

**Commission on Faculty Affairs
Minutes
January 29, 2010**

Members attending: Debbie Smith (acting chair), Jack Finney (for Dean Chang), Brad Klein, Carol Burger, Sam Riley, Tami Watson, Ed Lener (for Bruce Pencek), Paul Winistorfer, Sam Easterling, and Patricia Hyer

Guests: Martin Daniel, Director of Operations, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALs)

Agenda for the meeting included two items: mandatory calendar year to academic year faculty conversions and annual leave for research extended appointments.

The minutes of the CFA meeting on December 11, 2009, were approved without change.

Mandatory Calendar Year (CY) to Academic Year (AY) Faculty Conversions

Hyer reminded CFA that the Faculty Senate Review Committee had recommended that CFA take up the policy question of mandatory CY to AY conversions as a result of a grievance last year. To provide some background on when and how such mandatory conversions might be necessitated, Hyer invited Martin Daniel, Director of Operations from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALs), to share the circumstances facing CALs.

Martin Daniel briefed CFA members about the rapidly changing external environment for colleges of agriculture and the strategies that the college has already adopted, or is considering, in order to position itself for a very different future. One of the most significant changes on the horizon is the move to transform formula funds for agricultural research to competitively awarded funding. A federal initiative to institute this change was recently announced, then delayed. This change could have dramatic consequences for the salary support currently provided for many faculty members, not only in CALs but also the other "229" colleges at Virginia Tech. Landgrant universities would no longer have sole access to USDA research (e.g. Hatch) funding. There would be no guarantee that all CALs researchers, whose base salaries are currently supported by formula funding, would be successful in garnering competitive funds to support their research programs. Since most CALs faculty members have some or a great deal of 229 funding supporting their base salaries, the eventual loss of formula funding coupled with repeated budget reductions for the 229 budget that cannot be offset by tuition have created a very challenging set of circumstances.

Over the last five years, the college has already taken a number of significant actions to invest in new lines of research through new appointments, new buildings and renovations, and assisting current faculty to become more competitive for peer-reviewed grants, while also dealing with budget reductions and less competitive salaries. One strategy has been the voluntary conversion of the traditional calendar-year appointment to a 9-month appointment at an incentive rate of 90% instead of the standard 80% rate. A number of faculty members have taken advantage of the program. Those faculty members with sponsored research grants can then increase their new 9-month salary by as much as 33% (a net increase of about 20% over their former 12-month salary) through a research-extended appointment. As a result of voluntary conversions,

academic-year appointments for new faculty members, and pending retirements through the ASO program, about 50% of the CALS faculty will be on 9-month appointments.

Given the current and pending financial challenges, the college would like to have in place a policy framework for mandatory conversions, should this become a necessity. Several options are possible including one-year advance notification, or less notification and stepped down summer support for one or two years. It will be important to agree on what factors would trigger a mandatory conversion for an individual or for a group. The college still has the voluntary, incentivized program in place. The same plan is available to 12-month faculty in the College of Natural Resources and the College of Veterinary Medicine. Historically, these three colleges have appointed faculty members on a 12-month basis, reflecting the need for active summer research or extension programs, and in the case of Veterinary Medicine, year-round hospital operations and a different teaching schedule.

CFA members expressed concern about mandatory changes that would result in salary reductions for faculty members, while acknowledging that the prospect of a significant loss of both state and federal funding could result in a significant loss of faculty positions. Some CFA members felt uneasy about involuntarily changing the terms of employment from the faculty member's initial hiring. The expectation that a salary reduction might be made up by generating sponsored funding may not be realistic if the faculty member's research area was not suitable for external funding. No immediate action was requested from CFA at this time.

Annual Leave for Research Extended Appointments

During university wide forums delivered by the federal compliance task force during November and December, several faculty members shared concerns about how to handle summer vacations when faculty members are funded by a sponsored grant or contract during the summer. In response to this concern, the task force is considering reinstating annual leave for research extended appointments and adopting clarifying language for the Faculty Handbook addressing the issue for AY faculty members. With accrued leave, faculty members on research extended appointments would be able to take vacation during the summer and still be in compliance with federal regulations. Because faculty members are not paid out for leave balances when they leave the university or return to an academic year appointment, there would be no financial risk in accruing leave balances. CFA members agreed that reintroducing leave accrual for 12 month extended appointments will be helpful, while it may not be worth the effort for those on 10 or 11 month appointments. Hyer noted the changes proposed to the faculty handbook will also clarify that AY faculty do not earn or accrue leave, which means that they can only be compensated for actual work performed during the summer, not for vacation time.

Recorder, Cindy Wilkinson