Faculty Welfare Committee

Meeting Minutes
September 18, 2012
2:00 pm, Jewish Studies Center 3rd floor conference room

Present: Simon Lewis, John Crotts, Margaret Hagood, Celeste Lacroix, Todd McNerney, Hector Qirko, Michelle VanParys, Allison Welch

Also in attendance: Devon Hanahan, on behalf of the Faculty Compensation Committee

1. Welcome, news and updates
   a. Staff Advisory Committee – Simon has received an email from the Staff Advisory Committee. They would like to meet with us about issues of mutual concern, for example childcare. Simon is expecting to be contacted by the SAC. One way or the other, we’ll try to invite them for our November 20 meeting.
   b. Communication among committee chairs – A wiki has been established to allow committee chairs to share ideas across committees. Simon will be posting our meeting minutes to the wiki, in order to keep other committees informed about the issues we are working on.
   c. Sabbaticals – Bev Diamond responded to Simon’s query about the status of the sabbatical inquiry sent by last year’s FWC. According to Bev’s email, Academic Affairs has revised the sabbatical policy to suggest that the criteria be specified a little more clearly, but has not revised it specifically in response to our inquiry. They still intend to provide us with the requested historical data on sabbatical denials, and also expect to discuss with us the other issues we raised, including the alignment of sabbatical criteria with scholarly work rather than professional development.

2. Visit from Devon Hanahan, on behalf of the Faculty Compensation Committee
   a. Devon provided an update on the survey that is being conducted by the Faculty Compensation Committee, in cooperation with Academic Affairs. The survey seeks information about adjunct compensation practices from 13 other public institutions in South Carolina. The rationale for surveying only other SC institutions is the perception that many adjuncts would not be willing to relocate out of state for better compensation. Devon shared a copy of the survey with us.
   b. They are currently trying to generate more responses before sharing the data with us. However, Devon did indicate that the responses received to date paint a rather grim picture. It was noted by the committee that the institutions that have responded to date are not among those we would consider peers or aspirational.
   c. The possibility of sending a similar survey to our aspirational peers was raised. The compensation committee would like first to complete the current survey, but did express interest in surveying aspirational peers as a possible future step.
3. Faculty survey subcommittee
   a. Members of the subcommittee had reviewed a workplace satisfaction survey used by the Chronicle of Higher Education. Responses were positive, especially because, as a national survey, it would result in comparative data.
   b. Participation is free to the College. It was later clarified that this participation would include a sample of roster faculty. If desired, the college could pay to have everyone surveyed.
   c. John Crotts will draft a motion, to be presented to the faculty senate, that the College participate in this survey.

4. Adjunct subcommittee – The subcommittee will have its first meeting next week.

5. Courtesies for departing faculty
   a. Various cases were discussed of faculty that had left the college, on good terms, from roster positions or upon completion of a visiting appointment.
   b. One issue is the immediate termination of email accounts and other courtesies typically extended to faculty members (e.g., library privileges).
      i. As these courtesies come at little cost to the College and promote continued good relations with departing faculty, there appears to be a strong case for requesting a change in policy to automatically delay terminating these courtesies until some reasonable amount of time (e.g., 6 months) after the end of the departing faculty member’s contract.
      ii. Committee members, particularly Todd McNerney, will seek a more complete list of other low-cost courtesies that should be included in such a policy.
      iii. With a more complete list, we will draft a letter to HR and Academic Affairs proposing this change.
   c. A second issue is the immediate termination of benefits, particularly health insurance, at the end of the contract period (i.e., May 15).
      ii. Departing faculty members are unlikely to be immediately starting a new benefits-eligible position, as most academic positions wouldn’t begin until the end of summer. Thus, departing faculty members may need to purchase COBRA coverage, which can be expensive, for the summer. Alternately, a faculty member who does not have another job lined up runs the risk of running out of COBRA eligibility sooner than s/he would if benefits had been extended.
      iii. As a result, some faculty members may be inclined to delay tendering a resignation until August 15, in order to preserve access to these benefits over the summer. This pattern creates substantial problems for departments left to fill vacant teaching assignments on very short notice.
      iv. By contrast, returning faculty members receive benefits through the summer. These benefits are part of the compensation that the faculty member receives for performing their job duties, which are completed over a 9-month period.
      v. Unlike staff positions, faculty cannot take their unused sick leave or vacation time at the end of their employment with the College. Consequently, faculty members lack a potential mechanism that can be used in other types of positions to extend the period of benefits (as well as pay).
      vi. We would like to see a policy that extends the period of benefits for departing faculty members who have successfully fulfilled their 9-month and therefore earned this portion of their compensation. We would like to see such a policy officially communicated (e.g., added to the FAM).
      vii. This issue can also be included in a letter to HR and Academic Affairs.
6. **New business**  
   a. **Online teaching evaluations** – Margaret Hagood raised concerns with the online teaching evaluations. These concerns were echoed by other committee members.  
      i. Of primary concern is the decision not to require students to complete the evaluations (or to strongly guide students to do so, for example by requiring students to at least visit the site to opt out of completing each requested evaluation).  
         a) Return rates have not been acceptable under this system, and it is the impression of the committee and those colleagues with whom we have discussed the issue that return rates do not appear to be rebounding to acceptable levels.  
         b) The poor return rates and optional nature of the survey have led to pressure on faculty to incentivize student participation. Faculty have previously expressed philosophical opposition to a system in which faculty are called on to offer incentives for student participation.  
      ii. The low return rate for evaluations calls into question their statistical validity and makes their use in evaluating faculty – particularly those without tenure – very concerning.  
         a) Many faculty members share the perception that because student participants are self-selected, the sample is likely to be biased toward students with strong opinions, especially when return rates are low.  
         b) In addition, the practice of reporting mean values but not standard deviations or another measure of variability suggests that these metrics are being used without proper consideration for their statistical validity or lack thereof.  
         c) Further, because biased samples are more likely with low return rates, those faculty members who receive higher return rates (for example, by incentivizing student participation) cannot be validly compared with faculty who receive lower return rates.  
         d) Evaluations without sufficient return rates should not be requested for T&P packets. Even if this safeguard were in place, the system would remain flawed as long as individual faculty members can influence return rates.  
      iii. Some concerns also related to the format of the survey.  
         a) Students cannot easily navigate from a reminder email to the evaluations. Rather than being able to follow a link directly to a page where they can sign in to complete evaluations, students are directed through a virtual maze of links and logins before having the opportunity to complete an evaluation. This inefficiency makes it less likely that students will ultimately complete their evaluations.  
         b) From an environmental standpoint, the output produced for faculty seems to use as much paper as the old paper evaluations. In addition, because the output is so diffuse, it is much more difficult to wade through the information, making the results that much less useful.  
      iv. The committee agreed that this is a very important Faculty Welfare issue, because of the implications for decisions about tenure, promotion, retention and merit pay.  
         a) Margaret will follow up with Beth Goodier to request the recommendations made by last year’s ad hoc committee charged with revising the online evaluation instrument.  
         b) The survey subcommittee will develop a survey to elicit faculty feedback on the online evaluation system as it is currently implemented.

*Submitted by: Allison Welch, 9/3/2012*