

**Commission on Faculty Affairs
Minutes
February 13, 2009**

Members attending: Gary Long (chair), Mike Kelly, Jack Finney (for Dean Chang), Sam Riley, Debbie Smith, Sam Easterling, Brad Klein, Allisyn Dunn, Patricia Hyer

Guest: Terry Wildman, Professor School of Education, former Director of CEUT

Agenda for the meeting included two items: University Committee on Evaluation of Teaching and updates on CFA policy initiatives.

The minutes of the CFA meeting on January 30, 2009, were approved without change.

University Committee on Evaluation of Teaching:

Current student instructor evaluations have been in place for the past 40 years. The evaluation system is aging and the process and instrument are outdated. The goal of the committee was to explore a new system for student evaluation of teaching. The committee has completed the final report with recommendations.

Wildman described the extensive literature review conducted on learning, teaching, and evaluation. Many common concerns expressed about student evaluations of teaching are not supported by the research literature. For example, class size and characteristics of the instructor are not related to evaluation scores, as widely believed. There is also a movement to rethink how we educate students. When the evaluation system is redesigned, the team should look to systems and processes that point towards learning as it may evolve in five or more years instead of focusing on past pedagogies and ways of thinking about the teacher/student relationship.

The committee surveyed 480 faculty members and held several focus groups to collect data. Wildman acknowledged that while the committee had considerable data from faculty members there has been little input from students. The results showed there is widespread concern about almost every single aspect of the teaching evaluation system. Nearly 80% of faculty members surveyed believed student input was important. Since teaching is so varied and complex few faculty members surveyed thought one instrument could be used to measure all forms of teaching and learning. Another concern was data collected has been unwittingly misused. Often the data are presented in a way that is not designed to help instructors improve, student data may be the only source of information about teaching, and students may not understand how the data are used when filling out the form.

18 recommendations were submitted by the committee. Wildman reviewed many of the recommendations highlighting specific areas for improvement. Faculty members at Virginia Tech overwhelmingly believe the reward system is broken with the current system skewed towards research with less emphasis on teaching excellence. Some CFA members maintained teaching is hard to define and measure, unlike research programs

and scholarship. CFA members made several suggestions to improve teaching evaluation such as evaluating students three years post-graduation and developing a nuanced system to capture the complexity of learning. All agreed that there should continue to be a balance between teaching and research in evaluating the performance of faculty members.

CFA members discussed the committee's recommendation for faculty self assessment. CFA members suggested existing mechanisms such as the Faculty Activity Report (FAR) that could incorporate self assessment. Others noted that departments have different processes for evaluating faculty teaching, with some disregarding student survey input altogether.

Wildman explained that there is no central ownership of the teaching evaluation process. The committee recommended identifying an owner, possibly a standing committee or technical group, to maintain the system.

Use of student perception data for faculty member evaluation varies substantially across colleges and departments. The committee recommended developing an institution-wide process for using data to improve teaching and to evaluate faculty members. Some CFA members questioned whether every course for all faculty members needed to be evaluated. Virginia Tech policy requires student evaluation for all courses. Wildman suggested the policy could be observed with a subset of questions for each course with a more extensive set of questions for select courses.

Wildman will meet with CFA again to continue the review and discussion of recommendations. Once the committee's report is final, he would like to post the report to the provost's website for dissemination. CFA members suggested the Provost's website. Hard copies of the final report will be circulated to Deans and Department Heads.

Updates on CFA Policy Initiatives:

PI Removal Resolution

The Faculty Senate approved the resolution on February 10, 2009. The resolution is on the University Council's agenda for first reading on February 16, 2009. If the resolution is passed it will be submitted to the Board of Visitors.

Professors of Practice

The Faculty Senate approved the resolution on February 10, 2009. The resolution is on the University Council's agenda for first reading on February 16, 2009. If the resolution is passed it will be submitted to the Board of Visitors.

Next meeting time has been changed to 2:30 – 4:00 pm, February 27, 2009 in 325 Burruss.

Recorder, Cindy Wilkinson