Commission on Faculty Affairs
Minutes
October 13, 2006

Members present: Hardcastle, Hyer, Eriksson, Lener, Balci, Sanders, Ball, Hagan, Sorenson, Mitchell, Zahm

Guest(s): Hardus Odendaal

Hardcastle called the meeting to order with three agenda items: 1) Discussion of Grievable Action Resolution, 2) Professors of Practice Designation, and 3) Discussion of the Results of the Faculty Survey on Promotion and Tenure Procedures.

Agenda and minutes of the last meeting were approved.

GRIEVABLE ACTION RESOLUTION
CFA resolution 2005-06D from last year was intended to clarify the language in section 2.13.1 of the Faculty Handbook on what is deemed a grievable issue, particularly related to promotion and tenure. The resolution was withdrawn after introduction at University Council last spring when Engineering department heads objected. Hardcastle met with the Engineering department heads in the last few weeks to learn more about their concerns, some of which involved current not new language. That discussion led to a few minor changes to the proposed language.

Ken Eriksson, who has been chairing the Faculty Senate Reconciliation Committee, spoke to the need for the changes based on the Senate’s experience with several recent tenure cases. According to Eriksson, P&T committees have dealt with issues of merit and not procedure. Allowing substantive procedural violations to be pursued through the grievance process would give faculty members another appeals option and offer a checks and balances system for the process. Hyer argued the importance of leaving tenure appeals within the P&T committee structure, rather than allowing appeals through both P&T and grievance processes. If necessary, the grounds for filing an appeal could be expanded to make certain that procedural matters could be considered and dealt with.

In further discussion of the proposed list of grievable actions, the term threat (2.13.1 #3) was removed since commission members felt that usage of the term was too broad and could be easily misinterpreted. In addition, the proposed general language of “other matters of conflict and dispute…” was removed. General conflicts are more appropriately a matter of reconciliation and too broadly defined for a grievance.

The resolution, including the language allowing substantive violations of promotion and tenure procedures as a grievable issue, was approved with a 9-1 vote. It will be submitted to University Council for approval.

PROFESSOR OF PRACTICE DESIGNATION
The fundamental question regarding this topic is whether Virginia Tech is interested in expanding the range of non-tenure faculty appointments, not just for visitors and adjuncts, but as
an on-going full-time appointment type. A number of departments have already started using such titles even though they have not been approved, and still others have asked for more flexible options to appoint faculty members with heavy teaching and/or outreach responsibilities which would make it difficult for them to obtain tenure, or individuals with exceptional experiential credentials. The general consensus of the Commission is in support of the idea, believing that a faculty member’s title should be valued and meaningful.

The following advantages and disadvantages were addressed in the discussion:

**Advantages**
- Creating a professor of practice rank (not just adjunct or visiting) would allow greater flexibility when working with graduate students; this designation would allow faculty to participate in thesis and dissertation committees.
- Designation would give recognition to the experience and accomplishments of faculty.
- Designation would bring expertise that supports the instructional mission of the institution. This ranking would be advantageous to some departments where the title of *clinical professor* may not be as fitting (i.e. music, construction).
- Recognition that some division of labor may be beneficial and economically efficient.

**Disadvantages**
- Increase in the number of non-tenure track positions may appear to threaten tenure.
- Overdependence on non-tenure track faculty to deliver instruction means that fewer students would be exposed to tenured or/tenure track faculty, particularly in freshman and sophomore classes.
- Creates too many distinctions. Current titles aren’t clearly defined.

Commission members questioned overlap of the Professor of Practice title and the “Clinical Professor” title. Some universities (i.e. Tulane, Indiana Univ) use the clinical professor rank for the same purpose that VT would use the Professor of Practice designation. Before further action is taken regarding this matter, Hardcastle will present a comparative analysis of the existing titles.

**RESULTS OF THE FACULTY SURVEY ON PROMOTION AND TENURE PROCEDURES**

Hardcastle distributed survey results (including comments) and gave a snapshot into the overarching themes presented:
- Professors should be included in most aspects of the P& T process while Assistant Professors should not.
- Smaller departments petitioned for flexibility.
- Respondents from Liberal Arts and Human Sciences and Agriculture and Life Sciences were overrepresented in the survey results while the College of Engineering was underrepresented.
- There is no clear mandate, either way, of concerning one vote per case.

Hardcastle will take a more in-depth look at the data. Additionally, it appears that the issues of voting and who should serve will guide the Commissions future direction.
Commission members are asked to read the survey comments for discussion at the next meeting.

**OTHER BUSINESS**
The Faculty Senate voted unanimously on the multiple levels of instructors. The Commission will move forward on drafting language for a resolution concerning instructor appointments and promotions.

Recorder: Tracey Cameron, Office of the Provost