Commission on Faculty Affairs (CFA)
Minutes
September 14, 2007


Guest(s): Jim Collier

Odendaal called the meeting to order with three agenda items: 1) Survey of Pre-Tenure Faculty 2) Mandatory EAP for Faculty and 3) Future Topics for the 2007-08 academic year. The minutes were approved.

SURVEY OF PRE-TENURE FACULTY (COACHE)

Hyer presented results from the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) survey. COACHE was created by researchers Trower and Chait (Harvard University) to try to shed some light on “good” places to work and the conditions and policies that drive faculty satisfaction with tenure-track employment. Since its implementation, COACHE has been administered to three cohorts - 54 universities have participated and a large number of smaller institutions. Participation is voluntary, and member institutions are assessed a fee. The difference between this survey and the study conducted by ADVANCEVT is that COACHE focused on pre-tenure/probationary faculty; ADVANCEVT surveyed the entire population of research and tenure-track faculty. Additionally, there are no external benchmark data for the ADVANCEVT survey. COACHE participants are allowed to choose up to five schools of which they can receive comparative data. Overview findings are published nationally (i.e the Chronicle, Inside Higher Education), giving the survey and these issues a lot of visibility. Institutional data are not revealed unless the university chooses to do so.

The COACHE survey measured five themes (i.e. tenure; nature of the work; policies & practices; climate, culture, & collegiality; and global satisfaction), but for the purpose of this presentation, Hyer focused primarily on promotion and tenure.

Highlights:
Pre-tenure faculty hired before January 2006 were asked to participate. Of the 221, 157 responded (71% response rate). The individuals also had to be employed by VT for a minimum of six months.

Demographics: The majority of the respondents were White (106), which reflects the demography of the faculty. Of the underrepresented populations, there were more Asian (29) than Black (10), Hispanic (10), Native American (1), and multi-race (1) participants – these are weighted responses to reflect their proportions in the pre-tenure population. 28% were non-U.S. citizens.
Selected peer institutions were: Iowa State University, Michigan State University, North Carolina State University, Ohio State University, and University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

The data showed concerns in three areas: transparency of the tenure process, clarity and reasonableness of tenure standards; and policies and practices related to tenure and work-life. Virginia Tech scored lower than its peers, and lower than other universities, on many items.

Hyer asked the group for their thoughts on how the university might respond to the promotion and tenure issues included in the survey. An overall theme was a desire for more clarity on how the tenure process works and a more concrete explanation on how a probationary faculty can obtain tenure.

Klein, of Veterinary Medicine, suggested that there may be a discrepancy in how the expectations of receiving tenure are perceived by pre-tenure faculty in the clinical and basic sciences. Clinical faculty may be less sure of how much research they are expected to do. Standards for biomedicine may be less ambiguous but still complicated by clinical service performed by some biomedicine faculty.

There may also be a disparity with how the expectations are communicated in the various disciplines. Finney explained that mixed messages may be sent due to a change in standards over the course of the last few years (i.e. Top 30 goal). He suggested making available sample dossiers to show diversity throughout the disciplines.

Odendaal stated that the change in membership of departmental committees adds to the uncertainty since the messages are not always consistent. Collier commented that micromanagement of documentation (i.e. font size) seems to raise anxiety levels as well.

Klein also suggested that the perception of research being significantly more important may have an effect on the quality of teaching.

Hyer commented that one or more of the COACHE institutions instituted an association for pre-tenured faculty charged with the purpose of providing a social/networking outlet as one way to address survey concerns. Odendaal stated that Clemson University has a similar organization. He also explained Faculty Senate planned to host a social event in the near future.

MANDATORY REFERRAL TO EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP) FOR FACULTY

Mandatory referrals to the employee assistance program are already possible for university staff, and such referrals for faculty are supported by case law. However, VT does not have a policy stating that such a referral can be made and under what
circumstances. A very early draft resolution was distributed for comment. Initial concerns expressed by CFA members were privacy/confidentiality; wording of the resolution (i.e. mandatory referral needs to be defined); and whether this referral could ultimately be used against the individual. Klein questioned whether this resolution was a knee-jerk reaction to the incident that occurred on 4/16. Finney added that this resolution should be a referral to the employee assistance program and not an open ended referral to any physician of the faculty member’s choice.

Eriksson spoke to the lack of consistency – staff can be referred, but faculty cannot. He explained that the mandatory referral is a safeguard/mechanism for individuals who may be a danger to themselves and others. It should not be used to subject faculty to abuse. He argued for a possible team approach to determining if a mandatory referral should be made.

Finney maintained that faculty have the freedom to live with mental health disorders. The resolution should focus more on job performance and the threat that the illness and behavior may have on the workplace.

There is a pending meeting scheduled with legal counsel to discuss this resolution in greater detail.

ADDITIONAL TOPICS FOR 2007-2008 ACADEMIC YEAR
Eriksson briefly introduced three new topics for consideration:
1) Promotion of Research Faculty: There are questions as to whether the expectations are understood.
2) Post Doc Compensation: Should there be a minimum commitment for individuals serving in a post-doc position? The current contract states that dismissal can occur if there is a depletion of funding.
3) Removal of Principal Investigators

Recorder: Tracey Cameron, Office of the Provost