

Minutes
Faculty Senate Special Meeting
Jan.30, 2003

1. In attendance: John Brower, chair; Grant Mitman, Chip Todd, Rick Appleman, Andrea Stierle, Doug Cameron, Danette Melvin, Mary MacLaughlin, John Metesh. Absent: Dave Carter (prior engagement). Invited guests: Chancellor Frank Gilmore, VCAAR Susan Patton. Faculty: Jack Maguire, Rick Douglass, Rick Donovan.

2. The special meeting of the faculty senate was called to order at 8:00 AM in the Mountain Con room, SUB.

3. New evaluation system.

The meeting was called at the request of Chancellor Gilmore, primarily to respond to the senate's appeal of last December to postpone implementation of the new evaluation system. Chancellor Gilmore was given first opportunity to address the senate, and began with commentary about having to respond to various faculty representatives, not just the faculty senate. He next addressed the evaluation system, and noted that it is in response to verbal warnings given by a NWASC representative upon departure after their last accreditation visit, and to comply with Board of Regents requirements. The system is intended to bring uniformity to student evaluation of faculty teaching effectiveness.

The senate chair responded that, while any and all faculty members can bring their concerns to the Chancellor, the faculty senate is the elected body that represents the faculty as a whole, no matter how imperfect the process may be. Regarding the evaluation process, it was noted that evaluation results from last semester are still not in the hands of some faculty at this late date, and therefore of no use in correcting any problems that may have been noted. Moreover, portfolios for faculty up for promotion and tenure, and periodic reporting for non-tenured faculty are due tomorrow (Feb. 1st), and are supposed to contain the last semester's teaching evaluations. Concern was also expressed about several of the questions being of little value in improvement of teaching, but of great potential harm in tallying-up the results of any given evaluation. The questions need to be reviewed, modified, or rejected. The drafting committee members were inexperienced in the whole area of constructing such an important document and process, and did not review the evaluation tools used by sister campuses in Montana, which presumably are meeting the concerns of NWASC and BOR and faculty.

The issue of summarizing student comments was raised, the concerns being that they are to be done by administrative staff with no such training, and that even with due diligence, confidentiality of comments is at risk while they are being summarized, human nature and gossip being what they are. VCAAR Patton informed the senate that the summaries are not being done this time, and that the original evaluation sheets are being returned to faculty after department heads have reviewed them.

The chair noted that this process marks a turnabout from past practice where professors received the forms directly, after semester grades had been posted. VCAAR Patton responded that with that process, there was no assurance that professors had not

tossed-out the bad evaluations, resulting in evaluation packets that were not valid. Chair responded that this marks a change from trust of faculty to mistrust, that the very evaluation guidebook used by the drafting committee listed the turning-over of raw evaluation forms to the administration as a “must not do,” and that there is no assurance that administrators will not tamper with the originals.

The chair noted that it is absolutely essential that the faculty trust and feel comfortable with something as vital to their careers as the performance evaluation method and tools. Instead, an atmosphere of mistrust and fear has been created, wherein faculty suspect that the new system is aimed at compiling evidence for termination, rather than being aimed at improvement of teaching. This could have been avoided had the administration ensured faculty review of the questionnaire and process. What occurred, however, was spotty review at best, with most faculty being taken by surprise at the implementation of a new and un-tried system. Thus the senate’s request (after two faculty votes) that the implementation be delayed until review and acceptance had been accomplished. Chancellor Gilmore responded that this issue has been going on for years at Montana Tech, that resolution should come as no surprise, and that the senate had opted-out of recommending an evaluation process in the past. He also noted that he had been in error in believing that an earlier evaluation committee appointed by ex-VCAAR Bradley was a senate-led committee, whereas in fact it was a VCAAR ad-hoc committee with no chairman to coordinate work or report results.

The senate chair requested that the senate be authorized by the Chancellor to review the current status of the new evaluation system, and to draft recommendations aimed at making the system acceptable and workable. Chancellor Gilmore responded that this would be satisfactory, but that he would not be bound to accept recommendations. The senate voted unanimously that such a committee be created.

4. Collegiate Evaluation Committee.

Problems of the recent past were discussed, mainly that candidates for promotion or tenure were not given sufficient information about the format and content of portfolios to be submitted to the CEC, resulting in rejection and therefore ineligibility for further consideration. Chancellor Gilmore stated that [*although*] the CEC [*does not*] have “Pass/Fail” authority, [*and is*] ~~not just~~ advisory, [*he would be foolish to ignore its findings*]. After further discussion, it was recommended that the CEC provide candidates with written guidelines, including specific items needed, rather than merely providing candidates with examples of successful portfolios (which they should also do).

5. Super Tuition.

At the request of Chancellor Gilmore, forwarded through the faculty senate’s representative on the Chancellor’s Cabinet (Dave Carter), the senate discussed the idea of charging higher tuition (“super tuition”) for higher-cost degree programs. This is done in several high cost/high value programs such as architecture, pharmacy, and the Tech nursing program.

The senate voted unanimously to recommends against targeting specific departments for super tuition. Actual higher costs for labs and special materials should continue to be recovered through existing cost recovery charges.

The senate's concerns included, (a) driving engineering students away, (b) harming overall competitiveness vis-à-vis other campuses, especially in the current weak economy, (c) recognition that Montana Tech's high cost programs also tend to be the ones that define its identity, and therefore their loss would damage the campus, (d) difficulty in defining which collateral departments should share the cost burden that may result from teaching students from the high cost programs, (e) inability to direct super tuition funds to specific high-cost items, and (f) the strong possibility that students would avoid super tuition by declaring a low-cost major, meanwhile taking courses in a high cost major and switching in their senior year. The senate feels that if more tuition revenue is needed, it should be borne by all students. The possibility of a year-by-year tuition increase, instead of the lower-upper division single step should be considered.

Submitted by John Brower, Senate Chair