Minutes of the Faculty Senate Meeting, 11 March 2008

The Faculty Senate met on Tuesday, 11 March 2008, at 5:00 p.m. in Wachovia Auditorium. Speaker Joe Kelly called the meeting to order.

Reports

The Speaker

The Speaker mentioned the SWOT survey/analysis that was being conducted across the College. He asked Senators to urge their colleagues to become involved. The SWOT analysis constitutes the best opportunity for the faculty to provide input about the state of the College, its future direction as an institution, and the strategies it must adopt to reach its goals.

Following up on the “Klaxon vote” (the vote on the resolution regarding the proposed emergency notification system) at the last regular Faculty Senate meeting, the Speaker reported that Associate Provost Susan Morrison is putting together a committee that will study the best type of alarm system to install before the deadline stated in the sunset clause that the Senate inserted into last month’s resolution.

Brian McGee, Chair of the Committee on By-Laws and the Fac./Admin. Manual

Mr. McGee reported that there would be a substantive revision of the Faculty/Administration Manual (FAM). He said that there are many places in the FAM that need updating and asked Senators to let him know if they see anything that is obsolete or missing in it. He said, too, that the FAM’s current structure dates back to the early 1990s, and that some information is placed in inconvenient locations. Some re-organization of the document is therefore needed. A draft of the FAM with a different form of organization has been created as an alternative to the organizational scheme of the current FAM. Mr. McGee stressed that the draft does not attempt to change or add content that has not already been vetted. He added that his committee is not wedded to the draft, and that they would like feedback on it and suggestions for how it could be better organized. He also made clear that he was talking about the administrative portion of the FAM, not the section on by-laws, which requires faculty approval to change.

Mark Hurd, Chair of the Educational Technology Committee

Mr. Hurd reported his committee’s work on online course evaluations. He first thanked his committee members and his co-chair Jannette Finch. He then provided some background information on the issue. In spring 2005, the Faculty Educational Technology Committee (FEC) was charged with the task of looking into the feasibility of online course evaluations. In 2006, the committee reported to the Senate. In that meeting, Senators raised a number of concerns, which his committee has since tried to address.

Mr. Hurd then provided an overview of the current course evaluation system and some of its weaknesses. The current system
-- is expensive, not secure, and slow,
-- uses a lot of paper (70,000 forms are printed each year),
-- requires a lot of labor to administer (205 hours to print, sort and deliver the
evaluations, and 16 hours to photocopy),
-- and makes the process of analyzing data inconvenient and difficult.

Mr. Hurd then commented that the response rate in the current system is about 70%. In online
evaluations, the response rate is generally lower, especially when an online system is first
implemented; but the rate recovers somewhat after the system has been in use for three or four
years. He noted, however, that in some schools—e.g., medical schools where students are
typically required to respond—the response rate is very high.

Mr. Hurd next reported on a pilot study—involving both paper and online evaluations—that
his committee had conducted. Members of a group of departments from various schools of
the College volunteered to participate. In total the study involved 69 class sections and over
1900 students. Results of the evaluations were emailed to participating faculty right after
grades were submitted. The response rate for paper evaluations was 70%; for online
evaluations the rate was 39%. Some participating faculty reported that student comments in
the online evaluations were more articulate and less emotional. In that regard, Mr. Hurd
concluded that the higher quality of the responses compensated for the lower response rate.

His committee also analyzed the evaluations of eight courses in the Psychology Department,
where students did paper and online evaluations. That part of the pilot study showed that
there was no difference in results between the paper and online evaluations.

As part of the pilot study, the committee also surveyed the faculty who participated. Of the
participating faculty, 50% responded to the survey. Of those who responded, 64% were
satisfied with the online course evaluation system, and 36% were not satisfied, mainly
because of the low student response rate. Three suggestions emerged from the survey: (1)
that students be reminded more often to do the online evaluations; (2) that students be given
incentives to do them; and (3) that grades be withheld until the evaluations are completed. On
the question, “Would you sell this to other faculty?” 47% responded yes, 53% no. On the
question, “Would you participate again?” 74% responded yes, 26% no.

Mr. Hurd announced that more information about the study can be found at the website of the
Faculty Educational Technology Committee.

Richard Nunan (at-large) asked if he found different response rates according to department.
Mr. Hurd responded that the response rates in chemistry courses were high, that in
psychology courses the rate was 46%, and that overall it was 39% to 40%. In his courses, the
rate was between 50% and 60%, and he said that during the evaluation period he reminded his
students everyday to do the evaluations. He thought that for overall response rates to go up,
“a cultural shift” on campus would have to take place.

Hugh Wilder (Philosophy) asked for specifics about the evaluation period. Mr. Hurd said that
the online evaluations took place during a two-week period. During that time, there were
exams, but it would be possible, he said, to work around exam periods. For example, the evaluation period could be opened up for a time, then closed, and then opened up again. The time of the day when one may fill out evaluations can also be controlled to avoid the scenario of possibly inebriated students filling them out in the wee hours of the morning.

