Minutes from the Regular Meeting of the USAO Faculty Association

Tuesday, November 3, 2009

Signed in as present:


I. Call to order by President Dr. Steve Weber at 11:10 am.

  • Opening Announcement as members sign in:

    o Vice President of Information Services and Technology Lynn Boyce and Anna Marie Pratt from Institutional Research and Assessment are with us to address the questions about online evaluations that were raised at the October Meeting of the Faculty Association. (*See Old Business for Notes of this Question and Answer Session.)

II. Approval of Minutes.

  • Minutes of the 10/06/09 regular meeting of the USAO Faculty Association were delivered electronically on 10/29/09 and were posted on the Faculty Association Page of the USAO website on 10/27/09. Without correction or amendment, a motion to approve by K. Crow was adopted.

III. Treasurer’s Report

  • C. Elder announces: the balance of account is $852.71.
IV. Regent’s Report

- There was no October Meeting of the Regents. S. Weber encourages faculty to provide for his report at the meeting in November.

V. Committee Reports

- Convocation/Commencement Committee: N. Osborn announces that this committee will meet November 12th at 3pm in the Emerson Room.

- Handbook Committee: L. Hester solicits suggestions from the faculty for changes to the handbook. He notes that the changes to administrative structure have altered the system for hiring that was part of the most recent handbook updates. D. Reigh asks if that documentation of hiring process was approved and in the handbook. Discussion follows about the desire of the entire faculty to have a voice in the establishment of the new hiring procedure. Particularly, we wonder who will assume the “clerical” duties that were previously handled by Terry Winn. The faculty would like to make a suggestion of who should collect and review application materials for faculty hire. L. Hester asks for faculty to respond directly to him with ideas about this issue.

- Tenure and Promotion: to meet in the Spring Trimester.

- IDS Committee: J. Long not present. No report.

- Curriculum Committee: E. Guzik not present. S. Weber reports that the Curriculum Committee is reviewing suggestions from the IDS Committee about expanding the definition of Artistic Expression in the IDS Core. Any proposed revisions will come before the Faculty Association for discussion eventually.

- Distinctiveness/Academic Rigor: D. Reigh announces that the survey results from the committee were sent by email to all faculty members. The Research Endorsement is almost ready for submission to the Curriculum Committee. The Cultural Endorsement is still in process. Planning continues in anticipation of a better fiscal environment and the possibility for implementation.

- Faculty Advisory Council: N. Osborn reports that the next meeting will be Saturday at 9am at the State Regents Office. She will chair the meeting and invites other faculty to attend.
VI. Old Business

- S. Weber opens a discussion with Lynn Boyce and Anna Marie Pratt about the eventual implementation of a software package to manage online course evaluations.
  - L. Boyce announces that we are ready to go live with an online enrollment system. This will allow online enrollment for the Fall Trimester in Spring 2010 and will potentially be in place for the submission of Spring Grades. Transcripts, schedules, and other student information will be available by permission to faculty advisors.
  - K. Bohannon asks if the new system will allow a + or - grade. Conversation ensues about the complications to determining GPA and the Regents standards. It is assumed that the grading system will remain the same.
  - K. Crow requests a Faculty Development Training/Tutorial session before the system is live.
  - L. Boyce addresses general questions about the software packages available for online evaluations. There are many options for security. Faculty will be directly involved in the selection of which security features will protect information and identify student respondents.
  - A. M. Pratt states that the cost is significantly cheaper than the way we do this now. She assures that the questions will still be faculty generated and the purpose will continue to be for the use of the faculty in evaluating courses. She adds that this process will free her time to provide useful analysis of data instead of being occupied with transcribing information.
  - This evaluation is distinct and separate from the NSSE.
  - Students will be automatically notified of the need to complete the evaluation; grades will be held until they respond to this notification. Taking the evaluation or choosing not to take it (by checking a box within the evaluation) will both be considered responses.
  - Faculty will not be able to see evaluation responses until final grades are submitted for the course.
One company guarantees a high response rate.

Data can be stored securely and reports are available for faculty use. Reports can be run as a summary by course, by question, by type of course, etc.

If/When implemented, this will not be optional for faculty.

Faculty can customize evaluation question content and type for their own purposes. B. Brown reports very favorably about the flexibility of the software.

- Discussion by the faculty about this issue is tabled. The faculty will organize a committee to examine options, evaluate software, and make suggestions to the Faculty Association.

- The updated Master List of University Committees has not been released by Dr. Huguenin. S. Weber announces that he will re-release Faculty Committees with minor changes.

VII. New Business

- S. Weber opens a discussion about the student use of laptops in the classroom. Faculty members acknowledge that this can be a useful way of taking notes and that for some students with disabilities it is a necessity. However, there is a large percentage of students whose laptop use in the classroom is “surfing the net” and is disrespectful to the instructor, distracting to other students, and significantly more destructive to the student’s ability to listen than doodling. Discussion includes:

  o We cannot selectively limit wireless internet access.

  o We cannot make a student pay attention, but we can respond to their creation of a distraction that interrupts the learning environment.

  o Allowing the laptops at all makes it hard to “police” the activity in large classrooms.

  o There is a current policy in the Student Handbook that identifies distractions in the classroom as a student conduct issue.
T. Winn suggests a broad policy from the Faculty to address the laptop issue specifically.

