

Commission on Faculty Affairs
Minutes
January 30, 2009

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

Guest: Joseph McFadden, President / Graduate Student Assembly

Agenda for the meeting included three items: resolution from the Graduate Student Assembly concerning tenure and promotion guidelines, PI removal resolution, and professors of practice resolution.

The minutes of the CFA meeting on December 12, 2008 were approved without change.

Tenure and Promotion Guidelines Resolution from Graduate Student Assembly (GSA):
Joseph McFadden presented a GSA resolution to change the tenure and promotion guidelines to include optional statements from graduate student advisees.

The GSA membership is seeking to create a process for systematic graduate student participation in the tenure and promotion review process. The GSA would like for voluntary graduate student advisee statements to be considered by the promotion and tenure committee. The resolution stemmed from graduate student discussion about improving graduate student advising. At Virginia Tech, there is no formal process for allowing graduate students to provide statements during the tenure and promotion review process. Each department at Virginia Tech has a different philosophy about seeking graduate student input with many departments not allowing input. This resolution provides a documented process for graduate students to be heard about the faculty member's quality of advising.

CFA members noted the resolution needed revision to make the language clearer, specifically who would instigate the request and how the process would be executed. Some members expressed concerns about negative perceptions if invited graduate student advisees chose not to provide a statement. CFA members recommended that the resolution be revised and then resubmitted to both the CFA and Commission on Graduate Studies for input prior to being submitted to the University Council.

CFA members continued to discuss the resolution after McFadden's presentation. Some members suggested that the tenure process may not be an effective way to influence advising as it would not affect the majority of already tenured faculty. If the GSA members seek to improve graduate student advising, input should be provided on an ongoing basis to the department. Some departments are considering an evaluative process for graduate student advising. CFA members noted there are implications to graduate students as providing input may put them in an awkward position in relation to their advisor and could conceivably jeopardize completion of their degree.

Gary Long will communicate with Joseph McFadden that CFA had concerns about the idea, including the concern about possible negative effects for graduate students, and that CFA would not approve the resolution in its current form.

PI Removal Resolution:

Patricia Hyer reported on the meeting with Commission on Research (CoR). Requests for involuntary PI/co-PI removal do not happen very often, however having a documented process helps to define how to consistently handle removal when needed. CoR members were concerned about the authority granted to a single individual (the Vice President for Research (OVPR)) to remove a PI/co-PI, and they suggested that a team might make this decision. However the legal and contractual responsibility for grants and contracts is the responsibility of the OVPR. To make sure that the dean and department head contribute to this decision, the language was strengthened to state that the OVPR *must* consult with the department head and dean. They also suggested language reminding participants about evaluating the validity of a sponsor's concerns as part of the process. The CoR members also felt it was important to have a statement in writing from the sponsor if PI/co-PI removal is requested by the sponsor.

CFA members agreed to the CoR changes. CFA members unanimously voted to approve the resolution.

CFA members will share the PI/co-PI removal resolution with the Faculty Senate one more time before bringing it to the University Council for review. Gary Long will send the senate the approved CFA resolution with a bulleted list of concerns that were addressed by revisions.

The next Faculty Senate meeting is on February 10, 2009 and the next University Council meeting is February 16, 2009.

Professors of Practice:

Hyer reported on the changes to the professors of practice resolution following discussion at the last CFA meeting. One of the changes suggested was to remove language that appeared to require equivalency to tenure track faculty credentials, when credentials for the professors of practice are by definition of a different nature. Reference to a "professional" degree was reinstated since that was relevant for several fields.

CFA members voted to approve the resolution, with one dissenting vote. The resolution will be taken to the Faculty Senate before submission to the University Council.

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New Business

Some CFA members suggested drafting a statement to the graduate school addressing the GSA members' concerns about the quality of faculty advising. Gary Long will draft a letter reflecting CFA members support for improving graduate student advising. The letter will also note that the tenure and promotion review process is not a very effective vehicle to address this concern in a comprehensive way.

Recorder: Cindy Wilkinson