

Commission on Faculty Affairs
Minutes
April 24, 2009

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

Guests: Tom Inzana, Associate Vice President for Research Programs

Agenda for the meeting included three items: faculty incentive plan, 2008 AdvanceVT faculty work life survey, and suggested agenda items for 2009-2010 CFA meetings.

The minutes of the CFA meeting on March 27, 2009, were approved without changes by email prior to the April 24 meeting.

Faculty Incentive Plan:

Tom Inzana presented a faculty incentive plan developed by the Office of the Vice President for Research. The plan has been vetted with a number of groups over the last year. The proposed incentive plan allows principal investigators (PIs) and co-principal investigators (co-PIs) to receive a bonus of up to 25 percent of base salary per year. To be eligible, grants and contracts must be externally funded, and PIs and co-PIs must first cover their summer salaries and teaching buyouts. Bonuses would be funded from additional savings generated from salary charges during the academic year. Departments may choose whether or not to participate based on their specific departmental needs. Department head approval and monitoring of the plan is required to ensure appropriate use of the incentive plan. Fall 2009 is the earliest the plan can be submitted through the governance system. If approved, the plan may be implemented on a trial basis.

CFA members were concerned about implementing a plan that would create inequities since some disciplines have very limited potential for sponsored research funding. Faculty members with extensive sponsored funding are already compensated at higher rates than other faculty members. And the plan, as written, appears to perpetuate the notion that research is rewarded more than teaching excellence at VT. The proposed plan, if implemented, would exacerbate the differential in salaries between faculty members who are excellent teachers and those who are successful grant getters. Another complication will be the interaction between changes that will need to be made to achieve compliance with regulations for federal grants and contracts, highlighted by the recent settlement between Yale University and the U.S. Attorney. This will require more charging of faculty member's time during the academic year, moving away from 100% summer funding from federal sources. Tracking salary savings for the purposes of the bonus plan would be necessarily complicated by these required changes in salary practices. Setting up a policy that allows optional departmental participation may also pose a significant risk by having inequitable personnel policies. The plan looks to be very complex which will require an administrative burden for fiscal staff to track and monitor.

The deans are interested in exploring the research incentive plan but are conflicted according to Mike Kelly. The salary differential issue is only one area of concern. Another concern is the issue of diverting some returned overhead and salary savings to

individuals since departments currently use those revenue streams to cover departmental needs.

CFA members offered ideas of other incentive options. Rewarding new faculty members for grant or contract awards with a small fixed dollar bonus may open the incentive system up to more faculty members. Teaching excellence incentive programs should be explored in conjunction with research incentives.

CFA members agreed there are many major issues that need to be resolved prior to moving forward with a vote on a research incentive plan. The authors of the incentive plan should incorporate feedback including other options for research incentives prior to presenting the plan to CFA and other groups in the fall.

2008 AdvanceVT Faculty Work Life Survey

Jack Finney presented an overview of the AdvanceVT survey results for the College of Engineering (COE). The COE report is an example of the content each college will receive by the end of spring term. The report compares the 2008 survey results with the 2005 survey results. Only two scales showed some slight improvement in the university-wide results: diversity and overall job satisfaction. Some areas, like mentoring and work-life balance, have low scores that suggest needed attention. Even those scales with mean scores at or above 3.0 offer room for improvement. CFA members noted the importance of seeking faculty member feedback and of involving them in identifying initiatives that might yield improvement to department climate.

2009-2010 Suggested Agenda Items for CFA

Faculty Teaching Evaluation

CFA members would like to see actionable recommendations from each of the committees, process and instrument.

Faculty Mentoring

Hyer requested that CFA Members encourage participation in the Mentoring Workshop scheduled for September 23-24, 2009.

Online Faculty Activity Reporting System Demonstration

Hyer noted the online system should be active by October 2009 so that a demo could be shared during late fall. Eight departments are in the pilot project.

Masters Teachers Program

CFA members would like to work with the Center for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching Excellence to establish teaching excellence programs.

2008 VT Faculty Work Life Survey

CFA members would like to review the summaries to identify areas for CFA action.

Recorder, Cindy Wilkinson