K. Lamar points out that we already have the right to set our own classroom discipline policies.

It is suggested that the Faculty Association release a statement to Student Services and to The Trend making a statement from the faculty about this issue.

“Students are reminded that using laptops or other wireless devices to access the internet, play games, etc. constitutes a serious violation of the expectations for classroom conduct. Each faculty member will exercise their privilege to establish a policy regarding laptop use in the classroom.

S. Weber opens the floor for discussion about the President’s announcements to the faculty on Monday, November 2, 2009. Notes from discussion:

- A passage from the Faculty Handbook (p. 24) pertaining to termination or furlough for faculty is read.

- Since furlough is specifically mentioned as an action that may be taken in the circumstance of “demonstrable financial exigency,” why shouldn’t the policy outlined in the faculty handbook be followed?

- Was there a formal public statement of “financial exigency?” Shouldn’t this happen first? Why was this decision made so quickly?

- Why weren’t the officers of the Faculty Association involved in the discussions? Why wasn’t there at least an informational consultation with the faculty?

- “We give the administration a lot of lee-way in decision-making on good-faith…but here again are major administrative decisions that have left us exposed because faculty salary does consume 80% of the budget.”

- Why weren’t any faculty representatives included in this solution?
B. Brown explains that the Division Chairs were invited to three meetings, held on October 28th, 30th, and November 2nd. At these meetings the possible solutions to the financial “crisis” were debated. A four-day work-week was considered.

- Is Chair involvement “administrative involvement” or “faculty representation?”

- Why wasn’t there evidence provided that there could be no plant or equipment reduction as a temporary solution? What other solutions were considered? What style of budgeting was considered? Are we thinking about finding $40,000 per month or only a lump of $360,000 for the year?

- Why can’t student fees, etc. be reassigned in times of financial crisis? Isn’t that just as easy to accomplish as changing the terms of faculty salary?

- What exactly are the other budget items in the same “pool” of funds as faculty salary? Can’t they be adjusted?

- Were the Regents notified before the announcement to the faculty? Was this approved?

- This financial crisis is not sudden. It has been publically anticipated for at least 5 months.

- Why didn’t we have a hiring freeze?

- Isn’t the letter we are given each fall a contract? It states our salary. Since this has been changed, without discussion or negotiation, each faculty member should be given a new letter stating exactly what change will be made to pay and benefits and the reason for this change.

- In effect, aren’t we being asked to work for free for a percentage of this fiscal year? Should we stop all currently unpaid service activities on campus?

- A suggestion: We should ask the Administration to petition the Regents for an exemption on the required classroom minutes, since this fiscal necessity requires that we lose pay. All faculty members will take their furlough in March – for an extra week of spring break. Comment: “If I had that much time, I could find another job.”
Each faculty member would like to have a written statement of this entire decision, with summary explanations of how this will effect our retirement, our benefits, etc.

We’d like to have a spreadsheet that shows exactly the cut to salary and the effect to retirement for each tier affected. We would really like to see numbers.

Actually, we would have liked to have all of that, on paper, in anticipation of our questions BEFORE being blindsided by yesterday’s meeting.

Many, many other colleges and universities have resorted to just this type of temporary solution. However, they have a clearly articulated plan on paper that obviously included faculty concerns in the decision-making process. For example: University of South Carolina has a five-page long Mandatory Furlough Frequently Asked Questions page available to download – from 2008-2009. Did our administrators do any research about how other universities handle this? Did they not think we’d want to have the same questions asked?

“We are nicked and dimed to death.” Why is it always the faculty that makes the fiscal ends meet? We aren’t paid for tutorials, aren’t given reasonable over-load pay, aren’t paid equably for activities like observing student teachers. We can’t be expected to be good sports about being asked, yet again, to take less money for better work. Snide: “Raising the Standard. Lowering the Salary.”

Actually, some of us would have been very content to “take this for the team” had we actually been ASKED and INVOLVED.

What has happened to communication between the administration and the faculty? Didn’t we ask that question only a few months ago when the decisions about retirement accounts were made without consulting the Faculty Association?

The officers of the Faculty Association will meet to draft a letter to the Administration and Regents.

VIII. Announcements
• K. Lamar announced the BFA show opening at 5pm on Saturday, November 7th.

• J.C. Casey announces Homecoming activities this week.

• N. Warden announces “free lunch” at the Hypatia induction on November 23rd. Watch for her email.

• K. Davis announces *Lysistrata* by Aristophanes presented on stage by the Drama Department on November 12th-14th at 7:30pm in Davis Hall.

• J. Hanson announces the Choir Concert on November 17th at 7:30pm.

• D. Hanson announces the Band/Key Players on November 23rd at 7:30pm.

IX. A motion to adjourn made by K. Lamar was adopted - adjournment at 12:08pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

K. Davis