the Advance conference for doctoral students and post-docs. Candidates will be hosted by a Virginia Tech department and participate in enrichment sessions (i.e. how to negotiate a job offer). One resource for identifying possible invitees is the Southern Region Education Board’s (SREB) database of fellowship recipients.

While the number of hires expected from such a program may be small, it should have a ripple effect if done well – participants may speak well of VT to their friends or urge them to look for openings here. This helps to build the reputation that VT is interested in attracting faculty from underrepresented groups.

The program would require administrative support. There may be some possibility of corporate or donor support to get the program launched – this option will be explored.

Diversity Cluster Hires
This program is the most expensive of the four. A set of 6 or more positions would be identified for a cluster recruitment around the scholarship of race or diversity more broadly. A wide variety of departments could participate in such recruitments. Hiring a critical mass of scholars with expertise in race/ethnicity/diversity would allow VT to make progress on other related initiatives, like transforming the curriculum and strengthening curricular offerings on race/ethnicity.

Hyer and Oaks spoke with administrators at Rutgers regarding their new diversity cluster initiative and learned some helpful strategies. Rutgers contacts warned about how
difficult it is to successfully recruit senior scholars, although more senior faculty of color are much needed at VT to provide leadership in various academic subdisciplines and to act as role models and collaborators for more junior faculty.

Several CFA members spoke to the need to hire several people per year in just two or three years maximum in order to gain any sense of momentum from the initiative, and to consider making the cluster at least ten faculty members to have a real impact. Finney expressed concern about the unspecified nature of the “cluster” and that it may be so broad that it does not actually accomplish the intellectual impact that comes with a more defined initiative. A concentrated focus may give us an extra advantage in attracting more people. Not all departments will find it possible to recruit for a diversity cluster. A cluster of this sort does not address general recruiting in a specific discipline.

PROPOSAL FOR RESEARCH INCENTIVE PLAN
Tom Inzana, Associate Vice President for Research, presented a proposal aimed at providing salary incentives for faculty who successfully acquire grants and contracts. Such incentives are relatively common among medical schools and vary in detail. This plan is intended to boost the number of grants and contracts submitted; to give VT a competitive advantage in recruiting “high-end” researchers and retaining research-productive current faculty; to enhance faculty morale; and to provide faculty raises when the state is not able to do so.

PIs and Co-PIs on E&G funds would be eligible for one time bonuses from salary savings generated by grant funding. Fifty percent of salary savings, beyond savings required to cover summer salary or departmental requirements, is the maximum bonus an individual can receive. There is a sliding scale formula to balance the salary savings return to the Department and the PI, but is designed to be flexible to meet Department needs.

Concerns/Questions were as follows:
- Lack of structure and the possibility of misuse - Inzana explained that the department heads are responsible for reviewing proposals and guarding against diverting funds away from graduate student support or excess salary charges to maximize personal income
- Will this incentive apply to individuals who secure foundation grants which seldom allow overhead?
- NSF grants typically only allow two months of summer charges so it may be difficult to achieve sufficient salary savings from only NSF-funded projects.
- Would faculty members on calendar year appointments be allowed to participate? If so, do they need to achieve a threshold of equivalent summer earnings before the remainder could be used to provide a bonus?

Inzana explained that the next step in getting the policy adopted was to speak with department heads.

Recorder: Tracey Cameron, Office of the Provost