

Spring 2010

Faculty Senate Newsletter

Message from the Chair

Dear Fellow Faculty Members,

This semester the Faculty Senate was involved in addressing three very important issues: the proposal to dissolve the [Department of Economics and Policy Studies](#), the proposal to create the [Department of Applied and Computational Mathematics and Statistics](#), and the draft revisions of the Outside Activities Policy into a broader [Conflict of Commitment Policy](#). A summary of the Faculty Senate reactions to these issues are summarized in this newsletter by the committee chair who led each of the Faculty Senate deliberations. The complete Faculty Senate statements can be found in the Documents/Resolutions section of the Faculty Senate web page, facultysenate.nd.edu, or by clicking on the links in this paragraph.

A number of senators were also involved in regular, ongoing committee work on issues related to employee benefits, CIF implementation, bookstore management, campus parking and traffic, ECDC (the daycare center located on campus) policies, student life, travel policies, and information usage policies. In addition, the chair and the chairs of the standing committees serve on Academic Council and its committees and working groups to help develop and approve important academic policies for the University.

I am pleased to report that the Faculty Senate has a positive and constructive relationship with Fr. Jenkins, Tom Burish, and John Affleck-Graves. These three men and their offices value the input and perspectives of the Faculty Senate and continue to work to ensure that the Faculty Senate is consulted on many important issues. As Chair of the Faculty Senate, I also have had the opportunity to report to the Academic and Faculty Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees at each of their meetings. The trustees are keenly interested in learning about the issues that are important to the faculty as well as their concerns, challenges, and ambitions.

To represent the views of the faculty well, the Faculty Senate relies on each faculty member to bring important issues to the attention of his or her senator. We take all concerns seriously so please take the time to talk to your senator and share your ideas.

Best wishes for a productive summer,

Tom Gresik
Chair

News from the Academic Affairs Committee

Keith Rigby, Chair

The Academic Affairs Committee was substantially involved in three major efforts during the Spring 2010 Semester. Our major task was to prepare a response to the proposal to create the Department of Applied and Computational Mathematics and Statistics from the existing Department of Mathematics. Considerable effort was expended to ensure that interested parties, particularly those directly affected by the proposed changes, could communicate their views to the committee and hence to the Faculty Senate as a whole. Based on our findings, we concluded that there was very broad support for increasing statistical capabilities on campus. We did find some reason for concern in that the process of drafting the proposal to create the new department could have been smoother. Much of the dissatisfaction could have been averted with more attention paid to communication with those who would be affected by the proposed changes. The Faculty Senate made several recommendations regarding the vetting of future proposals that were forwarded to the Office of the Provost.

Our second major undertaking of the Spring was to assist the Administrative Affairs Committee of the Faculty Senate in an evaluation of a draft "Conflict of Commitment" policy as proposed by a working group of the Academic Affairs Committee of the Academic Council. Members of the Faculty Senate Academic Affairs Committee tried to ensure that faculty were made aware of the draft document and we solicited comments to represent our constituents in the working group discussions that will follow this first round of feedback.

Our third major undertaking this Spring was an attempt to determine if a revision in the Final Exam Schedule is needed. A number of faculty have voiced concern that the currently scheduled 2-hour periods did not meet the need for more time in some courses. In order to satisfy this need, some faculty have had to resort to "take-home" exams or exercises conducted at some other point in time other than the 2-hour final exam block of time. Such variations, we thought, might unwittingly cause a Code of Honor compliance issue. Courses, where this might be a problem, are generally those with heavy computational needs or the need to include long problem sets as part of the exam. This is an item of continuing discussion and it is suggested that this might be an item for the next session of the Faculty Senate to resolve.

