Minutes
GSU University Senate, Faculty Affairs Committee Meeting
9 February 2012 | 1:00 p.m. | 718 GCB

Members Present

Annette Butler  Mark Geil  Peter Lyons
David Cheshier  Maria Gindhart  Layli Maparyan
Andrew I. Cohen  Lynda Goodfellow  Joe Perry
John Duffield  Hugh Hudson  Wayne Reed
Laura Fredrick  Jennifer Jones
Gerald Gay  Nancy Kropf

Members Absent

Peggy Albers  Valerie Fennell  Risa Palm
Cathy Brack  Shelby Frost  Jerry Rackliffe
Conrad Ciccotello  MaryAnne Gaunt  Roy Sobelson
Harry Dangel  Richard Miller  Cherian Thachenkary
Cheryl Delk-LeGood  Linda Nelson  Marta White

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 PM by the committee chair, David Cheshier. Minutes from the January 12, 2012 meeting were attendance corrected and approved.

The committee was updated on several topics:

- Two Senate committees including FAC representatives have been organized. One, chaired by Greg Lisby, is undertaking an update and revision of the Faculty Handbook. Another, chaired by Siva Nathan, is working to produce a promotion manual for non-tenure track faculty. A committee working to update and revise the university graduate faculty policy expects to soon circulate a draft of their work.

- The email committee vote conducted during the week of January 30, which asked whether administrator evaluations should be worded to permit review committees to distinguish whether respondents were from within or outside the unit, was unanimously in favor of the change.

- Given the “review during the first three years of service” language that was adopted by the full Senate relating to administrator reviews, Provost Palm should have been reviewed in this cycle, but the error was caught too late to correct in the 2011-2012 academic year cycle. She will be reviewed in the year to come.

- Colleagues elsewhere in the USG have restarted discussions relating to the matter of whether domestic partnership benefits should be provided to system employees. As options are explored, FAC will monitor them and discuss potential language relating to the issue on the GSU campus.

Some discussion occurred relating to the issue of whether students should be able to complete course evaluations for an instructor after having received the grade in the class. The current policy prohibits students from evaluating after seeing grades (a motion voted by FAC and approved by the full Senate in 2008 directs that “In no case will a student be allowed to fill out or alter an online evaluation after the grade is viewed”), but concerns are regularly conveyed that this policy is not enforced. In some cases, the professor is providing final grade information (e.g., through uLearn posting) that the student can see apart from the formal notice provided in the
GoSolar system (which is where the system is programmed to segregate grade views from evaluation responding). This scenario is difficult to prevent since presumably the instructor should have the freedom to notify students as she or he sees fit. Cheshier agreed to gather further information, since the frequency of the expressed concerns implies that there may be a more serious problem (one reported possibility is that it may be that a student can complete one evaluation, see all grades, and then return to complete other evaluations – that possibility will be specifically researched).

The committee undertook wider discussion of the student evaluation instrument, since the wording of questions asked by all Colleges is a FAC jurisdictional issue. There was no consensus view about whether FAC should undertake a full review of the SEIP common questions at this time. Concern was expressed that, in evaluating instructional records, undue reliance should not be placed on the statistical data that derives from the SEIP, but the current policy already urges all reviewers to explore the fuller contextualized record, and it is unclear whether the SEIP common questions are contributing to the problem. The view was expressed that the SEIP should be updated so that its questions would better connect to changing modes of instructional delivery (i.e., to shift from questions that seem to imply a “sage on the stage” model to alternatives that take account of online and collaborative instructional environments). Others advocated for such a review given what seems to be a wider sense that the current questions to not provide useful information to reviewers. The full committee will be emailed by Cheshier to see if a small ad hoc subcommittee might volunteer to look into the issue, with the idea of returning to FAC with a range of possible further actions.

The new University Promotion & Tenure manual having been adopted at the January Senate meeting, some follow on issues have been brought to the attention of FAC that were discussed:

- The new manual discusses the timing of pre-tenure review as occurring “after” the third year, when the University’s ongoing practice has been that such a review occurs “during” the third year. This appears to be an uncaught typographical error, as there was no expressed intention to change this policy. It was agreed that Cheshier would draft a corrective motion, quickly circulate it for electronic vote, and (if it passes) forward it to the Senate executive committee with a recommendation that it be presented to the full Senate as an informational item.

- The new manual, reaffirming the University’s common practice, describes the possibility that an incoming faculty hire might be awarded probationary years of credit toward both tenure and promotion. Staff members in two Colleges have asked whether this is enabled by System policy, and, agreeing that probationary years of credit can be awarded toward tenure, asked whether probationary credit can be awarded toward promotion. It was the unanimous sense of the committee that probationary credit should continue to be available toward both tenure and promotion. The USG policy on probationary credit was discussed, and the sense was that the new manual is in sync with what that policy enables. Further, the consensus view was reasserted that to separate the potential of probationary credit (or, to deny potential credit toward promotion) would both mark a significant change in hiring practice and would undermine the university’s ability to attract accomplished faculty.

- The language that instructs candidates undergoing P&T review in the new manual requires them to submit SEIP data in a comprehensive way, and then suggests options for what else might be used to document learning outcomes in the instructional dossier. A suggestion had been made to the committee that this language be strengthened so as to obligate candidates to submit both direct and indirect assessment data documenting learning outcomes, and further to specifically enable as a category of instructional workload credit efforts made to do assessment work. FAC discussed whether there was enough support for this perspective to justify appointment of a subcommittee to draft a motion that would enact these suggestions. There was no support for this action in the
committee: while the need to assess learning outcomes was affirmed, the sense was that the current flexibility written into the University manual is sufficient for now.

The committee was updated on campus-wide task force conversations underway relating to parking, traffic flow management, and master planning activity relating to these issues. Parking is in short supply, demand for new parking options is growing, and traffic issues have grown considerably more complex as the number of students and university employees has grown. One of the ways in which these issues are being explored is by creation of an ad hoc committee. FAC has been asked to appoint a representative to this committee.

Work proceeded on three draft motions:

- A motion that would require all academic units to adopt guidelines relating to grade distributions was deliberated. While no university wide grade inflation problem has been documented (in fact, there is evidence that overall grade means have dropped), the motion was presented as a way to foster discipline-specific discussions that might avert variations across course sections or unit-level upward grade pressures. Conceding that these guidelines are used by some departments, and with apparent success, but concerned that the resolution legislates against a problem that may not exist and that guidelines seem to imply that a certain percentage of students should be expected to fail, the motion was rejected by a voice vote.

- A motion that would have the Senate convey a letter to Chancellor Hank Huckaby opposing policies that restrict access to Georgia public colleges and universities for undocumented students was discussed. The motion was drafted by an ad hoc committee and is under simultaneous review in FAC, Admissions & Standards, and Student Life & Development. The concern was expressed that the current wording of the letter should be softened to better address the public policy complexities of the matter. Specific rewordings were suggested, but an absence of a quorum prevented the matter from being resolved on way or the other, and a sense of the committee could therefore not be ascertained. Cheshier agreed to circulate the revised language electronically and to attempt to bring the issue to resolution one way or the other by evote.

- Work continued on a motion to create a University P&T review committee. Discussion relating to certain suggestions for modification of a potential senior faculty P&T review mechanism hinged on locating some additional information, which Cheshier agreed to present at the next committee meeting. No vote on the motion was taken.

A motion to adjourn was made, seconded, and accepted by acclamation at 3:10 PM.

Future committee meetings
Thursday March 8, 2012, 3:00

Future full Senate meetings
March 15, April 19