Jack Parson (Political Science) thought that in general online evaluations were good, but he was concerned about the time-window when students did them. For instance, if the time-window of two-weeks at the end of the semester is slated as the evaluation period, many professors hand back papers and exams during that time, which in turn may affect the evaluations. He said that controlling the time-window is important for faculty (something they have some control over with paper evaluations) because faculty will claim that the timing caused bad results. Mr. Hurd responded that to address that concern each faculty member would have to pick certain days for his/her course evaluations, but he was not sure whether that type of fine tweaking of the system could be done. Meg Cormack (at-large) said whether vendors providing the technology for the online evaluation system could make such timing adjustments should in part determine which vendor the College chooses. Mr. Hurd added that some vendors claim they can make such timing adjustments, but whether they really can or how well they can remain questions.

Steve Litvin (Tourism and Hospitality) said that he participated in the pilot study and remarked that the FEC did a great job. He thought getting rid of excessive paperwork was good, but he was concerned about response bias. He said that he was lucky last semester (during the pilot study) because no student hated him, and his evaluations were good because those who liked him filled out the online evaluations, but the others did not. He likes the system, but is worried about bias. Mr. Hurd responded that much work has been published on the issue of response bias: the studies done using large samples show that there is no bias.

Unfinished Business

Motion on Salary Increase for Faculty Meeting the Merit Threshold

The Speaker reminded the Senate that at the last regular Faculty Senate meeting, a motion had been approved to table a motion made by Tom Heeney (Communication) on the salary increase for faculty meeting the merit threshold until after Presidents Benson’s open forum on the new salary merit-raise system. The text of the motion is as follows:

For any faculty member judged to meet the merit threshold as defined in Recommendation 3 of the Faculty Compensation Committee’s January 08 “Recommendations on Merit/ Market Salary Increase Process,” the College of Charleston Faculty Senate recommends a minimum salary increase of 80% of the mandated average annual raise percentage authorized by the General Assembly for State employees for the coming year. Larger salary increases will be contingent on funds available, on level of meritorious performance, and on market factors, as judged appropriate.
Scott Peeples (English) began discussion on the issue by reading the following statement from his colleague Simon Lewis:

I’m sorry I’m not with you all in person this evening, but I think my family would consider I’d done enough unpaid overtime already this month. That comment may not sit well with all of you who’ve been doing similar unpaid overtime all year, and thereby, if the gods of fairness were on the ball, eating up all available merit pay raises available. Which is the point of this brief statement in favor of the Senate resolution to recommend a minimum salary increase of 80% of the mandated average annual raise percentage authorized by the General Assembly for State employees for the coming year. Personally I believe all who meet the minimum standard should get 100% of the mandated average annual raise, but let that pass for now. More importantly, what’s the rationale behind my support of this resolution? Because it seems self-evident that we should all get raises according to merit, doesn’t it? How can anyone who considers him or herself meritorious not support such a position?

Two reasons: first, as the Chair of the Vestry of my church said last Sunday when drumming up annual funds from us congregants: “A raise isn’t a raise when it’s less than the increase in the cost of living.” We all know what she means—especially those of us for whom -- for human, family reasons -- costs are increasing at the same time as the strains on our time are increasing (we’re starting a family, sending kids to college, caring for aged parents/spouses, etc.). So let’s not kid ourselves that this system is going to raise salaries—it’s just going to divide the salary pot differently, quite possibly dividing ourselves against each other in the process. Robbing Peter to pay Paul.

Second: this new system is not really based on merit, either—at least not in absolute, criterion-determined terms; it’s based on relative merit, a very nebulous concept where the amount of effort I put in will not necessarily be rewarded, since someone else may be putting in more than I am. In other words, no one will know what will get us the goodies and we’re all going to have to fight each other to prove not just our worth but our relative worth against each other. To put it really bluntly, it seems to me that this system is designed to get more free labor out of us, since we’re not necessarily going to be rewarded for meeting criteria of merit in the three designated areas, we’re going to be rewarded (assuming there is money available) for exceeding departmental norms—which probably means going way beyond any contractual obligation we are under. In my opinion, the College needs to honor its contractual obligations to us, among which I see the obligation to keep paying us at the level we were promised if we keep doing our job.

Finally, I have heard it said that the president considers any mitigation of the “merit-only” system to be likely to tie his hands in negotiations with the Board of Trustees. I contend that this argument is specious, in that the funds designated by the state for pay raises are not in the gift of the Board. In other words, passing this resolution is entirely harmless as far as the president’s negotiations with the board are concerned.
-- and hugely beneficial as far as demonstrating his commitment to and trust in his faculty is concerned.