News from the Administrative Affairs Committee

Seth Brown, Chair

There were two main issues that the Administrative Affairs committee dealt with this semester. The first was the proposal to close the Department of Economics and Policy Studies (ECOP) and to rename the Department of Economics and Econometrics the Department of Economics. The committee did not feel it was appropriate for us (or the Senate as a whole) to comment on the substantive issues regarding the wisdom of closing a department. We were, however, very concerned about the implications of the proposal regarding the tenure protections of faculty in the ECOP department. One of the few reasons that the University can fire tenured faculty without serious cause is the closure of their department. In this instance, faculty were not at risk of being fired—all Economics faculty were given written guarantees at the time of the split of Economics in 2003 that their tenure would be maintained in the College of Arts and Letters even if either department were to be discontinued. But some current faculty in ECOP did face the possibility that they would not be retained in a department. Normally tenure protects against kicking a faculty member out of a department against his or her will, but in this case the outcome of the proposal would be that a cohort of faculty who were tenured members of the Department of Economics at Notre Dame in 2002 would be involuntarily excluded from the Department of Economics in 2010. We therefore recommended that, if the changes in departmental structure were to go forward, the current ECOP faculty should be allowed, at their discretion, to (re)join the Department of Economics. The Academic Council did not follow our recommendation and the ECOP department was dissolved under the terms of the original proposal. This case sets a worrisome precedent for future instances in which a department is subdivided into two closely related fields (e.g., spinning off a Department of Applied and Computational Math and Statistics from the Mathematics department) and the two departments are subsequently consolidated. Because splitting a department lowers the barrier to eliminating either department (it is much harder to decrease the number of math departments at a university from one to zero than from two to one), it is troubling that tenured faculty involved in departmental consolidation might have no more protection than those involved in a true elimination of a department.

The Administrative Affairs committee was also asked to respond to a draft of a new policy on Conflict of Commitment. Less well known than conflict of interest, conflict of commitment refers to faculty activities outside the University that compromise the faculty member's principal professional allegiance to the University. (The clearest example of such a conflict would be a faculty member teaching full time for two different universities.) Such conflicts are rare, and the committee felt that the proposed policy was more broadly conceived and more intrusive than was warranted by the actual scope of the problem (if any). The Faculty Senate's comments have been sent to the group working on revising the policy. A re-revised policy should be forwarded to the Academic Council for consideration in Fall 2010, so stay tuned for future developments.

News from the Benefits Committee

Nasir Ghiaseddin, Chair

The Benefits Committee generally meets with the HR administration in charge of Employee Benefits on a monthly basis to discuss and provide input on issues affecting the faculty. In these meetings, we raise issues brought to our attention by faculty and advocate the faculty views on benefits-related issues. In addition, our regular meetings with HR provide a good mechanism for resolving problems and irregularities noticed by the faculty in their dealings with Meritain Health and other health care providers.

The following items may be of interest to the faculty:

Personal health advocacy services will be available beginning July 1 for employees, spouses, dependent children, parents and in-laws. The Committee feels the services offered will be of great benefit to faculty and staff.

Faculty interest in having an option to invest their retirement benefits in a Roth 403(b) plan was discussed with HR. HR agreed to implement this feature as of 1/1/11 with the support of OIT resources.

Some faculty members reported difficulties in the way portable tuition benefits for faculty children are handled. The issue was discussed with HR. HR, in communication with Registrar's Office, have been trying to find ways to streamline the administration of the Notre Dame Children's benefit. This issue should be resolved by Fall 2010.

We have been in discussion with the Office of the Provost about bringing the mean salaries of the Notre Dame faculty in line with the mean salaries from private AAU peer universities. The Office of the Provost reports minor improvements have been made. However, we will keep this issue alive and continue our discussion with the provost's office.

The one-year wait for NDFA (defined retirement contribution) eligibility, has been lifted. Effective January 1, 2010, contributions to retirement plans for faculty and exempt staff no longer require a one-year waiting period.

News from the Student Affairs Committee

John Gaski, Chair

The main issues taken up by the Student Affairs Committee during Spring 2010, apart from full Senate issues that dominated the semester, were the following.

1. Implementation questions and possible execution problems associated with the new Course Instructor Feedback (CIF) instrument. This has involved development of a comprehensive set of concerns and follow-up communication with the administration.
2. Sorting through a number of competing matters to prioritize for committee attention. The committee has selected for further scrutiny a commonly perceived change in student classroom deportment.



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The Faculty Senate is conceived as an assembly through which the faculty can exercise a collective and independent voice in the governance of the University. In forming its recommendations, the Senate pledges itself to the principle of reaching conclusions based on research and free and open discussion. In the submission of its recommendations to a University officer or to the Academic Council or other group, the Senate invites further study and discussion with that person or group whenever disagreement occurs. So informed with the spirit of independent and cooperative effort, the Faculty Senate hereby commits itself to the service of the faculty, and thereby to the service of the University.