

Commission on Faculty Affairs
Minutes
February 27, 2009

Members attending: Gary Long (chair), Debbie Smith, Allisyn Dunn, Jack Finney (for Dean Chang), Mike Kelly, Sam Easterling, Sam Riley, Carol Burger, Ed Lener, Dennis Welch, Patricia Hyer

Guest: Terry Wildman, Professor School of Education, former Director of CEUT

Agenda for the meeting included two items: updates on CFA policy initiatives and University Committee on Evaluation of Teaching.

The minutes of the CFA meeting on February 13, 2009, were approved without change.

Updates on CFA Policy Initiatives:

PI Removal Resolution

The second reading of the resolution is on the University Council's agenda for Monday, March 2, 2009. If the resolution is passed it will be submitted to the Board of Visitors.

Professors of Practice

The second reading of the resolution is on the University Council's agenda for Monday, March 2, 2009. If the resolution is passed it will be submitted to the Board of Visitors.

University Committee on Evaluation of Teaching:

Wildman continued his review of the committee's 18 recommendations for improving teaching evaluation.

Prior to redesigning the teaching evaluation process teaching effectiveness must be defined, the purpose of the evaluation must be determined, and buy-in from faculty members must be considered. Relevant research and best practices will help define teaching effectiveness. Flexibility can be built into the process and the instrument to achieve both formative and summative evaluation needs. Involving faculty throughout the evaluation process redesign will create more ownership of the new process.

The committee recommended forming two groups, a steering group to own and maintain the process and a working group to design the survey instrument. Some CFA members questioned whether one group could serve both purposes. Wildman preferred two groups because of the distinctly different skill sets needed. The working group should be comprised of members with expertise in survey design and learning pedagogies. This group will focus entirely on the survey instrument and will disband after the survey design is complete. The steering group will take a much broader approach to the evaluation process and is envisioned as a standing group. Both groups will seek feedback from faculty members, departments, and colleges working to strike a balance between administrative and departmental data needs.

Many of the committee's recommendations reflect concerns about how the data are being used. There is wide variation in the way data are treated by colleges and departments. Regardless of the process there needs to be clarity about how data are being used for personnel decisions and improvement purposes. More could be done to prepare, train and support data users to optimize use and prevent misuse. Instructors could benefit from assistance in using the data for improvement. Some centralized approaches to collecting and using the data may benefit the university and provide opportunities for statistical analyses and research efforts.

Wildman explained that there are three aspects to the evaluation of teaching: student perceptions, peer perceptions, and the instructor's self assessment. The committee recommended developing a communication plan to better convey to students how the data requested are being used. An internal working group is also needed to develop a better peer evaluation process. CFA members suggested reworking the Faculty Activity Report (FAR) for collecting instructor self-assessments.

CFA members acknowledged the committee's extensive work in preparing an excellent report on an important topic. They also noted there is still considerable work to be done to redesign the teaching evaluation process. To continue momentum, Wildman suggested quickly establishing the recommended working and steering groups. Reflecting the importance of the topic, Virginia Tech's leadership should charge both groups.

At the highest level, the Provost and President must be engaged. They must respond to the lack of confidence in the reward system and the perception about the value of teaching. Addressing the recommendations in a comprehensive way will require engagement of faculty members, the governance system, and administrators. Leadership must also address the key question of who owns of the evaluation process.

The Vice President and Dean for Undergraduate Education would appear to be the natural administrative home, given his oversight of CEUT and Assessment. The Faculty Senate and CFA need to be involved. A standing committee, if formed, would report to one of the University Commissions -- CFA or the Commission on Undergraduate Studies and Policies.

Two open sessions have been scheduled: 3:30 – 5:00 on Friday, March 20 and 3:30 – 5:00 on Tuesday, March 24 to share the report with the broader university community. CFA members suggested other means to disseminate the committee's results such as the Provost's website and Virginia Tech's Daily News email. Wildman will have Courtney Martin contact Suzie Karlin about posting the report to the Provost's website.

At the March 6th meeting, CFA members will have a full discussion about the committee's report. On March 27th, Wildman will report to the CFA feedback from the open sessions. Some CFA members suggested canceling the March 20th meeting, given the timing of the open faculty sessions.

Recorder, Cindy Wilkinson