

Commission on Faculty Affairs (CFA)
Minutes
September 26, 2008

Members present: Allisyn Hudson Dunn, Sam Easterling, Jack Finney (for Chang), Pat Hyer, Brad Klein, Ed Lener, Gary Long, Deborah Smith, Sam Riley, and Dennis Welch.

Guests: Feride Daku and Tara Frank (Higher Education Administration students)

Hyer revisited the “charge” of CFA and explained the organizational structure of the commission. Faculty members were also urged to complete the climate survey that is currently out for faculty participation. The survey was distributed to all instructional faculty by AdvanceVT and the Survey Research Center.

The meeting was called to order with three agenda items: 1) Professors of Practice, 2) Faculty Involvement with the School of Medicine, and 3) the Department Climate Compendium.

PROFESSORS OF PRACTICE

The Professors of Practice discussion is a rollover item from two years ago. The initial presentation of the resolution to the Faculty Senate got a mixed response. The draft document included protections that addressed the maintenance of tenure-track position; that is, the departmental faculty determine whether the rank will be used in the department. However, faculty expressed concern that the adoption of the ranks might force new faculty appointments into Professor of Practice rather than tenure-track positions, particularly in the arts where scholarly output is measured in different ways. There was also concern that the “professor” distinction was an unfair bestowal for individuals who did not possess the academic credentials as those who have gone through the traditional trajectory. It is also believed that the lack of enthusiasm for the resolution was as a result of timing (i.e. presented during the end of the semester) and limited advocacy available at that meeting. After consideration, the commission agreed to re-present the resolution to Faculty Senate during 2007-08. However, the topic was not included on the Senate’s schedule last year.

Supporters of the Professor of Practice distinction maintain that the title “Instructor” or “Adjunct Faculty” is not indicative of the experience/expertise that the professional may possess. As such, the title differentiation would be beneficial and necessary for attracting highly experienced professionals. Easterling added that this model parallels that of other universities. The Professors of Practice title acknowledges the accomplishments of seasoned/retired professionals who have an interest in contributing to the general education mission of the institution, but may not choose or have a desire be on the tenure-track.

The current commission will take on the task of bringing this agenda item forward to the Faculty Senate this year. Questions/concerns generated are as follows:

- Title: Should the qualifier come before or after “professor” (e.g. research professor of practice, clinical professor of practice, practice professor, practice assistant professor)? The title “Applied Professor of Practice” was also presented as an option. Finney stated that “applied” may be an undesirable qualifier because it has a negative connotation in some fields (i.e. medicine). The preference appeared to be for the current proposal – Professor of Practice.
- Degree Equivalency: There was a question raised regarding the language in the draft policy that speaks to degree equivalency. The current sentence reads, “At a minimum, the appointee shall hold the terminal professional degree in the field or the *equivalent by virtue of experience*” (p. 2). The concern is that the italicized phrase may be “too loose.”

Easterling explained that this phrase has to be loose due to the diversity of disciplines and backgrounds. Equivalency in engineering may be certifications, but this may not be indicative of other areas. Hyer explained that it is understood that individuals in these positions may not possess a terminal degree. In this instance we have to ensure that we fulfill SACS requirements by presenting alternative credentials (i.e. experience in the field). She added that this process is also required for tenure-track faculty who may not hold terminal degrees.

- Promotion Hierarchy: Is there a need to have a promotional ladder (i.e. assistant, associate, and full professor of practice)? The argument is that if the individual is deemed an expert, they should receive the Professor of Practice distinction regardless of how long they have been in the field. There may be need, in some cases, for a more junior rank and the existence of the assistant and associate ranks would allow that flexibility.

If the promotion language remains, the department and college level P&T committees will facilitate the promotion process.

Hyer will revise language and email another draft prior to next week’s meeting. Long and Easterling will work with getting the topic scheduled for an upcoming Faculty Senate meeting.

FACULTY INVOLVEMENT WITH THE SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

This topic is being brought to CFA as a point of information. A letter from Dr. McNamee was distributed that speaks to the item at length.

Hyer reported that the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine is a private, non-profit institution. The primary delivery of instruction will be facilitated by employees of the Carilion Clinic. However, the school will operate from a non-traditional, problem-based curriculum in which Virginia Tech faculty may be asked to assist in the delivery of modules. Faculty buy-out is not a very workable option for short term/limited involvement (i.e. delivery of 3-4 lectures) and a consulting contract runs into legal difficulties. One solution is to create an overload pay policy so that compensation comes

through VT payroll, thereby avoiding the problem of a second, private consulting contract with the same employer. Overload pay provides compensation for duties that are not considered part of the employee's usual responsibilities.

A question was raised regarding Virginia Tech's relationship with VCOM. Hyer explained that the Virginia College of Osteopathic Medicine is not a Virginia Tech entity, although there are a number of collaborations with VCOM. So the relationship is different than with the new medical school which we helped establish. Another question was raised about faculty who have adjunct appointments at other institutions. Hyer stated that regular outside employment is not prohibited in the Faculty Handbook. Adjunct positions in which the employee is not compensated but may serve as a guest lecturer or as a member of graduate committees is allowed.

Conversations regarding the faculty involvement with the new medical school are currently underway. It will be an item of discussion at the November meeting of the Board of Visitors.

DEPARTMENT CLIMATE COMPENDIUM

Finney reported that faculty from the Colleges of Science and Engineering were asked to create a Climate Committee as part of Advance to determine what types of practices were being employed that supported (or did not support) a healthy departmental climate. The committee facilitated this effort through the examination of results from the previous AdvanceVT survey and a brief departmental survey. The committee produced the Department Climate Compendium which identifies five components and strategies: creating a sense of intellectual community; providing a fair and full evaluation; providing effective and supportive communication; providing effective policies; and focusing on work-life balance. This document is linked to the AdvanceVT webpage and can be used as a resource for departmental leaders and faculty.

The committee plans to work in collaboration with members of the Race Task Force (will implement a new mentoring initiative) on adding a section on mentoring. The committee also hopes to collect information on best practices in the area of teaching evaluations/peer review. It was suggested that CFA spearhead this endeavor.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Teaching Award information will be available to departments shortly. Please encourage submissions.

A request was presented from a tenured faculty member who wishes to receive a degree from Virginia Tech. VT's current policy (Section 2.15 of Faculty Handbook) requires approval from CFA. The request was submitted without an accompanying letter from the department head. Since this is an official item of business that requires a vote, it was recommended that this matter be addressed when all documentation is available.

Recorder: Tracey Cameron, Office of the Provost