Date: December 11, 2012

To: Dr. George Hynd, Provost and Executive Vice-President of Academic Affairs

Cc: Dr. George Benson, President
    Dr. Bev Diamond, Associate Provost of Academic Affairs
    Dr. Brian McGee, Chief of Staff and Senior Policy Advisor
    Dr. Lynn Cherry, Speaker of the Faculty

From: Dr. Simon Lewis, Chair, Faculty Welfare Committee

Subject: Faculty morale report and recommendations

Faculty morale appears to be an issue at the College of Charleston. In this report, we outline our findings related to faculty morale, based on two surveys conducted last year, as well as anecdotal and informal communications collected over the past eighteen months, and we offer specific recommendations regarding three areas of particular concern: online teaching evaluations, communication about tenure and promotion procedures, and faculty-administration discord. Faculty discontent with administration is particularly acute within the School of Business; however, most of our recommendations in this area address issues related to clear communication and shared values between faculty and administration more broadly.

Please find attached a detailed description of our current work, including specific concerns and recommendations. We look forward to working with Academic Affairs to pursue ways to address these specific issues and to improve faculty morale more generally. We also look forward to presenting this report to the Faculty Senate in January 2013.

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Introduction

The Faculty Welfare Committee last year conducted two surveys of faculty to sound out what was on people’s minds. Their results, as well as numerous informal conversations with faculty members over the last eighteen months, drew attention to issues of faculty morale generally. Last year’s Committee selected three of the most frequently-raised issues for further study: tenure and promotion procedures, faculty-administration communication, and adjunct policies. In addition to continuing our work on adjunct policies, this year’s Committee has engaged in further discussions related to faculty morale. The purpose of this report is to draw attention to the status of our work this year and to offer specific recommendations regarding three areas of particular concern.

This year’s committee determined that we need to formalize annual evaluations of faculty morale. Thus we made a resolution to the Faculty Senate that the College participate in the “Great Places to Work For” survey administered under the auspices of the Chronicle of Higher Education. Annual participation in that survey will allow us not only to measure our progress from year to year, but also to measure how we stack up in relation to other institutions. The Senate has approved this resolution and President Benson has signed us up for the Spring 2013 survey. We look forward to the College’s participation in the “Great Places” survey, and to using this spring’s results as a benchmark in the future.

In addition to tracking faculty morale via the “Great Places” survey, the committee believes that we need to return to a system of formally evaluating chairs and deans with input from the faculty, as specified in the Faculty Administration Manual. We understand that Academic Affairs and President Benson are discussing the best way of doing that, and we hope that annual chair and dean evaluations will be in place by the end of this academic year. The Committee stands ready to help in devising appropriate, anonymous evaluation mechanisms and questions.

In the meantime, we have identified three particular issues affecting faculty welfare that call for immediate attention: on-line course evaluations, concerns with the timing of Academic Affairs’ announcements to faculty of new policies in regard to the tenure and promotion process, and faculty disaffection particularly within the School of Business. What follows are detailed explanations of these concerns, along with a number of specific recommendations.

Issue 1—On-line course evaluations

Background

Student evaluations of teaching play an important role at the College of Charleston. Historically, these evaluations have been used by faculty to evaluate their own pedagogical strategies, while also providing important information for evaluations of faculty teaching effectiveness (e.g., annual reviews, tenure and promotion decisions). In addition, the SC Commission on Higher Education (CHE) expects student evaluations of all courses for each instructor (with the exception of independent studies and other sections with a single student), which are to be used as part of each faculty member’s annual performance evaluation.
In 2001 the College of Charleston, through an *ad hoc* committee, began investigating a transition from a paper-based system to an online evaluation system. The Faculty Educational Technology Committee (FETC) was charged in 2005 with investigating such a change. The FETC brought a motion to adopt an online evaluation system to the Faculty Senate in 2006; the motion was not approved. In 2007, a pilot study was conducted by the FETC in which tenured faculty from several departments volunteered to participate in online evaluations. In 2008, the Faculty Senate approved a motion from the FETC that online evaluations be implemented at the option of each faculty member, with the system to be evaluated after one year. Three semesters later, Academic Affairs ended this “hybrid” system as unworkable and began researching a move to online-only evaluations. In Fall 2010, after consultation with faculty committees including FETC and the Faculty Welfare Committee (FWC), Academic Affairs announced the implementation of online-only evaluations.