Thanks, Scott, thanks, All.
Simon

Larry Krasnoff (Philosophy) next recalled a suggested amendment that he brought at the last regular Senate meeting regarding Mr. Heeney’s proposed resolution. He moved to amend the resolution by inserting the phrase “a publicly specified minimum percentage” in place of “80%.” The motion received a second. Mr. Krasnoff pointed out the amended resolution would make clear that faculty meeting the merit threshold should get a salary increase and that the amount of the increase would have to be made public by the College administration. At the same time, it would allow the administration some flexibility in how state funds granted for raises would be allocated and used.

Richard Nunan (Philosophy) spoke against the proposed amendment, arguing that it would not be an effective way of sending a message about minimum raises for meritorious faculty, and that it gave no guarantee of a minimum raise. Recalling what one Senator pointed out at the last meeting, the “specified percentage” could be zero. He added that he was worried about some of the things that President Benson said at the open forum, such as the statement that he (the President) thought a 3% raise was a good raise. That might, said Mr. Nunan, be a good raise for someone in the Business School where salaries have been high, but not for most other faculty, especially given the fact that the inflation rate has been about 2.5%. Mr. Nunan was also disturbed by the President’s comment that he regarded the evaluation system at the Terry School of Business at the University of Georgia as ideal. That statement shows that the President’s looks at the world through a business school prism.

Another Senator thought that the Senate should send the strongest possible message by stating that the minimum salary raise should be 100% of “the mandated average annual raise percentage.”

Hugh Wilder (Philosophy) spoke in favor of Mr. Krasnoff’s amendment. He stated that he had served as chair of his department when there was no money for raises. He thought that the 80% figure would tie the hands of chairs and not give them the adequate discretion they needed to address various equity issues, and would ultimately cause more unhappiness.

Mr. Heeney responded that the 80% figure is designed to provide some flexibility for chairs and administrators, but at the same time it is intended to make sure that some minimum amount, some concrete amount would go for raises so that faculty could keep up with rises in the cost of living. He added that for the last three years salaries and benefits have been going down, which shows that salaries and benefits have not been regarded as important by the College administration. The resolution is intended to make a statement about priorities.

George Hopkins (History), speaking against the proposed amendment, said that his experience as chair has been different from Mr. Wilder’s. In his view, the 80% figure provides chairs an appropriate degree of flexibility to deal with the various issues mentioned by Mr. Wilder.
Also, deans and the provost can, in cases of exceptionally meritorious faculty, come up with more money. Meg Cormack (at-large) agreed with Mr. Hopkins. She said that Provost Jorgens has said that extra funds are available for special situations. The 80% figure, she thought, struck an appropriate balance: it guaranteed a salary increase for faculty meeting the merit threshold and it provided some flexibility for chairs.

The Senate voted on Mr. Krasnoff’s amendment, and it was defeated.

The Senate then voted on Mr. Heeney’s motion, and it passed.

**New Business**

**Faculty Curriculum Committee**

The Senate without discussion approved the following proposals.

**Computer Science**
- Proposal to Change a Course – CSCI 210 Game Programming

**Religious Studies**
- New Course Proposal – RELS 120 Religion, Art and Culture

**Music**
- New Course Proposal – MUSC 353 Wind Ensemble

**English**
- Proposal to Change Degree Requirements for a Minor – Film Studies

**Psychology/Biology**
- Proposal to Change Degree Requirements for a Minor - Neuroscience

**German and Slavic Studies**
- Proposal to Change a Course – LITR/ RUSS 290 Special Topics
- Proposal to Change a Course – LITR/ RUSS 390 Special Topics

**Mathematics**
- Proposal for a New Minor or Concentration – Statistics Concentration.

The following proposals were next submitted for approval:

**History**
- New Course Proposal – HIST 218 The American West
- New Course Proposal – HIST 219 Native Americans in Film

Mr. Nunan wondered if anyone in the History Department apart from Christophe Boucher could teach HIST 219. He said that he was concerned about approving courses that only one
person could teach. He wondered, too, if other departments or programs, such as Film Studies, were affected by the course proposals.

Christophe Boucher (guest) said that the proposed course focuses on content, not on the form or art of the film, as a film studies course might. So it is a different kind of course than what might be offered in other departments teaching film courses. On the other point, Mr. Boucher said that a lot of courses exist that only one person can teach. That’s in part why many of us here—to teach courses in our areas of specialty, which other faculty lack the expertise to teach. He didn’t see Mr. Nunan’s concern as a problem.

The Senate approved the history course proposals.

The following proposals were approved without discussion:

* International and Intercultural Studies
  * New Course Proposal – HNDI 101 Elementary Hindi I
  * New Course Proposal – HNDI 102 Elementary Hindi II

Constituents’ Concerns

Mr. Hopkins called attention to an ethics policy that was circulated recently. He said that the section on honoraria was unclear and would like the College administration to provide some clarity on that issue. Speaker Kelly said that he would look into the matter further.

With its scheduled business finished, the Senate adjourned at around 6:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Terence Bowers
Faculty Secretary