Members present: Kerry Redican, chair; Ken Eriksson, Sue Hagen, Carlyle Brewster, Mike Kelly, Sheryl Ball, Pat Hyer, Valerie Hardcastle, Robert Stephens.

The agenda was approved with one addition. Minutes from the previous meeting were already approved electronically.

There was no significant progress to report on three topics under consideration by CFA this fall: revision of stop-the-clock language, development of a temporary part-time option, and professors of practice. Work on these topics will continue outside of CFA meetings and will be brought to the commission when ready.

Pat Hyer briefed commission members on plans for the October 24th session for academic leaders concerning faculty work-life issues. CFA members were all invited to attend since last year’s commission was deeply involved in the design and conduct of faculty focus group sessions that were held in April. The report of the focus group findings is one of several reports that will be featured at the meeting. Participants will also get copies of work-life data from the AdvanceVT survey, a summary of the exit survey results, and a report on voluntary departures of tenured and tenure-track faculty. In addition to the presentation on the 24th, a similar presentation is planned for the Faculty Senate meeting on November 9th, and for the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Visitors on November 7th. The Commission will be central to any of the policy initiatives that may come from these discussions.

The commission then discussed plans for their upcoming meeting on October 28th. Susan Willis-Walton has been asked to provide a detailed presentation on results of the faculty exit survey. In addition, P&T considerations will be brought up for further discussion with Dr. McNamee who is expected to attend.

Promotion and Tenure Issues:

Ken Eriksson provided an overview of six issues concerning promotion and tenure that have been identified through various grievances and reconciliation requests during the last year. These issues are being introduced to determine if CFA wishes to recommend any changes in current policies or practices.

1. Deans chairing college-level P&T Committees: The Faculty Handbook calls for deans to chair college-level P&T committees; however they may not vote as part of the committee. The issue that has been raised is whether this policy and practice might lead to undue influence on the committee’s deliberations when the dean has a particular view on a case.
Members shared their experience with P&T deliberations in their respective colleges. In LAHS, the dean convenes the meeting, addresses issues of procedures, responds to questions, but otherwise “witnesses” rather than participates in deliberations. There is a faculty chair designated who manages the meeting.

Brewster suggested that deans can play a *positive* role in a case, supplementing information provided by a designated presenter. The dean in Agriculture reads all two and four-year reviews and all annual evaluations and hence is familiar with the accomplishments of individual candidates. There should not be a presumption that a dean would automatically be using their influence in a negative fashion concerning individual cases. There is a faculty committee chair in CALS other than the dean.

Kelly reflected that he would welcome a wholly separate faculty committee for college-level deliberations that would meet without his participation. That would leave his judgment truly independent of the committee’s views, and it provides a better vantage point for adjudicating differences should they arise. In Natural Resources, the dean prepares the letters summarizing the committee’s view on the candidate’s record, in addition to his own letter.

At this point in the discussion, commission members appeared to support a recommendation that would reduce the dean’s involvement or control of college-level deliberations. Further conversation with the Provost, the deans, and with the Faculty Senate are needed to test whether some variation of this recommendation would be more broadly supported and accepted.

2. Role of department heads on college-level P&T committees: A related issue is the role that department heads have in serving as voting members of the college-level committee after having a formal vote and voice through their own letters at the departmental level. Both Engineering and Natural Resources, and perhaps other colleges, give voting membership on the college P&T committee to department heads. This is permitted by the Faculty Handbook as long as their collective vote does not exceed that of other faculty representatives. Again, the expressed view of several members of the commission was that college-level committees be faculty-only committees. The issue of who serves on college committees appears to vary by college (separately elected? Departmental P&T committee chairs? Department heads?) may need some attention to determine if greater consistency is desirable, and whether all colleges are actually in compliance with Handbook guidelines on selection of members.

Given recent changes in the university-level P&T process whereby faculty representatives and deans get only one opportunity to vote on candidates from their own college, it may be worthwhile revisiting the role of heads in the same way.
3. Annual Evaluations: Erikkson shared his concern that several recent cases have brought to light serious deficiencies in departmental level annual evaluation processes, and also two and four-review probationary reviews. The absence of written feedback to faculty members creates a serious problem in documenting difficult or marginal cases of performance since faculty members can, rightly, insist that they have not been told how they needed to improve.

Commission members again shared their experiences in their departments with annual evaluations. Clearly the process is formalized and functioning well in some departments, with written feedback provided annually, which the faculty member must sign in acknowledgement of receiving. But this is not true in other cases. Commission members all felt that written feedback on annual evaluations and for the formal two and four year probationary reviews was critical and should not be optional.

Valerie Hardcastle agreed to write a sentence or two for section 2.9.1 of the Faculty Handbook on annual evaluations requiring that they be done in writing. Kelly pointed out that it will be important to have training for department heads so that they understand the importance of written annual evaluations and the best way to go about providing them to faculty members.

Hyer agreed to draft some language for section 2.8.2 of the Faculty Handbook concerning the necessity of doing formal probationary reviews for tenure-track faculty and providing constructive feedback in writing as part of their reappointment.

4. The commission then took up the Provost’s suggestion about allowing deans to defer their vote on P&T cases on which they have decidedly mixed views, allowing the case to come forward to the university-level committee along with all other cases rather than giving it a negative vote and forcing the faculty member through a formal appeal. This particular suggestion did not have a lot of support, but commission members asked if Dr. McNamee could explain his concerns on October 28th so that they might better understand why this might be useful.

Additional issues on Erikkson’s list will be discussed at subsequent meetings.

The next meeting of the Commission will be Friday, October 28th, at 3:00 p.m. in 325 Burruss.

Recorder,

Patricia Hyer