

Commission on Faculty Affairs
Minutes
September 4, 2015

Members Attending: Montasir Abbas (Chair), Jack Finney, Philip Young, Sallie Beth Johnson, Jack Davis, Deborah Good, and Anne Zajac

Guests: Ellen Plummer

The Commission on Faculty Affairs (CFA) meeting was called to order by Montasir Abbas (Chair), who identified the following agenda items:

- a. Use of journal impact factor in faculty evaluation
- b. Reorganization of the Faculty Senate Committees on Reconciliation, Ethics, and Review
- c. Revision of grievance process, in context of above committee reorganizations
- d. Other issues

1. Discussion of use of journal impact factor in faculty evaluation (handout given)

Philip Young led a discussion about addressing journal impact as a part of the faculty evaluation process. One of the issues cited with using journal impact factor is that it uses the average number of citations per article in the journal, which obscures the high degree of skew in article citations. Young stated that he would like to see faculty judged more about what they publish as opposed to where they publish. A handout was presented that included problems with the journal impact factor, as well as recommendations for institutions. He would like to see a longer conversation about this issue.

Questions were raised about the impact this has across departments. Some fields only have low impact journals, while others have several high impact journals. A concern was raised that if this metric is eliminated, it becomes difficult for those outside of a discipline to know the major journals in a field. An additional concern was shared about valuing scholarship that is accepted into highly selective journals, as opposed to journals with higher acceptance rates. There was discussion about other metrics to include. Other ideas would include online citations and alternative metrics (other links to research such as, government reports, news media stories, and other online publications). Others discussed the role of departments in determining what is meaningful for their field.

Currently, the Faculty Handbook allows for several ways to articulate impact. One of these ways is through journal impact. The question was raised about whether this should be changed in the handbook. It was suggested the this should be written as a guideline rather than policy, because it should not refer to all faculty. It needs to remain flexible to accommodate departments and incorporate many ways to measure impact. The conversation ended with

Young agreeing to work on language to include for the guidelines. He will present this information at a future meeting. This is an important issue as it was mentioned that the president would like to create a reward structure for high impact scholarship.

2. Reorganization of the Faculty Senate Committees on Reconciliation, Ethics, and Review

The Faculty Senate recognized that these three committees do not meet often. When they are called on, it is unwieldy because there is a representative from each college. There was discussion about creating a small committee that can take an initial pass to address a given problem and then determine the next steps. There is ongoing discussion about how to rework these committees.

3. Other issues

a. Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine

There is a delay in the acquisition of the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine by at least another year.

b. Ombudsperson

There was a discussion about the creation of an ombudsperson position to work with faculty on grievances. This person would need to function as independently as possible and would advise faculty members on any circumstances/situations of concern to them. This position can be viewed as formalizing work that has already been taking place. The proposal has been submitted and will be reviewed by President and Provost. The proposal follows the model of ombudspersons at similar institutions. Examples include North Carolina State and Purdue.

There was a concern about the controversial nature of an ombudsperson. Discussion followed about the work of the Graduate School ombudsperson and the important role of this person in directing people to the right place and solving problems. This new person could play a similar role. Details are still being worked out in regards to the nature of the work. There is a thought that this could be a part-time role for two years to determine the utility of the position. The proposal has to go through the governance process and must be approved by University Council and the Board of Visitors.

c. Governance

There is a proposal being developed to include the Faculty Senate into the governance structure. As currently proposed, between the first and second commission reviews, the Faculty Senate would have a chance to review and provide comments to the commission. The proposal has not been approved, but will come to CFA in the coming weeks.

There was some discussion about next steps. It was suggested that other commissions be notified of this proposal before it goes through governance, particularly those commissions identified in the proposal.

d. Institutes

The Faculty Senate will be looking to address issues with institutes on campus to ensure they are meeting the needs of departments and the university.

e. Promotion and tenure guidelines

The university has identified several potential changes to the Promotion and Tenure guidelines. They would like to address guidelines for what information is shared with candidates at each stage of the process. They would also like to improve the process for selecting external reviewers. These items will need to be incorporated into the Faculty Handbook. The Provost would also like a discussion of innovative scholarship and how to ensure equitable review during the promotion process. Edits for the handbook need to be done by the end of fall or early spring so that it can begin to go through governance before the spring semester ends.

f. Representatives for vacant committees

One faculty member is needed to serve on CEOD, and another on the Employee Benefits Committee for the academic year. This information will be sent out to all members of the CFA and members for these committees will be selected at the next meeting.

Adjournment

There were no other issues discussed, the meeting was adjourned.

Recorder, Ryan Rideau