

Commission on Faculty Affairs
Minutes
March 27, 2009

Members attending: Gary Long (chair), Debbie Smith, Jack Finney (for Dean Chang), Carol Burger, Ed Lener, Dennis Welch, Mike Kelly, Sam Easterling, Sam Riley, Patricia Hyer

Guests: Daniel Wubah, vice president and dean for undergraduate education; Peter Doolittle, director of Center for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching (CEUT); Ray Van Dyke, director of academic assessment

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

The minutes of the CFA meeting on March 6, 2009, will be distributed prior to the next meeting on March 27, 2009.

Updates on CFA Policy Initiatives:

PI Removal Resolution

The resolution was approved by the Board of Visitors at the March 22-23, 2009, meeting.

Professors of Practice

The resolution was approved by the Board of Visitors at the March 22-23, 2009, meeting.

Recommendations of the University Committee on Evaluation of Teaching:

Daniel Wubah was briefed by Terry Wildman/Chair of the committee's work and recommendations. He is prepared to provide some leadership for following up on these issues and is interested in hearing comments about the recommendations from CFA members.

CFA members acknowledged the existing system is outdated and ineffective. It is important for the university to help faculty garner student input and then use it to improve teaching. While teaching is important, members are interested in how teaching leads to learning outcomes. Although there has been some discussion about which unit of the university should own the teaching evaluation process, members view the office of the vice president and dean for undergraduate education as the appropriate owner, with involvement of the Graduate School.

Wubah has heard from many units at Virginia Tech that teaching is not valued as highly as research. From his experience at other research universities this perception by faculty members is not unusual. Wubah acknowledged that research has been the focus at Virginia Tech and there are positive outcomes. It is timely to refocus all stakeholders, especially faculty members, on teaching and learning effectiveness. Wubah believes that raising the importance of teaching effectiveness will take a shift in culture.

Wubah views the process of teaching evaluation as two parts: 1) the process, and 2) the instrument. Wubah will establish working groups for both the teaching evaluation process and developing an evaluation instrument. These groups will have a finite deadline for completing their assigned tasks. The process will be transparent and owned by faculty members, not administrators. The process and instrument working groups will consider cultural aspects while redesigning the teaching evaluation system.

The committee's report recommended that teaching evaluation data should be used for research and to establish teaching norms. Wubah agreed and suggested teaching effectiveness research will be a natural byproduct of the new teaching evaluation process and does not need to be the focus of a separate working group. Wubah recommended housing and archiving the data in the Office of Academic Assessment. Once Virginia Tech has an improved teaching evaluation process in place, then we will be able to use the data to establish teaching and grading trends for instructors and departments.

The CEUT has an opportunity to enhance the culture of teaching excellence on campus. This cannot be done in isolation; faculty members and other stakeholders must support the culture change. Many faculty members take teaching very seriously, and we should use that energy to help faculty members who need improvement. CEUT can facilitate a dialogue at Virginia Tech to identify and share best teaching practices. Programs are already in place, such as the pedagogies conferences which drew several hundred faculty members, to address teaching effectiveness and begin to shift the culture.

Virginia Tech needs to develop a culture that expects good teaching. This culture must be supported and encouraged by university leaders but needs to be embraced and owned by faculty members.

Wubah remarked that the purpose of teaching evaluation is to improve the teaching and learning process. There needs to be transparency at the level of the deans and department heads about how the data are used. There should be some consistency in the system across colleges and departments, but also some flexibility to use the data locally. The system must have some feedback loop to the instructor to use for improving teaching effectiveness. The teaching evaluation process must be a holistic approach with student, peer, and self assessments.

Wubah will establish two working groups one to create the teaching evaluation process, led by Doolittle, and the other to design the evaluation instrument, led by Van Dyke. The working groups will seek input from all stakeholders including relevant commissions, departments, deans, and the graduate school. He will invite a member of CFA to participate in the working groups to maintain the involvement of the commission. Members expressed appreciation for his proactive engagement on this important topic.

Review of CFA's Agenda for 2008-09

Hyer noted that 8 out of 9 CFA agenda items for the year have been completed. Hyer briefed members on the outcome of the mentoring agenda item. Mary Dean Sorcinelli from UMass-Amherst, an expert on faculty development and mentoring, is scheduled to

present at Virginia Tech on September 24, 2009. She is well versed in mentoring models at the organizational and individual levels. In addition to a campus-wide workshop, she has offered to work with small groups of faculty members if requested.

The April 10 CFA meeting has been cancelled. The final meeting for 2008-2009 is April 24. CFA members will discuss agenda items for 2009-2010.

Recorder, Cindy Wilkinson