Under the paper evaluation system, evaluations were administered by faculty during their classes using a paper form. Evaluations took place on a single day of class, such that only students present that day had the opportunity to complete the evaluation. Students were instructed that they could turn the form back in blank if they did not wish to complete the evaluation. Average response rate with the paper system was ~70%, with variation among course sections in response rate most likely reflecting variation in attendance policies.

Based on experience reported at other institutions, a drop in response rate was expected to accompany the change to online evaluations, followed by recovery within three to four years. During the pilot study in Fall 2007, the average response rate was ~40%. Upon implementation across campus, the average response rate was also ~40%. In an effort to increase student response rates, Academic Affairs formed an *ad hoc* committee which, in Fall 2011, began encouraging faculty to use incentives and to track response rates in real time in order to increase student response rates. Yet response rates have remained below 40%. Response rates vary greatly among course sections, likely reflecting variation in the frequency and effectiveness of faculty reminders to students, as well as variation in how effectively faculty members incentivize student participation.

**Current Concerns**

There is a great deal of faculty concern about the low response rates that faculty members have experienced since the transition to online evaluations. Faculty members are particularly anxious about the use of online evaluations in various forms of performance review (e.g., T&P, retention of senior instructors, merit pay) when low response rates limit the statistical validity of the results.

Two years into the expected three- to four-year recovery period, response rates have shown no sign of recovering. During this time, the *ad hoc* committee has made strong efforts to promote higher response rates, including entering students in drawings, actively encouraging faculty to incentivize student participation, making response rates available in real time so that faculty can push more students to participate, and sending an increasing number of reminders to faculty. While the *ad hoc* committee has expressed hopes for incremental progress, present evidence suggests that more substantial changes are required, for two reasons.
First, these few years of poor return rates will be crucial years for Assistant Professors to make a case for tenure and promotion, Instructors for promotion, and Senior Instructors for retention. These faculty members perceive that their livelihoods depend in large part on demonstrating the effectiveness of their teaching. The Tenure and Promotion process incorporates several ways of evaluating teaching effectiveness, and clearly efforts are being made to conceive of teaching effectiveness more broadly than just student evaluations. However, faculty members remain very anxious about the impact that these low return rates may have on their evaluation process, as they perceive that their ability to show that students are satisfied with their instruction is jeopardized by low return rates, which are subject to both sampling error and self-selection bias.

Second, as mentioned above, response rates do not seem to be recovering quickly enough to approach our previous levels. Even with continued progress, faculty will likely not be satisfied until their response rates are near their former level. We note here that under the paper-based system many individual faculty members were able to attain response rates well above 70% simply by offering the evaluation on a day when high attendance was expected. In addition, as more time is demanded to remind students repeatedly and to stay abreast of response rates, many faculty members are coming to perceive that this system is a poor use of their time, which may ultimately lead to less participation by faculty.

Faculty members are also troubled by the use of faculty incentives to encourage greater student participation. Faculty members have been encouraged to incentivize student participation and do so in any number of ways (from extra credit to pizza parties or donuts). Untenured faculty, in particular, may feel obliged to offer incentives in order to ensure that their evaluation report won’t be dominated by a few unhappy students. Despite these efforts, incentives at the level of individual faculty are unlikely to lead to full recovery of response rates unless a large majority of faculty members offer very effective incentives.

Many faculty members are concerned that faculty-based incentives have the possibility to introduce bias. Because student participants are self-selected, the sample may be biased toward students with strong opinions, especially when return rates are very low. If students with strong opinions are more motivated to complete evaluations, even some of the time, then course sections with higher return rates cannot be validly compared with those receiving lower return rates. Allowing faculty to devise their own incentives – or not – exacerbates any such bias by increasing the variability in response rates.

