

Minutes from the FAEC Meeting with President Mercer

December 7, 2011, 12:30-1:30pm

College Mansion

Present: President Mercer, FA President Jim Morley, and FAEC Representatives Ruma Sen, Elaine Risch, Jillian Weiss, Max Goldberg, Sam Mustafa, Donna Crawley, and Peggy Greene

Minutes prepared by FA Secretary Rebecca Root

I. Tenure Caps

Pres. Morley asked Pres. Mercer what he is planning on proposing to the Board of Trustees regarding the tenure cap. Is the plan to eliminate the cap or something else?

Pres. Mercer responded that his preference would be for the Board of Trustees to rescind Policy 459 altogether. However, it is possible that they will wish to raise the cap rather than eliminate it, in which case he would advocate for a tenure cap sufficiently high to allow all current untenured, tenure-track faculty to apply for tenure without the cap impacting the decision in any way.

On Monday, Dec. 5, Pres. Mercer notified the Human Resources Committee of the Board of Trustees of his wish to place this item on the agenda for the February Board of Trustees meeting.

FAEC members raised concerns about the language of Policy 459 and the possibility that simply raising the tenure cap will only delay confronting the problem it poses.

II. Liberal Arts

Pres. Morley told Pres. Mercer that the lack of attention given to Liberal arts in official documents produced by the administration, coupled with the recent attempt to suspend the American Studies major and the denial of tenure to a member of the Spanish faculty, leaves the impression that the administration has chosen not to address the Middle States critique about Ramapo's lack of focus on the liberal arts. What is Pres. Mercer's response to that impression?

Pres. Mercer responded that he regrets that impression while acknowledging he bears some responsibility for it. The decision to deny tenure mentioned has been reversed. On the question of American Studies, there were unfortunate miscommunications, for no decision was imminent. The administration simply wanted to begin a conversation about the need for programmatic review. He reminded us of the financial pressures on the college and the reality that most of the expenses of the college are for personnel. If we address this problem by not filling vacant lines, then programs with retirement-age faculty will be unfairly impacted. Instead, we need a plan for determining where we might do with fewer faculty in future and where we need to continue to hire.

Pres. Mercer wants to bring more attention to the liberal arts. He cited the generous gift from the Salamenos to AIS as an example of the administration's advocacy for liberal arts and AIS. He stated that he does not want to see AIS suffer or be closed, and this is part of the reason he sought a named gift for the school. In general, we need to do a better job of marketing a liberal arts education as the best option for preparing young people for the demands of the working world.

Pres. Mercer noted that he and Provost Barnett need to do a better job communicating with the faculty. In turn, he hopes the faculty will be more engaged in issues like the budget and the need for programmatic review. He will plan to make himself available to answer questions about the budget in the Spring.

An FAEC representative raised concerns that we are not currently using a Strategic Enrollment Plan to recruit students into under-enrolled programs or limit admission into over-enrolled programs. Pres. Mercer suggested a working group of faculty and administrators might address these concerns together.

Another FAEC representative pointed to the lack of focus on the college mission or pillars in the current "Pushing Boundaries" marketing campaign, as well as a lack of attention to the liberal arts, diversity, or international and intercultural programs. Pres. Mercer responded that marketing advice suggested the public does not attach a great deal of meaning to the term "liberal arts", but also that the next phase of the campaign will emphasize graduates of the college in such a way as to highlight how the liberal arts has helped them in their careers.

III. Data

Pres. Morley asked Pres. Mercer when the faculty can expect to get accurate data about cost effectiveness of academic program, and who will be producing it. Pres. Mercer and Provost Barnett have stated that the current data are not sufficient, and the FAEC feels no meaningful conversation about program review can take place without this data.

Pres. Mercer responded that he does not agree that this data should be produced before faculty engage with the administration in a conversation about criteria for program review. He expressed regret that the initial recommendation to deny tenure to a faculty member was an unfortunate way to begin the conversation about programmatic needs. Nevertheless, we do need to have that conversation now.

Pres. Mercer stated that the first step should be to reassure untenured, tenure-track faculty that they can still have faith in the tenure process at the college. If there is any concern about an individual applicant's qualifications for tenure or an issue of programmatic need, those concerns should be brought forward and discussed long before the candidate applies for tenure. Pres. Mercer is hopeful that the Board of Trustees will be persuaded to eliminate or raise the tenure caps so as to prevent such a cap from serving as an artificial impediment to achieving tenure.

The next step, according to Pres. Mercer, is to develop a plan to ensure that in the future we will not have a mismatch between our number of faculty in any given program and the curricular needs of that program.

An FAEC representative raised the point that, at one point this semester, programs with fewer than 30 students enrolled in the major were asked to justify their current form or else possibly be merged with other programs. Pres. Mercer responded that, again, that was perhaps an unfortunate way to initiate this discussion of program review.

IV. Adjunct Ratio

Pres. Morley asked Pres. Mercer whether there is currently a policy stating that 25% of courses should be taught by adjuncts. If so, where is that policy?

Pres. Mercer responded that there is no such policy, so far as he is aware.

V. Request for Written Responses

Faculty have expressed a number of concerns and the FAEC would like to consolidate and refine that list of questions and give them to Pres. Mercer by February in the hopes that he will then provide written answers. Pres. Morley asked Pres. Mercer whether he would be willing to do so.

Pres. Mercer responded that he would prefer to address the faculty in person rather than via written answers to these questions. The FA has invited Pres. Mercer to address it early in the Spring semester.

Pres. Mercer did agree to provide available data that the FAEC requests of him. They will follow up soon.