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Annual Report, Arts & Sciences Professional Standards Committee, Tuesday, May 20, 2014

Arts & Sciences Professional Standards Committee

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Professional Standards Committee

Julian Chambliss

During the 2013-2014 academic year the Professional Standard Committee balanced the procedural process related to grant review and broader issues linked to faculty teaching and service. Overall, procedural loads defined much of the year's work, but the PSC responded to concern forwarded by the faculty.

Year in Review

The PSC began the academic 2013-2014 year by supporting the Finance and Service Committee investigation of salary compression. The PSC formally asked the Dean of Arts and Science to review faculty salaries. The PSC's action supported the Finance and Service Committee examination of salary compression.

Early in the academic year the PSC activities were closely linked to activities carried over from 2012-2013 year. In particular, the PSC started the year by continuing an investigation of the Course Instructor Evaluation (CIE) system. During the 2012-2013 academic year, several concerns were raised about the CIE due to the College of Arts and Science and College of Professional Studies faculty evaluations being treated the same. At that time, the PSC was concerned because the expressed identity and aims of the two colleges differed and the dissimilarities would be reflected in student expectations and evaluations. In response the PSC began a dialogue about the course evaluation process. During that discussion, faculty and students on the committee expressed dissatisfaction with the current system. The faculty complained about the clarity of the numerical score and questions about how the evaluations were used in Tenure and Promotion. Students stated they did not understand the questions or did not take the evaluation or simply wrote whatever was necessary to get through it. After conversation with James Zimmerman a proposed new evaluation form was offered and rejected.

Continuing this discussion, the PSC met with Dr. Paul Harris and discussed the concerns. Dr. Harris was able to paint a fuller picture of the process that developed the current CIE system. Based on that conversation, the PSC recognized the current system, while an improvement from the previous system, still requires institutional engagement. In practical terms, the PSC urged faculty (during a Faculty Meeting) to consult the CIE tutorial to gain a better understanding of the results from each course. From an institutional standpoint, the PSC pursued three steps. First, the PSC asked James Zimmerman to conduct student focus groups about the CIE. Second, the PSC initiated an online faculty survey about the CIE. Third, the PSC asked James Zimmerman to conduct faculty focus groups about the CIE. The result of the student focus groups and the faculty focus groups presented differing views on the CIE process. In simple terms, students were in favor of changing the process, faculty were not committed to changing the process. The nature of this gap reflects frustrations rooted in the distinct experience facing each group. While the PSC recognized the faculty's frustrations with discussing this issue, a continuing dialogue on this issue will likely be necessary due to an emerging dialogue around a "culture of assessment" linked to our accreditation.

The continual evaluation of policy related to faculty work characterized another significant element of the committee's work this year. Early in the year the PSC discussed a question of parental leave forwarded to the committee. The committee reviewed the policies for parental leave. The committee found the established policies functional. After that discussion, the PSC addressed a question of the *definition* of service brought before the committee. The PSC examined the various means used to identify service in the college handbook and bylaws. While the committee was able to define certain aspects of service and the compensation associated with that service, other elements of service were harder to discern. The committee felt this discussion was worthwhile, but without some clearer mandate to address an imbalance related to service the committee moved on to more pressing issues. Finally, the

committee began a discussion of the requirement for faculty office hours. Currently, there is no set policy related to office hours for faculty. The committee felt this to be an oversight and will address this issue next year.

The Professional Standard Committee institutional role as the body reviewing faculty grants shaped much of the year's work. The committee's work during certain points of the year, as mandated by faculty by-laws, is oriented around these activities. In many ways, concerns growing out of the review process shaped much of the PSC activities in the latter part of the academic year. The review process generated questions by committee members and across campus. This year, the PSC took the opportunity to examine the root cause of some of these questions. The PSC discussed the grant review process for all faculty research, Student-Faculty Collaborative Research and Faculty Technology Grants with the goal of clear and equitable distribution of funds (when applicable) and clear articulation of the process when possible. In the case of the Student-Faculty Collaborative Research (SFCR) program, the PSC worked closely with Dr. Christopher Fuse to streamline the process and give the committee a clear picture of the merits and challenges associated with each proposal. The fact the SFCR requires the committee to evaluate the grants before final funding amounts are known triggered several concerns. The PSC felt a fuller report on the applicants from the program director would be helpful. As a result, the committee was able to review the grant proposal with a more detail overview of each application, prior applicant outcomes, a consideration of the program goals, and project outcomes. The committee found this information helpful while making its decisions.

In the case of the Faculty Instructional Technology Integration Grant (FITI), the PSC is asked to approve the grants that have been reviewed and ranked by Information Technology (IT). Several committee members voiced unease with this process. As a result, the committee met with Carrie Schultz to discuss the purpose of the FITI grants and the logic used to approved or deny grants by IT. As was the case with the SFCR program, the PSC felt a fuller accounting of the logic applied to supporting some and denying other applications was important. The committee recommended IT develop a stronger dialogue with the faculty about the goals associated with the FITI grants. The committee recommended IT provide an overview of the grant program at the Fall Faculty Retreat to improve the effectiveness of the program. The committee believes by providing more information, the faculty can make better choices on which resources to use and when.

Further clarification and education related to faculty research grant was the last major element of the PSC's activities this year. The committee's experience managing the grant process throughout the year highlighted ongoing confusion with faculty research grants. In particular, some committee members questioned the adoption of a limit of 20,000 dollars over six years for faculty applicants. During application review a question related to faculty returning from sabbatical triggered long debate. This debate lead the committee to a broader discussion of the language in the Grant Application Form. After some debate, the PSC determined that faculty members returning from sabbatical that had reached the six-year/20,000 limit are not eligible for grants until they dropped below the funding threshold. However, a careful review of the Grant Application Form revealed this was not clearly articulated in the document. Moreover, faculty did not have a tool to quickly surmise their funding threshold. The PSC noted this and other issues and undertook a revision of the Grant Application Form. The revised Grant Application Form incorporated clearer language and provided additional tools to assist faculty to determine their eligible funding level.