Faculty Issues Committee, 2008/09

Members:
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Our objectives, as developed by the FSEC, asked for a review and report of the Faculty Workload study; a survey with subsequent recommendations for changes to the TRF Handbook concerning criteria used in faculty evaluations, promotion and tenure; evaluation of department chairs and school directors; and processes for faculty appeals and grievances. We were also asked to formulate a recommendation for conducting exit interviews of departing faculty. Shortly after this list of objectives was given to us, we were asked to create instructions for the administration of student evaluations of faculty and to develop a policy for dealing with compromised student evaluations (as a follow-up to our successful accomplishment in spring 2008 of passing a motion to require that student comments be linked to student numeric ratings).

For obvious reasons, we were not able to address all of these objectives. With respect to faculty evaluations, we did formulate a survey and send it to school directors, asking them to send it to department chairs. Our questionnaire asked if departments had a written description or elaboration of criteria used in evaluations which provided more information than what was included in the handbook, to send us a copy if it existed, to indicate if activities were weighted in any fashion, and to describe the method of sharing this material with faculty (assuming that it exists). It then included a set of questions about the process used in each department for the administration of student evaluations of faculty. I received replies from 15 departments. Without tabulating the data, it was easy to see that some departments relied solely on the description included in the faculty handbook whereas others had developed sophisticated systems for differentiating between a) types of activities and their relative importance for professional accomplishments; b) activities and weighted importance for the area of service; c) contributing weights of data for assessing teaching. In those departments which had developed rating scales, the material appeared to be distributed to all faculty. In departments which had not substantially altered the material in the handbook, there did not appear to be any attempt to distribute anything to faculty. I think we were all highly motivated to address this issue and consider approaches to a solution which would simultaneously acknowledge necessary differences across departments while at the same time provide greater comparability and consistency but could not given the truncated schedule of committee
meetings and the more immediate need of addressing student evaluations.

We did do the latter, using some of the material we had collected when it came to revising the handbook section on student evaluations. Our motion for a revision took into account the different procedures used, identified and eliminated both a lack of clarity in the language used in the handbook and some incorrect attributions (with respect to who was responsible for what), and most significant, developed a procedure for responding to the presence of compromised evaluations. The motion passed, bringing to a successful conclusion an issue which the committee had been dealing with for two years.

At the last minute, we were also asked to draft a motion for a handbook change with respect to the submission deadline for FARs. That was completed and passed.

Recommendations for next year’s committee:
• to use the data collected about criteria for faculty evaluation, tenure and promotion and draft a revision or addition to the handbook which provides more specific instructions, perhaps including examples from other departments
• to return to the issue of FAR submission deadlines in light of the existing variation in the policy as currently written
• to follow up on the Faculty Workload study – I requested this material twice and never received a reply
• to address the objective related to policies for faculty appeals and grievances