

## **Faculty Assembly Minutes**

Wednesday, October 19, 2011

1:00-2:30pm, Trustees Pavilion

Secretary: Prof. Rebecca Root

**1. Acceptance of the minutes from FA of September 21.** Motion, seconded, approved.

### **2. President's report (FA President, Prof. Jim Morley)**

The next FA is in two weeks. Discussion items from today may result in decision items at next or future FAs.

Reviewed the seven priorities of FAEC for the year and highlights developments related to these priorities. For example, Pres. Morley will be serving on a new committee in charge of planning for the Academic Commons. The FAEC has also met with Judith Jeney to discuss use of Sedona software for electronic submission and management of tenure/promotion/reappointment materials.

FAEC has been active on other fronts as well. Cathy Davey met with the FAEC to discuss the Ramapo Foundation and to address ways to improve upon communication between the foundation and the faculty. FAEC met with Dorothy Echols Tobe to discuss parking (shortly before the new policy was announced). Faculty are not going to be forced to pay for parking spots, but there is still concern that there may be increased pressure on the number of spots available in A lot. FAEC will continue to report back to FA on this issue.

Reminder that elections for FAEC representatives and president are coming up. FAEC is discussing putting together a nominations committee to identify candidates for FA president, but not for unit reps. The nominations committee will be to try to persuade individuals with experience in faculty governance, communication skills, ability to work with administration, etc. to run. Those who are not nominated by the committee can of course still run for president.

### **3. Union report (Librarian and AFT Local 2274 Pres. Irene Kuchta)**

Noted that the original proposal for parking was much worse for faculty and staff. The current plan reflects changes that AFT asked for to that plan.

There is no progress on negotiations over the contract, indeed there are currently no negotiating meetings scheduled. The union is in discussions with the NJ State Office of Employee Relations on the status of sabbaticals. She hopes to have a report for the faculty next week on this issue. Next Wed at 11:30 in SC136 there is a general membership meeting for AFT.

### **4. Diversity Action Committee (Prof Paula Straile-Costa, Co-Chair of DAC)**

Addressed the role of DAC and how it supports the mission of the college, Strategic Plan, etc. DAC is interested in diversity as it relates to curriculum, recruitment of faculty/staff etc, campus safety and accessibility, etc. DAC is composed of faculty, staff and students. Those interested in serving on DAC should email her.

This year's student competition is focused on the theme of "celebrating gifts of diversity." Not only papers (as in the past), but submissions in other media (sculpture, painting, etc.) are welcome. Please encourage your students to submit. The four winners will be recognized at the spring Diversity Convocation. Pernessa Seele, CEO of non-profit of Balm in Gilead (a grassroots interfaith org focused on equal access to medical services among the African diaspora), will be the speaker for Diversity Convocation. Also in the Spring, DAC will carry out a campus climate survey. She will address FA on that issue again then.

## **5. Discussion items.**

FAEC selected four of its seven priorities for 2011-12 for presentation and discussion at this FA.

### **a. Streamlining reappointment, promotion and tenure procedures, with the aim of reducing paperwork via the voluntary adoption by faculty of Sedona software.**

(Presented by FAEC Rep. Prof. Alex Olbrecht)

Packets for reappointment/tenure/promotion have grown enormous, hence the need to streamline. Our union contract says we have to submit materials, but not necessarily how we submit. One option is using Sedona software to create a "virtual packet." This would create greater ease for the committee, who can access the packets from any location, and reduce ecological footprint of the packets. Materials (like journal articles) are simply uploaded into the software. The software also is helpful in quickly converting data into appropriate formats, like that of the "Ramapo cv".

Prof. Susan Hangen, current chair of the all-college tenure committee, spoke in favor of adoption of Sedona because often materials end up buried in massive packets and in parts of the packet other than where the committee is looking for them. Software like this would enable the committee to more easily access the materials they need to review.

A number of concerns were raised by faculty in Q&A. Rep. Olbrecht suggested that without guidelines, the introduction of this software may actually encourage candidate to submit even more material. Several faculty members raised questions about whether multimedia material can be uploaded easily and whether there are size limits for files. Judith Jeney answered that the software should be especially useful to those who wish to submit multimedia materials and that there is no limit to file size.

She reminded us that this is an introductory conversation about Sedona and she encourages us to do a demo of the software and see what we think; she welcomes people approaching her to talk about the software. She states that there are multiple levels of

security access to the files, and that because it is password protected, they are satisfied with the degree of security it offers. Her office creates the accounts for faculty, so if you wish to gain access, see her.

Above all, it is important to remember that faculty are not being forced to use Sedona; this is an option. People are free to continue using traditional packets.

**b. Examining the question of pedagogical standards in online courses.** (Presented by FAEC Rep. Prof. Jillian Weiss)

There is some concern that standards for online courses are much less clearly defined than those for in-person classes. Suggested we should have guidelines for expectations of pedagogy (rather than simply content) in online courses. This would also be useful to faculty teaching online for the first time as a jumping off point about “good practices”, as well as for faculty wishing to refine their online teaching.

