

Faculty Senate Minutes
December 1, 1997

Senators Present: N. Bristow, T. Cooney, W. Haltom, K. Hummel-Berry, J. Kay, G. Kirchner, B. Lind, K. Maxwell, S. Sloane, R. Steiner, G. Tomlin, A. Wood

Visitors: M. Fiegenger, T. Fikes, T. Mace, A. Tullis

The meeting was called to order at 4:05 p.m.

Minutes of the 11/3/97 (as revised) and 11/17/97 Senate meetings were approved, chronologically at the point noted on page 3 of these minutes.

Announcements: see page 3

Chair's Report: see page 3

Survey of Ad Hoc Committee on Student Faculty Evaluation: Cooney prefaced his remarks by explaining that a copy of the committee's survey happened to come across his desk before distribution to the faculty, and his review of it raised concerns. He expressed reservations about the investment of time by this committee on the form used for student evaluation of faculty, since that subject is an explicit charge of the By-Laws to the Professional Standards Committee. He questioned the outcome of the survey, since student evaluations are mandated by the code and are part of every education evaluation model and accreditation process in higher education. Cooney then enumerated some specific concerns:

1. Our current form is a compromise between numerical and textual evaluation forms. Is the survey's word "data" to be understood as only the numerical, or also the textual information?
2. One survey question seems to assume that the administration uses student evaluation forms outside the Faculty Advancement Committee process. Cooney stated he knows of no such use.
3. Question #4 asks if the same or different criteria are applied to junior versus senior faculty on review of evaluation forms. Since a difference could be in either direction, the results from this survey question would not be revealing.
4. Question #19 refers to other measures but does not state which.
5. Questions 14 and 15 seem to ignore that our forms have always been a combination of numerical ratings and comments by students.
6. Finally, on page 4, B, the semantic differential scale of "Scholarly.....Barbaric" attributes to colleagues barbaric behavior, which is too harsh.

Cooney concluded by re-iterating that he only wished to state his reservations, not to block distribution of the survey.

Maxwell (chair of the ad hoc committee) replied that there have been occasions where ad hoc committees took on issues under the jurisdiction of standing committees (e.g., the core curriculum), therefore, he believes committees do not necessarily hold exclusive jurisdiction over issues. There never was an intention to abandon student evaluations. The question rather was, is the information on student evaluation forms correlated with excellent teaching? Our form has gone through several revisions over time, and there is some research casting doubt on the validity of the information on student evaluation forms.

Furthermore, Maxwell stated, there is anxiety among junior faculty over the process of using the forms. The survey asks for the perceptions of faculty about the process, therefore is an attempt to find out to what extent faculty feel that the process is dishonest. The word "data" may cause

some confusion that could be resolved by using instead “information.” Maxwell concluded that, whether the PSC or the ad hoc committee ultimately takes it on, the issue needs to be addressed.

Wood remarked that if concern and distrust of the process existed, it was probably at the department level, due to departmental dysfunctioning. Perhaps data could be collected at that level and the Dean could consult with that department if perceptions were negative. Over the years the FAC has conveyed a sense of thoughtful decision-making, so what does one do with data on collective perceptions, getting departments to deal with problems at hand?

Maxwell restated the charge to the ad hoc committee was to study the use of student evaluation information and its validity and make a report back to the Senate. The results of a survey could be used in devising ways to get rid of negative attitudes.

Hummel-Berry remembered the sense of the original Senate meeting as wanting the committee to collect and interpret the published research on student evaluations.

Maxwell replied that the three charges to the committee are listed in a box on the survey’s first page. There was no directive to conduct a survey or abstain from it. The committee has invested many hours and wants to know if it is still wanted.

Bristow expressed her thanks for the committee’s commitment to the well-being of campus. Perceptions matter- even if it’s a minority opinion that the process is flawed. She shared concerns over the well-being of junior faculty.

In a brief exchange, the desirability of adding a “no basis” or “no opinion” option was noted.

Cooney questioned the basis of answer option 6c, since the administration doesn’t have a role in giving teaching feedback. Maxwell replied that the President does make an independent decision on tenure cases, by its nature a statement about teaching. Cooney noted that the President has no responsibility for providing feedback.

Kirchner remarked that there is no move to stop the committee’s work; there exist only some suggestions for the survey. After general assent to this position,

M/S/P (with one abstention) “That the Senate provide the Ad Hoc Student Evaluation Committee with feedback on the draft of the faculty survey, leaving to the committee the task of writing the final survey and distributing it.”

Kirchner asked Maxwell to send an email message to senators setting a deadline for feedback to the committee. Maxwell re-iterated his desire for a late fall distribution, and Kirchner gave him permission to make that call.

(Minutes of 11/3/97 and 11/17/97 approved here.)

Announcements: Cooney announced an additional full faculty meeting for December 9th, to keep up progress on faculty code revisions.

Chair’s Report: Bill Haltom needs to leave the Senate for the spring term. Thus,

M/S/P That his replacement until the end of spring term be recruited from the list of runners-up from the last election of senators.

Kirchner also announced that the next Senate meeting would be Monday, January 26th.

Faculty By-Laws Changes: Kirchner lead a discussion of the following proposed changes.

Previously discussed changes:

Section 2- Kirchner removed the changes she had suggested earlier because they did not achieve the desired effect. Sloane agreed to work on re-wording that section for clarity.

Section 1a- Kirchner distributed the differences in parliamentary procedure between Roberts' Rules and a modern version by Sturgis. Senators assented to a new wording in this section. There was also some re-arranging of section e and then agreement.

New changes:

Conflicts of interest: By-Laws page 14. Kirchner noted that accreditation standards require that the university have a policy on conflicts of interest. In the faculty code under professional ethics there is the duty not to compromise the interests of the university or of students in favor of one's own. Cooney enumerated the several places where policies forbidding conflict of interest are currently published and opined that there would be no problem during accreditation with this topic.

Student Life: Kirchner stated that accreditation requirements call for faculty to monitor bookstore policies and to participate on an athletics committee (the latter was also mentioned in past By-Laws). Accreditation standards call for more faculty involvement than just in an advisory role. Cooney noted the dilemma of faculty responsibility for student activities but preferring the Dean of Students to oversee those activities. The trick will be to retain the possibility of that function without making it mandatory. Dean of Students Kay asserted that any residential campus benefits from faculty involvement in co-curricular student life. "The faculty shall establish rules" has been her operating assumption, but she noted the existence of very few rules: in music, media, publicity. Cooney replied that keeping the oversight language needn't require faculty to review policies every year. In some years perhaps the committee simply wouldn't meet that often.

Kay then offered an example case: ASUPS develops the policy for recognition of student organizations, and recently completed a major revision without going through the Student Life committee. Likewise residential housing policies are fine-tuned every year without oversight. Changes to the Integrity Code are required to go through Student Life. Nor is there a counseling policy needing faculty review.

Haltom suggested that as the Senate supervises faculty committees, could Student Life receive policies for these activities and hold no meeting if no problems are seen. This stance would create a legitimizing structure for 95% of the time and a forum for conflict resolution the other 5%. Kay recalled that the major issues in student affairs have been unpredictable, emergency in nature, and that a committee sometimes could be involved, but sometimes not.

Kirchner then asked Haltom if he would re-write sections b 1 & 2, to include the bookstore policy. Kay agreed to check the language pertinent to Haltom's charge.

The Senate adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

George Tomlin