

End-of-year Report

Faculty Affairs Committee

May 2015

Membership

The Faculty Affairs Committee (FAC) for AY 2014-2015 originally consisted of members Elizabeth Allman, Chris Fallen, Galen Johnson, Julie Joly, Leslie McCartney, Walter Skya, and David Valentine. The Ex Officio member was Bella Gerlich. Julie Joly convened the first FAC meeting (September) but external commitments required her to resign from the committee before the second meeting (October). Chris Fallen was nominated and elected to chair. Bella Gerlich resigned from the committee in January to take a position at another university and John Eichelberger joined the committee in February as the Ex Officio member for the remainder of the year.

Face-to-face FAC meetings were held monthly and a “Google Group” was used for online discussion and announcements. A shared “Google Drive” folder was used for collaborative editing of selected FAC documents. Ownership of the electronic Group and folder will be transferred from Chris Fallen to the next FAC chair, upon request.

Walter Skya volunteered to convene the first FAC meeting of AY 2015-2016.

Actions and Discussions

Committee by-laws

The first request of the Administrative Committee (AdCom) to all committees was for each to review and revise their respective by-laws, specifically to re-evaluate the committee charge and to specify committee procedures. Two significant changes were made to the committee charge.

One of the charges in the FAC by-laws is to act as a faculty advocate to elected officials. FAC decided that other organizations such as the unions are better faculty advocates, but that communication of faculty issues to relevant and influential parties outside the university is important. Therefore, the charge was revised to state that FAC shall enhance communication with public officials including the University of Alaska (UA) Board of Regents (BoR).

Another charge in the FAC by-laws is to review notices by the University of Alaska of financial exigency. The committee decided that its members typically do not have the expertise or ready access to appropriate data to meaningfully evaluate such notices of university financial exigency. Consequently, FAC eliminated this charge from its by-laws.

FAC submitted its revised bylaws to AdCom.

Department chair policy

AdCom requested that FAC revise the academic department chair policy because the policy had not been revised in many years and particularly because parts of the policy were in apparent conflict with the new UNAC collective bargaining agreement (CBA). Several interested parties provided useful input regarding revisions to the department chair policy. This issue took significant FAC resources to resolve largely due to the policy revision regarding who is eligible to be nominated and to serve as department chair.

Specifically, one interpretation of the CBA is that department chairs and represented faculty shall not have administrative supervisory capacity over other represented faculty. However, a small number of departments (approximately 10%) are chaired by faculty administrators with greater than 50% administrative workload. This appears to work well for some of those departments and cause significant

contention in others and occurs through a variety of circumstances. The old department chair policy did specify restrictions on who was allowed to be department chair, but there was also a mechanism in the policy that essentially allowed for unlimited and unchecked exceptions to the restriction.

Ultimately, FAC was unable to construct a concise general eligibility restriction without a lengthy list of exceptions that satisfied a majority of FAC or AdCom. Even seemingly reasonable restrictions such as “only tenured faculty may serve as department chair” cause problems because some departments have no or very few tenured faculty. FAC and AdCom changed the eligibility restriction to a guideline which was both consistent with the CBA and allowed flexibility for the variety of departments at UAF.

FAC submitted a motion for revisions to the department chair policy to AdCom and the UAF Faculty Senate. The motion passed.

Student code of conduct

The University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) Faculty Senate studied the BoR policy and UA regulations regarding the student code of conduct (SCC) and passed a resolution proposing revisions to the SCC. The revisions largely were intended to clarify elements of the SCC, particularly in regards to appropriate student use of technology. The UA Faculty Alliance requested that the respective Faculty Senates of UAF and the University of Alaska Southeast pass resolutions supporting SCC revisions proposed by UAA.

FAC found that the proposed revisions did not weaken the current SCC and that any perceived minor deficiencies in certain revisions were offset by the benefit of having a consistent SCC across all UA campuses. A resolution of support of the revisions proposed by UAA, containing one small change, was approved by FAC. The change contributed by FAC was to generalize language regarding plagiarism of a “persons” to “others” in recognition that commonly available “artificial intelligence” can, for example, currently provide derivations of solutions to mathematical problems and likely someday soon even provide essays on demand.

FAC submitted a resolution of support for revisions to the SCC to AdCom and the UAF Faculty Senate. The motion passed unanimously.

Unfinished Business

Joint appointments

An ad hoc Joint Appointment Committee studied and reported on issues regarding evaluation and tenure of faculty holding joint appointments. The committee was composed of faculty holding joint appointments. FAC invited the chair of the committee, Bill Bristow, to discuss and summarize the committee’s report of findings and recommendations. FAC was not in full agreement on all of the recommendations and wording in the report but generally decided that the Joint Appointment Committee thoroughly investigated the relevant issues. The committee agreed in particular that the hiring letter for faculty should specify which unit criteria will be used for faculty evaluation. FAC was in agreement that most of the Joint Appointment Committee’s recommendations should be implemented in the UAF “Blue Book.” One minor complication is that at the time of this report, the Blue Book was in a final stage of revision so the committee discussed whether the Joint Appointments recommendations should be included in the current Blue Book through a motion for revision to the UAF Faculty Senate, or whether the recommendations should simply be included in the draft revised Blue Book which also must be approved by the Senate.

This FAC decided that this task is best assigned to the next FAC given the limited available time to act and the potential to do harm. Careful consideration of the recommendations and the Blue Book is required since, for example, it is not even immediately clear where new definitions should be inserted since the numbering schemes in the documents are inconsistent. A copy of the Joint Appointment Committee’s report is available by request from either Bill Bristow or Chris Fallen.