Finally, faculty members have expressed philosophical opposition to using incentives to entice students to complete evaluations, believing that this practice sends several negative messages to students. Incentives are perceived as teaching students that they should expect bribes for doing their part to help improve teaching at the College, something that they always did willingly before. Further, incentives that come from individual faculty members may suggest that teachers should “pay” students to provide the feedback needed for retention and/or promotion. Incentives also show students that the College views their feedback as optional. On the other hand, expecting every student to complete evaluations conveys to students that their feedback is essential to the College and that providing such feedback fulfills a responsibility they have to the College and our collective pursuit of quality teaching.
Specific recommendations

1) **Simplify student participation.** *Specifically, we recommend (a) creating a way for students to access their evaluations with a single click from reminder emails and (b) extending the period for students to complete evaluations through the last day of finals.*

Both of these recommendations were made by the FETC in 2009 when they were consulted by Academic Affairs about whether and how to move forward with online evaluations.\(^6\)

Students have commented on not being sure how to find the evaluations. Making the evaluations easily accessible respects students’ time and minimizes the chances that they will tire of the process before completing all evaluations. In particular, from reminder emails, students could be directed to a password-protected page where evaluations can be completed. (Note that the library effectively uses similar technology to allow access of subscription materials from off-campus locations.) It is helpful that, starting this semester, a widget in OAKS will make the evaluations more visible and accessible to students. Adding single-click functionality to email reminders is the next logical step in making participation seamless for students.

Allowing students to complete evaluations through the end of finals will allow additional opportunities for student completion, perhaps after the stress of end-of-semester assignments. While some faculty members preferred a system in which the evaluations could be offered on a single day in order to control student perceptions (e.g., not presenting students with evaluations right after handing back a difficult exam), this control is not available with the current system and a gain in response rate would justify increasing the time window for students to access evaluations.

2) **Provide a uniform framework for student participation.** *Specifically, we recommend (a) that the College adopt an “opt-out” system which does not require students to complete evaluations, but does require students to either complete each evaluation or actively opt out of doing so (i.e., by being directed to a page before viewing grades). We also recommend (b) discontinuing a system in which faculty are encouraged to entrepreneurially come up with their own incentives to encourage student participation.*

An opt-out system was also recommended by the FETC in 2009.\(^7\) They also noted that access to grades is perceived by students as a strong motivator and that other schools that have achieved high response rates have usually done so by linking completion to students’ access to grades.

While Academic Affairs has expressed a belief that students have a right to know their grades regardless of whether they complete their evaluations, an opt-out system does not infringe upon this right, but simply offers students a convenient final opportunity to provide feedback. Such a system would be a virtual equivalent of our previous paper-based system in which each student was handed an evaluation form, which they could either complete or turn back in without completing. An opt-out system, with faculty encouragement and well-timed reminders from Academic Affairs would neither reward nor punish students, but would simply guide them to complete evaluations (as was the case with the old, paper-based system). Further, this system would reduce the
current problems associated with the practice of faculty incentivizing student participation.

3) **Report measures of data validity.** *Specifically, we recommend (a) that standard deviations or standard errors be reported along with means and medians in evaluation reports from this semester forward, and (b) that these metrics be made available as an addendum to evaluation reports from the past four semesters.*

The low return rates for evaluations calls into question their statistical validity and makes their use in evaluating faculty, particularly those without tenure, very concerning. In particular, although the average return rate over the past four academic semesters is ~35%, it is not uncommon for sections to experience return rates in the teens or single digits. Statistically speaking, non-representative samples are more likely with low return rates due simply to sampling error. The practice of reporting mean values without a measure of their variability encourages these metrics to be used without proper consideration of their statistical validity. Even with higher return rates, medians rather than means are a more appropriate measure of central tendency for these data. Yet although the current evaluation reports include both means and medians, only means are presented in bar graphs comparing the focal course section with others. Reporting standard deviations or standard errors, and including error bars on such graphs, would prevent the appearance of a difference when no meaningful difference actually exists.

**Issue 2—Timing of publication of changes to tenure and promotion policies**

**Background**

The process and criteria for Tenure and Promotion (T&P) at the College of Charleston are outlined in the *Faculty Administration Manual (FAM)*. The credibility and reliability of the T&P process, as well as the proper communication via the *FAM* to disseminate the criteria, are dependent upon candidates’ and evaluators’ (tenured colleagues and administrators) clear understandings of the agreed upon process and standards of evaluation that affect candidates’ employment and promotion at the College. For these reasons it is critical that the criteria are explicit and the process for sharing the information is consistent and sound.

