INTRA-UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE MEETING

MINUTES

September 10, 2013; 8:30 a.m.
215 Business Bldg

IN ATTENDANCE: Nicholas Rowland (Chair), Tim Palmer (Vice Chair), Omid Ansary, Harold Aurand (Secretary), William Butler, Peter Eberle, Joseph Enama, Lonnie Golden (alternate for Le), Zachary Irwin, Dennis Jett, Jeffery Knapp, Michael Krajsa, Constantino Lagoa, Tim Lawlor, Emily Miller, Mahdi Nasereddin, Richard Shurgalla, Jane Wilburne, and Alex Yin

ABSENT: Gutti Babu, Arthur Lesk, Bihn P Le (excused), Darryl Thomas (excused), and Michael Wolff (alternate for Thomas)

I. Chair’s report (10 minutes).

a. Sign-in.
b. Information/announcements/communications, etc.

Chair Rowland reports that we have an exceptionally clear set of tasks to perform this year. He credited Chair Yarnal with doing an excellent job of charging all the committees.

The main issue to arise at the Officer’s and Chairs meeting pertained to the Wellness initiative. CCR is trying to figure out how the Senate can be mobilized during the summer. After all, the Wellness initiative came out over the summer and we, in the senate, weren’t able to respond as a body. Chair Rowland said that Faculty Benefits reported that it was their understanding that the initiative would come out slowly over a period of three years, which was somehow shortened into three months. A point of concern is that by defining the health issue as an economic one rather than a matter of Faculty Rights and Responsibilities, the administration can suggest there is no need for faculty input on this ultimately fiscal matter. Chair Rowland said when Faculty Benefits met last spring they were told WEB MD would be used as a platform for collecting our information, so that was not a surprise, but they were not told that financial “incentives” of this magnitude would be used to enhance participation.

Rowland continued that there was an issue that arose over the general sparseness of the Faculty Benefits Committee’s meeting minutes. The minutes were not detailed enough to be certain of what exactly was and was not said; it appears that these meeting minutes are some of the most downloaded minutes on the Senate website. For that reason, and because there is nothing wrong with diligence, we are being urged to take fuller notes.

Chair Rowland also suggested that widespread health screening might be a way for the administration to escape accusations of discrimination based on health conditions. For example, if the University told only fat faculty to lose weight, they would be clearly biased and, thus, acting in a discriminatory fashion; however, if they screened everyone, determined that overweight faculty require greater services, on average, then, based on aggregate not individual data, the overweight could be targeted for weight loss and our health programming couldn’t be blamed for discrimination. Additionally, because the program is outwardly voluntary, such issues like discrimination might also be mitigated. Butler noted that a petition was circulating seeking a special meeting of the Senate specifically to address the Wellness initiative, and that if fifty signatures were acquired the meeting would automatically be scheduled. Senator Butler
raised similar concerns over litigation as Chair Rowland; Senator Butler wondered if subcontractors of the health plan would have to post bond to pay damages if data was lost.

d. Additional matters of interest. None.
e. Nominations for secretary. Senator Aurand, for this meeting, has taken notes.

II. Review and approval of minutes from April 24, 2012 (5 minutes). Available on ANGEL: Content/2013-2014. On a motion by Senator Lagoa seconded by Vice Chair Palmer the minutes of the preceding meeting April 24, 2013 were approved.

III. Full Committee Status Report: Agenda items completed, agenda items currently under consideration or not yet addressed, and agenda items for future consideration (20 minutes). Review committee priority form. The entire committee looked at the priority form. It was agreed to divide into subcommittees to focus on the different tasks. The subcommittees will report back to the whole committee with the different tasks classified as either completed, under consideration, or not yet addressed.

IV. Subcommittee Meetings: Establish subcommittees, subcommittee chairs, and subcommittee plan for action (30 minutes).

  • Subcommittee for the Report on University Assessment.
    The first subcommittee is to report on University Assessment. This will be a short informational report completed in conjunction with Undergraduate Education. Part of the plan is to use more on-line assessment tools. Care must be given to differentiate among the different levels of assessment. For example are we trying to assess specific assignments and the skills they help develop in our students; or are we looking at broad rubrics such as those used by Middle States for accreditation. The report should have a “quasi-historical” element looking at past practices, consider how it will play out on the different campuses and fit into their different strategic plans, and give people a preview of what types of assessment are coming in the next few years. The report may grow into a forensic report if feedback is wanted from the Senate as a whole. Additional details for committee members are available on ANGEL.

  • Subcommittee for the Internationalization of Penn State Report.
    The second subcommittee is supposed to look at the Internationalization of Penn State. We started working on this last year with Global Programs, focusing on what is going on at the different campuses. Global Programs has a new chair this year (Greg Crawford), so they may take longer to get organized. What we are interested in is establishing institutional mission goals.
    This will include documenting the recent increase in applications and any immediate programs Vice Provost Adewumi may be working on. We also want to bring in information from the different campus, this will include a questionnaire that might address issues like infrastructure, programs, and help offered to international students, as well as obstacles to serving this group and
best practices. Additional details for committee members are available on ANGEL.

- **Subcommittee for the Planning for Fixed-Term Faculty Report.**

  The third subcommittee will look at fixed-term faculty. Chair Rowland stated Chair Yarnal told him Provost Jones was curious about the ratio or threshold of tenure-line to fixed-term faculty. This language previously caused trouble for our report both in Senate Council and on the floor of the Senate, and we have been trying to work around that language.

