

Faculty Assembly Executive Council (FAEC) Meeting Minutes

November 2, 2011, 9:15 to 11:15 am

Present: Jim Morley, Elaine Risch, Sam Mustafa, Alex Olbrecht, Ruma Sen, Donna Crawley, Jillian Weiss, Max Goldberg

Absent: Peggy Greene

Secretary: Rebecca Root

1. Minutes for FAEC of October 26 approved.

2. President Morley's Report

Pres. Morley reports on the conversations he has had with Provost Barnett regarding the question of program closures. The Provost and President Mercer hold the position that faculty consent is not needed for the administration to closure academic programs. Pres. Morley addresses his understanding of the terms "consult" and "consent" in this discussion, emphasizing that the faculty is asking to be presenting with compelling rationales before any such closure be contemplated.

Discussion of historical precedents from major changes to academic programs without faculty consent, namely the dissolving of the Division of Basic Studies.

Though faculty will understandably be concerned about the impact any programmatic changes might have on their own job security, this is above all a matter of maintaining the academic integrity of the college. We will keep both concerns at the forefront.

3. Faculty participation in Strategic Planning

Pres. Morley sent a letter to Pres. Mercer on this issue and is waiting for a response.

Secretary Root notes that the 2007 Strategic Plan committee included 12 members, two of them faculty (and one of those an untenured Assistant Professor). The current President's Cabinet has 10 members (though some are likely non-voting). It seems reasonable to imagine that the upcoming Strategic Plan committee might include 15-20 members.

Rep. Crawley recommends abandoning the previous model FAEC had discussed for selecting faculty participants in the Strategic Plan. Instead, she recommends we revert to recommending one representative be elected from each unit, plus one from the library. In addition there could be one All-College rep. and one seat for an untenured faculty member.

FAEC reaches consensus in favor of Rep. Crawley's proposal, and will proceed with developing recommended criteria for units to consider in selecting participants.

4. Elections

Rep. Olbrecht, the FA Parliamentarian, approves the timeline for elections discussed at the Oct. 26 FAEC. He notes that once Pres. Mercer approves a faculty member's tenure, they become eligible for election (as the Board of Trustees' decision often comes later, after the elections).

Pres. Morley will go over the elections timeline at FA today, and Secretary Root will include this information along with today's FAEC Key Points email to all faculty.

5. Suspension of sabbaticals

Pres. Morley briefly reports AFT's action on this matter, which Irene Kutcha will address at today's FA. AFT has collected information from several other schools in the union and found that several are proceeding with review of sabbatical applications. The Ramapo chapter of the AFT has voted to proceed with this as well.

6. Three hour courses

Pres. Morley raises the concern that there is no clear written policy about the new limitations imposed on 3 hour courses. The Provost announced a policy that no more than 25% of courses in any school can be taught in 3-hour time blocks, with certain exemptions like labs. This policy was formalized only through a letter from the Provost to the Deans, but no detailed guidelines about the exemptions or specifics of implementation were included or are public.

Pres. Morley proposes FAEC charge ARC to develop a written policy on this matter.

Several representatives raise doubts that this is something we want ARC to pursue or make into a formal policy. The issue is tabled until the next FAEC meeting.

7. Preparation for meeting with Provost Barnett and FA resolution on termination of academic programs.

a. Review of relevant data

Rep. Mustafa discusses what data is available through the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Research and Planning (henceforth IERP). Though the "Delaware data" is available, it is largely unanalyzed raw data, the purpose of which is to compare the cost of delivering a given major across colleges.

The data that is most relevant to our discussion at the moment is IERP data on cost effectiveness, which is based on a simple formula: how much tuition is paid by students enrolled in a program's courses, minus the salaries of the faculty teaching those courses. That data is available here: http://ww2.ramapo.edu/administration/oirp/faculty_info.aspx

The Program Review reports here show that every major in AIS, CA, SSSH, and ASB generates net revenue according to this formula. In the case of TAS, a lot of data is missing so there is no determination for most programs whether they have net revenue.