The T&P guidelines have been under revision for several years, which has led to confusion, frustration, and concern among many faculty members. Since 2009, criteria for T&P have changed substantially, resulting in several candidate grievances on the basis of perceived issues of a violation of the candidates’ due process. Additionally, the Fall 2011 Faculty Welfare Committee college-wide survey revealed that 70% of the 277 responds either agreed or strongly agreed that “the requirements for a successful tenure and promotion review are constantly shifting” and 73% either agreed or strongly agreed that “the *Faculty Administrative Manual* should be revised to clarify the requirements for tenure and promotion.”

To address these concerns, Academic Affairs held a series of retreats (August 2011, January 2012) to gather perspectives of senior faculty in order to revise the criteria and the process of communication of the criteria for T&P. In April 2012 Academic Affairs shared a draft of T&P criteria via PowerPoint at the meeting for candidates and their departmental chairs preparing for
T&P for the 2012-2013 academic year. Additionally, candidates received over the summer several emails from Beth Murphy on behalf of Academic Affairs that the “2012-13 Faculty Administration Manual will be up shortly” (see emails June 26, 2012; July 26, 2012; August 15, 2012). Despite the email communication by Academic Affairs to let candidates know about the “draft” criteria and process for T&P, the “draft” was not updated as part of the FAM nor shared as a final document with faculty via email from Deanna Caveny-Noecker until Oct.2, 2012, a full 17 days after candidates’ packets were due on September 15, 2012. That email from Oct. 2, 2012 states, “we are finalizing the Faculty-Administration Manual and expect to have it posted late this week.” Even at that point, the FAM criteria had not been updated to reflect the criteria by which candidates’ packets would be evaluated.

Current Concerns

Most of the approved changes in the draft and final T&P criteria address mechanisms that operate on behalf of the candidates (e.g., to correct errors of fact, to communicate the decision of the group at every level of review), and stemmed from recommendations brainstormed at the two senior faculty retreats. Even though the changes were meant to improve the T&P process, the timing of their shift from “draft” to “final” form led to confusion and concern among many faculty members, especially candidates whose packets had been submitted.

The retroactive policy approval and communication to faculty two weeks after candidates’ packets were due exacerbates the negative perception among faculty that the T&P process is not sound, nor fair, nor consistently administered across disciplines. Furthermore, not to have the final language in place before the packets were due added more uncertainty to the process and has been perceived as a sign of insensitivity and disregard for candidates’ welfare during an already stressful process that ultimately affects faculty’s livelihood and future.

Additionally, it is at best confusing to rely on a “draft” PowerPoint presentation to provide the standard for candidates when the FAM has been the approved form of communication.

This type of unclear communication may be one reason that nearly 50% of the 277 respondents on the Faculty Welfare Committee Survey responded that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the following statement: “I have a clear understanding of the criteria one must meet to have a successful tenure and promotion review.”

During the November 2, 2012 meeting of the Faculty Advisory Committee to the President, committee members discussed with the President the issue that the T&P coverage in the FAM available online was still not up-to-date. President Benson agreed that this problem needed to be resolved, and he pledged to discuss with Academic Affairs the problem of having available conflicting or out-of-date information about T&P, and making sure that changes are in place before the start of the process in any given year.

Specific Recommendations

1) **FAM revision must occur during a specified time period.** Establish a month-long period (e.g., July) when the FAM can be revised for the upcoming year.
Just like the Undergraduate Course Catalog, the FAM should be able to be revised only during a specified period of time every year. Such a move will assist administration and faculty in submitting proposal changes to the FAM in a timely manner so that it can be updated at one time, thus addressing the issue of conflicting or out-of-date information shared.

2) **Couple contract to FAM.** T&P expectations of faculty members as outlined in the FAM should be stated in each faculty member’s original contract.

Just as undergraduate students must abide by the academic regulations in the Course Catalog year at the time of their matriculation at the College, each faculty member’s hire should be tied to the FAM version under which they were hired. Thus, T&P expectations for candidates could be explained at the time of hire as outlined within the FAM. Such a move would help stabilize the T&P process and minimize the concern that criteria for T&P are unclear and shifting.

**Issue 3—Annual Evaluation of Deans and Chairs**

*Background and Current Concerns*

The results of last year’s surveys suggest faculty dissatisfaction in regard to communication with the president’s office and the provost’s office, particularly within schools in which faculty expressed dissatisfaction with their dean. These results suggest that the current hierarchical top-down administrative structure tends to limit the ability of faculty to effectively participate in shared governance.

