

FACULTY SENATE

ACADEMIC LIFE COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT (AMENDED)

6 MAY 2008

Committee Members: John H. Smith (Chair), Martha Foote, Steve Schwiff, Serge von Duvillard, Arun Goyal, Ed Manton.

Summary of Activity

The Academic Life Committee met twice in AY 2007-2008, in November 2007 and April 2008. The administrative duties of most of the membership prevented there being a full meeting at either time, and some business was conducted via email. The Committee tackled the following issues:

Administrative Evaluation
The Anti-Discrimination Policy
Tenure and Promotion Policies and Procedures

Administrative Evaluation

Although there are in the University Procedures Manual a procedure for the evaluation of department heads and upper-level administrators, it is not consistently or evenly implemented apart from annual evaluation of department heads. As codified, the process is a filtered one in which the faculty have little or no regular input on the performance of deans, the Provost, or the President. The evaluation instrument is extremely complicated and time-consuming. The quadrennial, comprehensive evaluation is supposed to include input from staff and students, which we do not believe is appropriate.

The Committee agreed that the evaluation procedure must be simplified so that department heads and faculty have greater ability to advise on and implement academic initiatives. The evaluation instrument should be a simple one dependent upon written narratives and departmental consensus (with regard to dept. heads), rather than on the collection and collation of vast amounts of numerical data. Such a new procedure should then be regularly and consistently implemented across the colleges. The Faculty Senate made such a recommendation to upper-level administration, which has yet to respond.

Wording of the Anti-Discrimination Policy

According to the University's Mission Statement and as appears on job applications (in compliance with federal mandates), "Texas A&M University-Commerce does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disabilities, or Vietnam era veteran status." The committee was advised to include the terms "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" to this list. The question was forwarded to Administration for any review, and the System legal advisors pointed out that since the State of Texas has not seen fit to amend its own

anti-discrimination policy, that there was no need for Texas A&M-Commerce to do so at this time. The Committee will continue to press this issue, as amending the wording of the policy would reflect recent trends at other institutions of higher education nationwide.

Tenure and Promotion Standards

The immediate issue regarded the proposed six-article standard for tenure and promotion, although the origin of the number six comes from deliberations between the College of Business and Technology and the College of Education and Human Services. It has been left up to individual departments, in consultation with their college deans, to arrive at varying—yet equivalent—minimum requirements for the awarding of tenure and promotion. There must be preserved a balance between quality and quantity, as well as proper accountability and equivalence among disciplines.

The Committee also discussed apparent inconsistencies in which faculty are awarded tenure and promotion according to divergent or varying standards between the University and System policies. Provost Mary Hendrix affirmed that the University will continue to follow established written procedures, though the Committee thinks that there needs to be some clarification of the language in the Faculty Handbook and the Procedures Manual, especially with regard to those faculty who wish to seek promotion without first applying for tenure. The Committee will continue to discuss this in the next year with an eye to bringing University and System procedures more into line with one another.

It was decided by the Committee to recommend that the Faculty Handbook be revised to eliminate the creation of two copies of the T&P portfolio, as in the College of Education and Human Services the second copy is redundant and never used. It is a waste of time and resources when just one copy is sufficient. The Committee agreed that the second copy is redundant, and requests a revision of the Faculty Handbook to eliminate the unnecessary second copy.

Faculty Development Leave

In light of Chancellor McKinney's denying Susan Stewart (Lit. and Lang.) Faculty Development Leave in Fall 2008 on the grounds that she is not yet tenured, and that FDL is only for tenured faculty, the Committee agreed that McKinney is in violation of System policy 12.99.01.§1.2.2, which states that FDL is available to anyone "who is employed on a full-time basis as a member of the faculty and whose duties include teaching, research, administration, including professional librarians, or the performance of professional services," and who "has served as a member of the faculty of the same institution of higher education for at least two consecutive academic years. This service may be as an instructor or as an assistant, associate, or full professor, or an equivalent rank, and must be full-time academic duty, but need not include teaching."

A draft letter has been produced by Donna Dunbar-Odom, Chair of the Faculty Development Leave Committee, which will be submitted to Provost Mary Hendrix to be forwarded to incoming President Dan Jones in August.