There is also a document here entitled “Fall 2011 Enrollment by Major, Second Major, and Minors.” To get the total number of majors enrolled in a program, one would add the figure in the column labeled “Major” with the figure in the column labeled “Major_2”. So, for example, though both Spanish Language Studies and Economics have a number less than 30 under “Major”, when we add second majors, they are over the threshold of 30 majors that the Provost has referenced as relevant to review of programs for possible closure or merger with other programs.

Rep. Mustafa has also examined data on American Studies course enrollments. Over the last three academic years, courses with the “AMER” prefix have been filled to an average of 96% of capacity.

b. Program review

Rep. Risch raises the issue of program review, which has traditionally been done through 5 year reviews involving external reviewers as well as internal review. Are those not now relevant to a program’s continuation or closure? Are they part of the criteria the Provost is considering? These 5 year reviews have now been replaced with annual reports. What impact might that change have on the quality of program review and the discussion of program change?

8. 10:30-11:15am, Meeting with Provost Barnett

a. What programs is the Provost asking to provide justification for their continuation in current form (as independent majors)?

Provost Barnett referred us to the “Fall 2011 Enrollment by Major, Second Major, and Minors” document (the frozen file for Fall 2011) document discussed above. She explained that this is the basis she used for identifying programs that need to provide a justification for continuation as an independent major. On the document, she has highlighted programs with fewer than 30 majors, but also notes that some of these are contract majors (eg. Liberal Studies) or joint programs (eg. Allied Health), which means they are exempted from requiring justification. Graduate programs are also being exempted at this time.

The programs that are identified here that require justification are Africana Studies (3 majors), American Studies (18 majors), and Bioinformatics (23 majors). (Note that Physics has already been closed as the convening group transitioned to Engineering Physics.) Of course, other programs might drop below 30 in future.

b. Is closure of these majors the outcome the Provost is considering?

Attached to that document, Provost Barnett has stapled a copy of a letter/email she sent to Eddie Saiff, Dean of TAS, on October 5, 2011. In this, she refers Dean Saiff to the enrollment data discussed above and asks him to develop justification for keeping TAS majors with fewer than 30 students enrolled “as independent majors”. We need to consider whether several of these might become tracks within larger majors.” Provost Barnett states that similar letters/emails have been sent to other deans of programs with under 30 majors. She has asked the Deans’ Council to begin to develop criteria to justify keeping programs with enrollment under 30 as independent majors.

Provost Barnett notes that she is not talking about “closing” programs in the sense of permanently removing them “from the books,” which would then require a whole new process of approval before they could ever be reopened. Rather, as in this email to Dean Saiff, she is considering merging programs, putting them in abeyance/hiatus, or other options.

c. Is number of majors the only criterion the Provost is currently taking into consideration?

Rep. Risch asks whether enrollment in majors is the only criteria being considered at this point. Provost Barnett responds that this is a first step; having over 30 students enrolled (which she acknowledges in an arbitrary number that she chose) might not exempt programs from the need to justify continuation. In other words, having more than 30 enrollees in a major “doesn’t mean a program is safe.”

Provost Barnett agrees that other criteria should also be part of any decision affecting program changes. She has already been discussing a variety of models of criteria for program change with the deans. Some programs, even if operating at a loss, might be important to sustain simply because of their relevance to the liberal arts core or to the mission of the college. She mentions other possible criteria as well, such as demand for a major and enrollment in courses.

Rather than state a single set of criteria that she has developed to guide decision about such changes, the Provost requests that faculty offer their own set of criteria and develop a process to guide program change. She has suggested to Pres. Morley that the issue be given to ARC, but it is up to the faculty to decide how to proceed. Another option she suggests would be to convene a Task Force of faculty to work on this. There currently is no procedure or set of criteria for program closure, hiatus or merger, and Provost wants faculty to dialogue with the administration to develop them.

Rep. Weiss asks whether decisions will be held off until such a Task Force develops criteria/process. Provost Barnett responds that she wants these developed this academic year. The earliest any program could be put in abeyance would be the start of Fall 2013.

In addition to faculty-developed criteria/process, the Provost has also asked the deans to develop criteria as well. She has received suggestions from one or two deans already.

d. Is this about saving the college money? Is there evidence the contemplated changes would save the college money?