Some faculty argued this would be helpful to give some sense of what is equivalent to the work in an online course. Others are skeptical, asking why such guidelines are necessary when they don’t exist for in-person courses, and how these guidelines would be implemented. The traditional means of reviewing pedagogy in in-person classes (namely peer and dean review via sitting in on a class) now should apply equally to online courses. Some deans and peers apparently already do reviews of online courses, but perhaps this is not standard practice across all schools.

A fair degree of consensus does seem to exist that resources to support those who wish to teach online are needed. Perhaps the Faculty Resource Center can provide training sessions on online courses; perhaps sample courses should be available for perusal; perhaps the IT offices can provide support. At least one faculty member raises the concern about security (such as, how do you know it is the actual student taking the course?).

**c. Implementing online course evaluations that satisfy faculty concerns, namely the degree to which students will complete them, and the need for the reports generated by these evaluations to be in a clear format that provides information faculty will be able to use.** (Presented by FA Pres. Prof. Jim Morley)

In recent pilot studies at Ramapo, the return rate for online student evaluations is approx. 60%, which is better than the nation-wide average of approx. 50%. For in-person evaluations, the return rate is approx. 90% at Ramapo.

What concerns would have to be addressed before online student evaluations would be acceptable to the faculty? The first major concern expressed by many is the issue of return rates. Though online evaluations reduce our ecological footprint, the lower return rates mean a less representative sample of student opinion. There is discussion of how to improve return rates.

A second major concern raised is the issue of simultaneous submission of evaluations. Several faculty voiced concern that if students can complete online evaluations at any hour the results may have less integrity. If students were to complete online evaluations at the same time (either in a computer lab, with laptops brought by students or provided in the classroom that day, or even perhaps by a smartphone app) this problem could be resolved. It is noted that though the provision of technology to address this may be costly, it would surely be less costly than having secretaries input all evaluations data manually.

**d. Ensuring an authentic and effective faculty voice in the upcoming Strategic Plan.**  
(Presented by FAEC Pres. Prof. Jim Morley)

The Provost suggested that each dean should choose one faculty member from their unit to participate in the Strategic Plan committee. FAEC suggests that instead, faculty ought to choose the representatives through a vote at FA. (Steve Perry, Dean of CA, notes that in the past faculty have had only two representatives involved in strategic planning, so the deans proposed increasing it to five, one from each school.)

Discussion of the criteria to consider in selecting faculty participants in the Strategic Plan, like having a vision for the college as a whole, or skill sets relevant to strategic planning. Prof. Keisha Haywood suggests (to applause) that one or more untenured faculty be included. Others suggest that the criteria include candidates with a vision for the college that is consistent with Ramapo's mission and/or the International Education Strategic Plan already in existence. Others are concerned with the idea of abandoning the principle of equal representation for each school.

Discussion of how to identify and select candidates. Because there is a concern that too few people will volunteer to stand for election as faculty representatives to the Strategic Plan, the FAEC proposes the formation of a 3-person nominating committee to identify candidates, persuade them to run, and then bring the nominees before the FA for election. If someone wishes to volunteer, they should contact this nominating committee (if and when it is formed).

Some doubts and concerns are raised about this nominating committee. Some ask why not just let volunteers come forward and then let the FA vote? Can those not nominated by the nominations committee still run?

Tabled until next FA, at which the FAEC may put forward its proposal for the formation of a nominations committee.

## **6. New Business**

Prof. Steve Rice raised a faculty governance issue. Provost Barnett has stated that majors with low enrollments may be closed or consolidated. American Studies has been informed that a failure to raise enrollments from its present level may result in merging or dismantling of the convening group. Prof. Tae Kwak notes that at today's Unit Council,

AIS faculty voted unanimously to resist any attempt by the administration to dismantle American Studies.

Provost Barnett responded that there is currently no procedure for the closure of programs. She states that she has asked faculty to develop the criteria for such a procedure for the last 5 years and has received no response. She argues this must be taken on now.

Faculty raise the issue of the suspension of sabbatical. There is strong feeling that faculty should express their rejection of the administration's action on this matter. Many of our colleagues submitted their applications for sabbatical only to have them returned with the notification that there will be no sabbaticals. Would the disrespect done to our colleagues not be compounded by the faculty's acquiescence to this suspension by not reviewing the applications as normal? Pres. Morley suggested it might be unfair to now restart the review process, as not all schools had their faculty submit applications. However, the response from the floor assures him that all schools were accepting applications for sabbatical.

Provost Barnett responded that the college cannot and will not move forward on sabbaticals given the order issued by the state, as doing so would result in Ramapo College being punished financially. She states that "while it has been traditional for faculty to enjoy a seventh year rest", they will not enjoy such rest next year. Outcry ensued, with faculty pointing out that sabbatical is not granted for "rest" but for research and expressing alarm that the provost would mischaracterize sabbatical in this way.

## **7. Close of Business meeting**

## **8. Announcements**

Prof. Paula Straile-Costa announced that the Henry Bischoff award for excellence in teaching will be awarded to Prof. Peter Campbell next week in the York Room.