The survey indicated that faculty satisfaction with deans varies greatly among Schools. In the School of Business, for instance, which came out most poorly in last year’s surveys, dissatisfaction with the dean’s communication and degree of attunement to faculty issues was markedly higher than in any other school. For example, the percentage of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement “I am pleased with the level of communication that comes from my dean” was 22.2% (against 65.3% sample-wide), while the percentage disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with that statement was 72.2% (as opposed to 28.4% sample-wide). The percentage of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement “The dean of my school is attuned to the issues of most importance to my department” was a mere 11.1% (as opposed to 65.3% sample-wide), while the percentage disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with that statement was 77.8% (as opposed to 26.6% sample-wide).

An indirect effect of school-level dissatisfaction on perceptions of higher levels of administration is suggested by the fact that only 5.6% of the respondents from the School of Business either agreed or strongly agreed that the president’s office is attuned to the respondent’s department, as opposed to 11.3% of the whole sample; 11.1% agreed or strongly agreed with the same statement in relation to the provost’s office as opposed to 22.4% of the whole sample.

In addition to statistical information, last year’s surveys also generated some telling comments. Again, it was notable that the greatest number of identifiably school-specific complaints came from faculty in the School of Business. The internal consistency of these comments suggested
that they are more than exaggerated grumbling of disgruntled faculty members with an axe to grind and, coupled with the extremely low satisfaction with the School’s administration; indicate the presence of problems of trust, confidence, and process. Such problems risk damage to the reputation of the school (and, by extension, the College), and the material consequences that a diminished reputation brings with it, including threats to faculty retention and recruitment, accreditation and fund-raising.

The example of the School of Business, cited above, suggests not only that we need to formalize annual evaluations of chairs and deans (as stipulated in the FAM), but that we also need to institute a mechanism that ensures appropriate responsiveness if and when the annual survey flags a potential problem.

Specific Recommendations

1) **Regular, anonymous evaluations of chairs and deans**

   Such evaluations need to be devised in such a way as to promote accountability, to ensure the integrity of shared governance, and to allow faculty to express their views without fear of reprisal. In particular, we recommend that the process for chair and dean evaluations include reporting two levels up; that is, evaluations of chairs should be conveyed to the provost as well as the dean, while evaluation of deans be reported to the president’s office as well as the provost.

   Given our interest in this matter, the Faculty Welfare Committee would appreciate being involved in developing procedures and questions for these evaluations. To begin this conversation, we are appending a list of sample questions that get at the kind of information that faculty would like to address.

2) **Mechanism ensuring responsiveness to the annual evaluations**

   Academic Affairs needs to be responsive to these evaluations, particularly in cases when evaluations reveal dissatisfaction with a given chair or dean. We recommend that Academic Affairs put in place a mechanism to dialogue directly with faculty within the department or school in such cases, without the involvement of chairs or deans. Putting such a mechanism in place would, in itself, be positive for faculty morale.

Notes

1. *Faculty Administration Manual*, pages 41, 43.


Appendix—Sample Questions for Annual Evaluation of Deans

This annual evaluation is used to assess each Dean’s strengths and weaknesses as perceived by their faculty. Your responses will remain strictly confidential.

1. On an A B C D F school grading system, please rate the dean on the following.

   a. Ability to create strong ties with leaders across the State. A B C D F
   b. Ability to create strong ties with leaders across of the Charleston region. A B C D F
   c. Ability to raise funds to support the School A B C D F
   d. Ability to represent the best interest of the faculty to the College’s Administration A B C D F
   e. Ability to create a shared vision and mission among the faculty A B C D F
   f. Commitment to the quality of undergraduate education A B C D F
   g. Commitment to the quality of graduate education A B C D F
   h. Commitment to faculty development A B C D F
   i. Commitment to facilitating research A B C D F
   j. Commitment to faculty engagement in all aspects of the School’s educational mission A B C D F
   k. Commitment to shared governance A B C D F

2. What three words would you use to describe your dean?
   a.
   b.
   c.

3. Using a 5 point scale where 5 = strongly agree and 1= strongly disagree, please rate the following:
   a. The Dean has been a positive force for continuous improvement within the school. 5 4 3 2 1
   b. The Dean has my full support. 5 4 3 2 1
   c. The future is bright for the School under the leadership of the Dean 5 4 3 2 1

4. Please use the following space, if desired, to further reflect on the performance of your Dean.