Yes, this is about saving the college money, however cost is not the only criterion for program evaluation.

Rep. Risch asks whether these programs are losing money, or if closure of these programs would save the school money. Provost Barnett responds that, unfortunately, we do not yet have good data on this. For example, the “Delaware data” is not accurate. The IERP data focuses on a single dimension: tuition earned from students enrolled in classes in a major, minus the salaries of faculty teaching those courses. She suggests that accurate figures would need to include other costs of delivering those courses, like providing library services, labs, heating the buildings, etc. (in other words, fixed costs of operating the college).

Rep. Weiss raises the point that, given that we have no data to indicate which academic programs are losing money, it is not yet clear that any changes to academic programs are necessary. Acquiring this data appears to be the vital first step. Rep. Goldberg asks when reliable data about the costs and net revenue or losses for academic programs might be available.

Provost Barnett responds that acquiring this data is not the first step. The first step, in her opinion, is determining the criteria and process by which programs will be reviewed to determine whether they continue in their present form.

e. Provost Barnett has already notified at least two deans that they need to provide justification for the continuation of academic programs with under 30 students enrolled in the major in their present form (ie. as independent majors). It seems she already has a criterion in mind then, and has initiated a process toward program review. Now she is asking the deans and faculty to develop criteria and process for this. What impact will faculty input have at this point?

Provost Barnett reminded us that the Board of Trustees has the power to close any academic program, and it does not need to consult with faculty beforehand. The Board of Trustees has given her the authority to make recommendations about changes to academic programs; she is now asking the deans and faculty to work with her on developing a process and criteria to evaluate programs. There is nothing that requires the administration to consult faculty on this or gain their consent. However, once a process has been put into place, the College must follow it.

Rep Weiss raises the FA-approved resolution of 2010. At that time, Provost Barnett agreed that proposed actions to be taken by the College on academic and curricular matters are to be reviewed by the Faculty Assembly Academic Review Committee, the recommendation of which is required before the actions may be taken. Provost Barnett responds that even if ARC or the FA recommended against a change to an academic program, she could still recommend that change to the Board of Trustees, who then

makes the final decision. Hence the Provost does not require the “consent” of the faculty in these matters.

Rep. Weiss raises the issue of American Studies and the fact that it was asked to provide justification for its continuation before the Provost began this conversation with the faculty about identifying criteria for program reviews or changes. Provost Barnett responds that there must have been some miscommunication, because she never warned American Studies that it might be closed. American Studies convener Steve Rice asked Provost Barnett for an extension (beyond a Fall 2012 deadline for increasing enrollment in order to keep the major in the catalog for academic year 2013-2014). Provost Barnett told him that she cannot grant him an extension on a process that does not yet exist.

f. What would happen to faculty members in programs that were ultimately put in abeyance or merged into other majors?

Provost Barnett responds that this would be a union issue, but that tenured faculty have a right to request reassignment. Untenured faculty might not be reassigned; they have no guarantees of continued employment.

g. What does all this signify in term of changes to the process of program reviews, previously conducted as “5 Year Reviews”?

Provost Barnett states that programs are still free to conduct 5 year reviews, but those reports were “not going anywhere” in the past. She feels that Middle States is pushing us in the direction of continuous review processes to guarantee quality control, so she has asked deans to oversee the development and implementation of annual program review reports. She proposed this to the deans in Spring 2011. In October, Vice Provost Eric Daffron gave the deans a draft of guidelines for conducting Annual Reports, and has asked them to put this before unit councils for consideration and feedback. She expects deans will put it before unit councils today. Part of the reason for this Annual Report is to generate data that might impact changes to academic programs. These Annual Reports would be implemented next academic year.

Several representatives report that this change to Annual Reports has been presented to faculty as a *fait accompli*. Rep. Crawley raises a concern that a shift away from the 5 year review process and its reliance in part on an external reviewer might weaken the review process. Provost Barnett says she has not done away with opportunity to bring in external reviewers.

Provost Barnett notes that assessment data might also be a factor in considerations about whether programs might not be sustainable in their present form. One step in determining how to strengthen programs might be for programs to bring in an external reviewer.