

Commission on Faculty Affairs (CFA)
Minutes
November 14, 2008

Members present: Sophia Anong, Carol Burger, Allisyn Hudson Dunn, Pat Hyer, Mike Kelly, Brad Klein, Edward Lener, Sam Riley, Debbie Smith, and Sarah Smith.

Guests: Hal Irvin (Human Resource), Feride Daku (Higher Education Administration student), and Tara Frank (Higher Education Administration student)

The meeting was called to order with four agenda items: 1) Professors of Practice, 2) Commission on Research – Removal of Principal Investigator, 3) the Authorized Closing for Winter Break, and 4) Consideration for Promotion & Tenure. The minutes were approved with one correction (Sam Riley was present during the last meeting).

PROFESSORS OF PRACTICE

The final copy of the Professors of Practice resolution was distributed via email to CFA members. Substantive changes included the removal of items already referred to in the faculty handbook. Commission members unanimously approved the resolution. Long will work with Hardus Odendaal to get the item added to the Faculty Senate agenda.

COMMISSION ON RESEARCH – REMOVAL OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

The Commission on Research held a series of meetings in which members discussed CFA's Resolution on the Removal of Principal Investigators. Feedback from those sessions was distributed to CFA members. Commission members were asked to review the document and come prepared to discuss during the next meeting. Due to the nature of questions raised in the document, it was suggested that a member of legal counsel be invited to attend this meeting.

AUTHORIZED CLOSING FOR WINTER BREAK

The Authorized Closing for Winter Break proposal was presented by Hal Irvin, Associate Vice President of Human Resources. Virginia Tech is one of two institutions (UVA is the other) to remain open during the period December 24 and January 1. The remaining public universities in Virginia are closed between the Christmas and New Year holidays, as are most of the SCHEV peer institutions across the country.

At present, departments make the decision on whether to close during this time. Since 72% of faculty and staff actually report using leave during this time, the decision to move towards a winter closing schedule would be advantageous from a sustainability and economical perspective. The institution would conserve energy and save an estimated \$20,000 per day. However, despite the cost benefits, the proposal has also received unfavorable responses. One objection is that this model does not allow flexibility in when employees can use the specified holidays. Some employees prefer to bank the "lesser" holidays and use them at specific times of the year in accordance with their own needs and interests.

The proposal calls for 12-month faculty to receive 4 additional holidays, for a total of 12, the same number granted to staff. Some staff expressed their discontent that 12-month faculty members would get this additional benefit. The fact that staff currently have more paid holidays is viewed by some staff as an offset to the greater number of annual leave days provided to 12-month faculty. CFA members spoke to this objection. Implementing a policy that makes the number of holidays equivalent between faculty and staff may actually be a positive step. One way to address the question of equity is to employ a model that would include 16, instead of 12 paid holidays; faculty and staff would have four floating days.

Other concerns were raised with respect to managing research projects when the university was closed. These issues may need to be addressed in further detail to respond to questions.

CONSIDERATION FOR PROMOTION AND TENURE

The question of what constitutes “consideration” for promotion arose in the context of a department’s decision not to seek external letters for a faculty member requesting promotion to full professor. The specific question comes up in section 2.9.5.3 of the Handbook, where it says “Consideration for promotion in rank may be requested of the department head or chair by a faculty member at any time if the department head or chair or committee has not chosen to undertake such an evaluation.” Setting an expectation that external letters WOULD be solicited under these circumstances would allow a faculty member to have some independent evaluation in cases where departmental politics or inappropriate bias on the part of committee members was blocking a positive promotion recommendation, or committee members did not have the subject matter expertise to recognize or evaluate the candidate’s achievements. On the contrary, seeking external letters may be an irresponsible move on the part of the department if the candidate’s credentials are truly not “ripe” for promotion consideration. This would be especially problematic in fields where there is a small number of experts available to participate in the review process and “using them up” prematurely may jeopardize the case when it is fully ready for promotion.

Like tenure, transparency of the process for promotion is a concern expressed by faculty. Some departments provide a metric that identifies the expectations for promotion so that faculty members can better judge their readiness. Hyer asked the commission if the commission should draft a policy requiring departments to document expectations for promotion. Members were receptive to this idea. This topic will be discussed, again, at a later meeting.

Recorder: Tracey Cameron, Office of the Provost