  Senator Lawlor said one thing we need to include is that any ratio will be different as it reflects the different needs of the different units. He stated that the role of Fixed-Term Faculty should be addressed in strategic plans. Senator Lawlor also stated that in addition to ratios raw numbers should also be reported. In reality, the numbers of tenure-line and fixed-term faculty are both increasing, just with fixed-term faculty increasing tenure. He wondered if we can really say tenure is eroding if the total number of people with it is increasing. Senator Lagoa suggested examining the number of tenured faculty per student or per credit hour over time. The number of credit hours might reflect higher research demands of faculty. Senator Krajsa asked if we can measure research or at least research grants, but it was perceived the different standards in particular fields of inquiry would not make this a useful analysis.

  Senators Golden, Shurgalla, and Lagoa spoke of the differences between FT-1 and FT-2 faculty. Senator Lagoa suggested by not highlighting fixed-term faculty in strategic plans or recognizing their contributions the administration marginalized fixed-term faculty and makes it easier to fire them. Senator Golden wondered if you needed a certain number of tenure lines per program. He said that he had heard of a threshold of three for degree granting units, but that was a practice not a policy, and that currently academic necessity was overruling that practice. Senator Krajsa said at Lehigh Valley they have been told tenure-lines will only be added for new programs. Irwin suggested benchmarking with the Big Ten.

  Senator Shurgalla asked if academic freedom can be built into a fixed-term contract. If tenured and fixed term faculty had the same rights it might be easier to measure the cost-benefit analysis of hiring one over the other. Senator Krajsa said we would have to consider both FT-1 and FT-2 employees. Senator Irwin stated when you advertise for tenure line positions you get a much higher level of applicants than when you search for fixed term positions. Fixed term can also be affected by location. Different campuses have very different adjunct pools, particularly if rural versus urban considerations are taken into effect.

  Senator Golden suggested finding out what units are paying adjuncts and presenting it in an informational report. If people understand the true pay differentials they may make better hiring decisions. For all we know adjuncts might not be that much cheaper, and the University might be moved to offer adjuncts a living wage. Chair Rowland said he thought addressing that topic would “sink the whole ship”. We would also need to keep in mind inequities among campuses and that fixed-term faculty might be coerced into doing more off-contract work to keep their jobs. Senator Shurgalla pointed out that FTM and FT-1 faculty are paid from different buckets, temporary versus permanent dollars, and that how much each unit has in each bucket can vary. Senator
Lagoa concluded by saying tenured faculty can stand up better to the administration and gave healthcare as an example. Having tenure is important to shared governance and the Senate. This subcommittee will work in some capacity with Faculty Affairs. Additional details for committee members are available on ANGEL.

- **Subcommittee for the Student Transition Between Campuses Report.**
  The final subcommittee will examine students transitioning between two campuses. We are supposed to give a report on this every two years. We already know students coming to University Park from the branch campuses graduate at almost an identical rate as students who take all for years at the main campus. There is a 0.4 GPA drop during the transitioning semester. That is the equivalent of going from B-B-B-B-A to B-B-B-B-C. They then rebound the next semester.

  The new director of Student Transition and Orientation, Dan Murphy is currently assessing programs already in place. Senator Miller requested we invite Dan Murphy back this year. Yin said he is beginning to look at the next cohort of students and there is a longer term project underway to measure post-graduation success. Currently they are looking at software and things like that, but it is not ready to roll out.

  Senator Krajisca wants to look at transitions to campuses other than University Park, and pointed out that some students take classes at more than one campus, including World Campus or via the e-learning consortium. World Campus makes residential students wait for a week before the semester before registering. Senator Nasereddin mentioned a problem they have experienced with Berks, where a student went to World Campus and took upper division courses he didn’t have the prerequisites for then came back to Berks for the lower division ones.

  Yin believes the new ISIS system will automatically put a stop to this. Another issue with the e-learning consortium is predicting what courses will be under-enrolled on the campuses, then find a way to electronically link courses together on multiple campuses till the numbers are reached. Yin said he will tell us what data is available but if numbers are too small for small intercampus transitions we won’t be able to use it.

  Chair Rowland wanted to know if we had enough data to know if the transition programs were working. Senator Lawlor said the old ones in 2009 were not, but few people participated in them. Yin stated before reaching that conclusion we had to examine whether the transition programs were academic or social. A successful social transition program might not be reflected in GPA. Chair Rowland wondered if transition programs should be more academic. Yin said he will forward Murphy’s pulse surveys and said one academic concern some transitioning students mentioned was they did more writing and essays at the branch campuses, while University Park tests were multiple choice.

  Senator Lawlor stated that IST does more than most colleges to help with transitioning students, so they see less of a GPA drop. Senators Lagoa and Lawlor discussed the size of IST and whether it provided a representative example, then Senator Nasereddin stated that IST has worked very hard to prevent curricular drift. Chair Rowland suggested doing a case study on IST to determine best practices. He wondered why we didn’t do focus groups or
interview transitioning students. Vice Chair Palmer thought this might duplicate what Dan Murphy was already doing. Chair Rowland and Senator Lawlor asked Yin how far back into the transition data they could go and the answer was about 2000.

The next question was why the one semester drop in GPA was happening. It was pointed out that weaker students GPA-wise and those from smaller campuses tended to dip the most. Senator Enama raised questions about how the data was presented. Senator Goldin suggested this may be a primarily social phenomenon and not related to academics, since grades rebound after one semester. Yin said he had some data that shows students transitioning from one small campus to another fare better and this may reflect similar grading systems at the small campuses. Senator Irwin suggested he break his data down by college. Is the drop in GPA entirely recovered and to what extent does GPA determine success in different fields? Additional details for committee members are available on ANGEL.

V. Closing comments for the good of the order (30 minutes). None.

VI. Wrap up (5 minutes). Adjourned 10:47am.

Adjournment – the next meeting of IRC will be October 22nd, 2013 in 215 Business Bldg.

Minutes taken by Harold Aurand