

Faculty Assembly Executive Council (FAEC) Meeting Minutes

November 9, 2011, 9:15 to 11:00 am

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

Secretary: Rebecca Root

1. Minutes for FAEC of November 2 approved.

2. Report from the President Morley

The committee in charge of overseeing the development of the new Academic Commons met. They did a walk-through of the Carriage House, and discussed whether options for food service in the new facility, as well as defining the purpose of the space and conveying that to the Events and Planning Office, which will presumably be in charge of managing scheduling the use of the space.

Discussion of last FA meeting (November 2). Subsequent to that meeting, Pres. Morley met with Pres. Mercer to discuss the question of program review and the role of faculty in decisions over academic programs. Pres. Morley expressed to Pres. Mercer many of the concerns raised by faculty at the last FA and FAEC, such as the lack of data informing this process.

Pres Mercer has confirmed that the process for promotions and tenure is not being suspended or altered for next year. He will soon announce the number of slots for promotion.

Pres. Mercer has also accepted the FAEC's proposal to have a total of seven faculty representatives participate in the Strategic Plan. This will include one representative from each of the five schools, one from the library, and one All-College representative. He leaves it to the faculty to decide whether one untenured faculty member should serve as one of the seven. He agreed that the faculty voice should be strong and effective in shaping the Strategic Plan.

3. Updates on progress on FAEC Priorities for 2011-12

a. Online Student Evaluations – Rep. Crawley

Rep. Crawley met with Provost Barnett and Chief Information Officer George Tabback and discussed the issues of response rate and the feasibility of bringing technology into the classroom to allow for simultaneous submissions of student online evals. They responded positively to these concerns, and ITS will look into acquiring the necessary technology. What seems likely is that those who are not concerned about the simultaneity of submissions would use a more traditional online student evaluation system, but there would be technology available to bring into the classroom for those who are concerned about simultaneity. ITS is also going to work on coming up with several format options

for reports generated from the evaluation data. They are now beginning to review the software and format options available. George Tabback and Bill Johnson in ITS are the point people on this. They will also look into the possibility of a Smartphone app. for online evaluations.

b. Minimal Standards for Online Courses – Rep. Weiss

Rep. Weiss has begun developing proposals in this area, but hesitates because of the resistance encountered at the last FA. Rep Sen recommended putting any proposals before the FA and giving faculty the opportunity to respond during the development process. Rep. Olbrecht raised objection to this initiative to develop minimal standards for online courses. Rep. Weiss and possibly also Rep. Greene will consult with Prof. Lysandra Perez-Strumolo on how best to proceed.

c. SBR – Rep. Sam Mustafa

The SBR Task Force has been in discussions with Provost Barnett, who has agreed to a framework for payment in the form of a reimbursement as an alternative to stipends. Given this agreement, the Task Force is now proceeding with drafting the necessary guidelines. They do not anticipate having a formal policy proposal to put before the FAEC or FA until next semester.

4. Meeting with President Mercer and Provost Barnett (10-11am)

Provost Barnett arrived first, so Pres. Morley took advantage of the opportunity to raise faculty concerns about the impact of G wing renovations on faculty offices. Provost Barnett referred the question to Associate VP of Administration & Finance Dick Roberts. Provost suggested there should be collaboration between the faculty and Dick Roberts on this issue. The Provost's Council has not received the plans from his office yet.

The Provost's Council is meeting on Nov 10. As Pres. Morley will be away at the AAUP conference, and FA Vice President Jill Weiss is not available, Rep. Mustafa will attend.

Finally, Pres. Morley asked why sabbaticals are treated separately from the tenure and promotions process, referencing the state's suspension of the sabbatical process for next year but the continuation of the tenure and promotions process. Provost Barnett clarified that while sabbaticals are covered by union contracts, tenure and promotion are not dependent on such contracts, but rather derive from state statute.

At this point, Pres. Mercer arrived.

a. Program Review

Pres. Morley asked Pres. Mercer to explain the reasons for the administration undertaking a review of majors with under 30 students enrolled. Is there a financial crisis that

necessitates this?

Pres. Mercer noted that the President's Cabinet has tried to shift the emphasis at Ramapo from spending on support services to spending directly tied to teaching and learning. In the past, they found Ramapo had spent much more on support services relative to teaching and learning compared to other schools, and have been attempting to shift this ratio in favor of the latter. At the same time, however, the college's revenues have increasingly come from tuition rather than state support. Each year, Pres. Mercer submits a budget proposal for the college to the state. In the past, he has generally asked for budget increases at least ahead of the cost of inflation. This year he asked for Ramapo to be granted the same level of funding as the median spending for colleges in the state. He has not received a response yet, but is hopeful the state may find that reasonable. Nevertheless, given that undergraduate enrollment has been capped (thereby limiting potential new revenue from traditional undergraduate students), there is financial pressure to cut costs. Furthermore, based on nationwide demographic trends, all colleges anticipate fewer traditional-aged college entrants in the years ahead.

It is now necessary to consider whether the college is spending money effectively, which requires examining questions like teaching load, numbers of students in programs, etc. Though there is not a crisis yet, they are trying to put a review process in place now to guide future decisions about how to rationalize spending. The State and Middle States have mandated that Strategic Planning and financial planning be fundamentally integrated, so this program review is part of strategic and financial planning.

