

Faculty Senate Minutes **April 20, 1998**

Senators Present: Anton, Beardsley, Bristow, Cooney (ex-officio), Hale, Hummel-Berry, Kirchner, Maxwell, Owen, Sloane, Steiner, Tiernan, A. Wood

Visitors: Bartenen, Fiegenger, Fikes

1. Approval of Minutes: The minutes of 3/23/98 were approved with a note to clarify that MIRS 503 reports will continue to be distributed. The minutes of 4/6/98 were approved as distributed.

2. No announcements

3. Chair's Report: Kirchner noted that the new senate chair may not be determined by the May 4 meeting, presumed the last of the year, at which election of the other senate officers occurs and committee reports are presented. A Monday, May 11, 3:00 pm meeting may be required.

4. Continued discussion of the report from the Ad Hoc Committee on Student Evaluations of Teaching: Maxwell said that the intent of the committee was to present its recommendations to the Senate prior to possible discussion of recommendations by the full faculty. Kirchner began discussion noting that the literature she had read questioned the validity of peer evaluations. Maxwell agreed and Fikes added there are no criterion validity studies on the peer evaluation process.

Maxwell explained that the problem of greatest concern for the committee is the trust issue as compared to issues regarding the evaluation form and process. The Senate should deal with the major issue and 'open the black box' of the FAC. Cooney asked what opening the black box meant. Attempts at UPS to publish results of student evaluations have not been favored. Maxwell said the committee wanted the confidentiality of an individual maintained during the evaluation process. The committee was more concerned about getting information about the process; how parts of the evaluation are weighed by the FAC, how data are used and interpreted, and how uniformity is applied in the decision making process. Fikes noted that each step illustrated on the Decision Flow Graph was open to biases. People want to be shown that each step in the process comes to an unbiased conclusion. Maxwell was concerned not with intentional skewing of data, but with unintentional bias.

Bristow asked if there were other recommendations that might impact the matter of trust directly. Fiegenger explained that management literature indicated that explaining how a decision is made and clarifying expectations lead to a perception of fairness. Fikes noted recommendation #8 considered hiring an external consultant. Maxwell thought training on how to read evaluations would be useful. Cooney noted that UPS has an elaborate evaluation process, if one group was to be trained, everyone must be trained, even the person reading his or her own evaluations. He continued that FAC members are available to talk about the process, or a person can have an open (except in tenure decisions) accessible file for full discussion.

A discussion ensued regarding methods individuals, departments and the FAC use in decision making. Bristow indicated that individuals witness the evaluation process of their departments, however the FAC's process was mysterious and the Ad Hoc Committee was trying to demystify the process.

Hale indicated there is decision making methodology in the code, however it may not be communicated in the best way. Explaining process was different than having something wrong with the process. Fikes said that the questionnaires did not indicate that the system was wrong. The questionnaires indicated a malaise about the use of student evaluations.

Discussion continued regarding possible biases that may arise while reading student evaluations. Is the FAC aware of possible biases? How does it deal with or safeguard against them? For example, what is the policy of dealing with conclusions students draw without any substantive

data? Possibly a procedural description of common elements of a given case could be included in the memo to the faculty each fall regarding evaluations. More information should be provided to newer faculty. Any document should be on the website for continual access.

Cooney volunteered to put together a handout of details of the general sequence of process used by the FAC. He noted that there are always six people from different disciplines on the committee which is one method of dealing with possible bias.

Motion M/S/P: Beardsley slipped in a motion indicating the Senate had received the Study of Student Evaluation of Teaching Report by the Ad Hoc Committee and will forward it to the PSC.

Anton wanted the minutes to reflect the Senate's appreciation for the hard work and effort put in by the committee and for the extensive and thorough report. Sloane specifically thanked the other members of the committee Mark Fiegenger, Tom Fikes, Alexa Tullis and chair, Keith Maxwell.

Motion M/S/P: Bristow moved that the Senate accept Terry Cooney's offer to draft a description of the procedures the FAC uses in its deliberations of evaluation cases, share this document with members of the Ad Hoc Committee on Student Evaluations and the PSC, conferring with them, and then circulating the document to all faculty.

Cooney noted that recommendations such as hiring an external evaluator could then be reviewed by the PSC which could then make its own recommendations. Thus endeth the discussion of the SET Report.

Kirchner brought up an added Bylaws revision regarding the New Articles of Incorporation, suggesting references to the April 23, 1903 (April 23 being Shakespeare's birthday) be removed. Beardsley asked if there was a parallel paragraph in the new Articles which would give context to the creature/faculty of the present university and was told there was not.

Motion M/S/P: Maxwell moved to strike the section in Article I of the Preamble related to the 1903 quotation and other material as indicated on the revision handout.

The Senate adjourned at 5:12pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Anne Wood