Pres. Morley asked how putting small majors in abeyance or merging them with other majors can save the college money. Pres. Mercer responded that this is a question of rationalizing our programs and resource allocations, and that we have to consider whether there is sufficient demand to justify the number of faculty we have in any given program. He suggests that a program review of this type might also indicate that we should add new programs based on demand. In other words, rationalizing spending might mean non-renewal of the contracts of some faculty, but new lines for other programs.

Rep. Mustafa noted that, though some majors may have few students declaring that major, they nevertheless have high levels of enrollments in the courses in that program. How could putting such a major in abeyance or merging it with others then save money for the college?

Pres. Mercer agreed that would probably not save money. Rep. Mustafa followed up by asking if there are other ways that such a change to a major could save the college money other than by not reappointing untenured faculty? Pres. Mercer responded that non-reappointment of untenured faculty in these programs would be the primary source of savings, but that some overhead costs might be reduced as well. Rep. Mustafa expressed concern that this process appears to be aimed at laying off untenured faculty, rather than encouraging early retirements of senior faculty or finding other sources of savings. Pres. Mercer responded that encouraging early retirement would require financial incentives, so would be more costly than not renewing the contracts of untenured faculty.

Rep. Weiss raised concerns about how this program review process has been communicated to faculty, who first learned of this because a major (American Studies) felt its existence was threatened from removal from the 2013-14 catalog if it did not increase enrollments by Fall 2012. Provost Barnett responded that she communicated to all deans of programs with under 30 majors (a copy of her memo to the TAS dean was distributed at the meeting last week). While she cannot comment on discussions she did not attend, she stated that it is apparent that her communication was misunderstood. During the meeting in which AIS Dean Nejad and American Studies convener Prof. Steve Rice met to discuss the matter, Prof Rice interpreted the conversation to mean that his program would be discontinued if enrollment did not increase. No doubt both were concerned about what this program review might mean for the program.

Pres. Mercer asked exactly what criteria and data analysis methods should be used to determine that a major requires review. Provost Barnett responded that she wants the deans and faculty to develop the criteria. Possible criteria might include course enrollment, institutional fit, cost, and student demand (judged both by trends in recent years in terms of enrollment in a major, but also projections of demand).

Provost Barnett noted that the proposed Annual Report is geared toward collecting the data that might inform the choice of programs to scrutinize. The proposed Annual Report specifies some of the relevant data, like the number of students that graduated from a program over the past three years. Other relevant data is collected by the Admissions Office, which charts how many applications the college receives by major, how many of those students then come to Ramapo, etc. She also suggests we need to look at data about the job market for graduating students to determine demand for programs.

Rep. Weiss stated that the proposed program review is a major undertaking requiring the collection of a great deal of data and then weighing multiple criteria to shape any decisions about program changes. Provost Barnett has asked for faculty and deans to develop criteria during this academic year, but this is too big an undertaking to complete in that time frame. Provost Barnett first indicated that she is not asking the faculty to collect data. She is asking that they consider the criteria by which we might assess the viability of a program. Then the questions of what data is needed, who provides this data, and who interprets the results of data analysis can be addressed. Provost Barnett further responded that the college faces demands for this kind of data-informed rationalization of resources from the federal government, Middle States, and other sources. She noted that the faculty is doing a great job of producing assessment data about the effectiveness of student learning within our academic programs and that this data is being used to assess the effectiveness of program curriculum; the college now needs to undertake a similarly systematic process of data collection and program review with an eye to generate greater cost efficiency. She added that other parts of the college will also have to go through cost efficiency reviews.

Rep. Crawley asked if there is an office on campus tasked with making projections about demand for various programs. Pres. Mercer responded that the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Research and Planning (IERP) is responsible for generating such data.

Rep. Weiss asked how faculty can engage in this review process without first seeing the relevant data. Provost Barnett responded that IERP is responsible for producing the data, but faculty and deans need to develop the criteria to guide the program review process prior to analyzing data. Pres. Mercer said there is good data available, primarily collected over the last year, and we need to analyze it now.

Rep. Sen asked for more specifics about what the administration is asking the faculty to given them as criteria, such as whether these are general criteria that should apply uniformly to all programs. Provost Barnett responded that the criteria should form a system or model of analysis that is not specific to a single program or school. Rep. Risch and Rep. Greene raised points about the need for this process to be framed in terms of dialogue between faculty, staff and administrators, and as about projecting the needs of the school.

Pres. Mercer said it is fair for faculty to demand from them a document to kickstart this process by laying out what they are asking the faculty for in this process. Rep. Sen and Rep. Goldberg asked about the nature of this document and whether it would include Ramapo-specific data. Pres. Mercer responded that such data would certainly be part of the ongoing dialogue between faculty and administration in this process.

Consensus was reached that one or more documents from the administration specifying the data indicating the need for this process, as well as the nature of the administration's request of faculty for criteria, would be an important first step.

b. Provost's Council's Upcoming Vote on Minimum Graduation Requirement

The Provost's Council has on its agenda for tomorrow (Nov 10) the Policy on Minimum Requirements for the Baccalaureate Degree which includes lowering the college's minimum required number of credits for the completion of a bachelor's degree to 120 credits, which would bring us in line with federal, Middle States, and New Jersey standards. Provost Barnett clarified that academic programs would still be free to require 128 credits if they wished, and as indeed, might be necessary for certain majors.

A number of concerns were raised by FAEC reps., but given that the time for this meeting had expired, Pres. Morley requested that Provost Barnett delay the vote on this question until the FAEC has a chance to examine the issue further. Provost Barnett agreed. Issue tabled until next meeting.