

Fall 2008

Faculty Senate Newsletter

Message from the Chair

Dear Fellow Faculty Members,

As the Fall Semester draws to a close, I am pleased to report to you on the activities of your Senate. There are four main developments I would like to bring to your attention.

- **The initiation of regular meetings of the Senate Executive Committee and the Provost.** Provost Burish is genuinely interested in maintaining regular communication with the Senate about the issues we consider most important. Both the Provost and I hope that these meetings will result in closer cooperation between the Senate and the administration in promoting the best interests of the University.

- **Chair's Report to the Academic and Faculty Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees.** As the Senate Chair, I give a report at each board meeting to this committee. This October I used my report to highlight the research accomplishments of several members of our great faculty and to press a number of concerns including the significant decline in the University's ranking relative to its aspirant group (primarily the AAU privates) with regard to faculty compensation, a decline in student comportment including academic honesty issues, and the implementation of the CROCF report recommendations to enhance the Catholic identity of the University.

- **Proposed revisions to the Academic Articles concerning the review process for reappointment/tenure/promotion decisions and the related appeals process.** Earlier this semester, a working group from Academic Council developed a number of proposed changes to the review and appeals processes related to faculty reappointment, tenure, and promotion decisions. These changes address three main issues: notification to the candidate of the status of his or her case at intermediate points in the review process, the possibility of terminating a candidacy prior to review by the Provost and the PAC if decisions at lower levels are sufficiently negative, and improving the appeals process to facilitate timelier decisions and fairer outcomes. The Senate is currently in the process of evaluating and responding to these proposed changes.

- **Reports on issues related to the hiring and retention of women and minority faculty.** Last spring, the standing University committees on women faculty and on minority faculty delivered a series of reports on the University's progress in hiring and retaining outstanding women and minority faculty. These reports are available on both the President's web page and the Senate web page. The reports lay out a mixed picture which suggests the University has made insufficient progress and they propose a number of recommendations. Fr. Jenkins has asked the Senate for its response to these reports. The goal is to have the Senate response ready by the middle to end of January.

Please check the Senate web page for updates on these issues and please share your thoughts with your senator so that the Senate can best represent our faculty.

May God's Blessings be upon you during this holiday season,

Tom Gresik

Chair

News from the Academic Affairs Committee

Julian Velasco, Chair

The Academic Affairs Committee has jurisdiction over matters dealing with the status and welfare of the faculty or with any matter affecting the teaching, research, and publication responsibilities of the faculty. This year, the committee has decided to look into three issues. First, grade inflation. As elsewhere, grade point averages are on the rise at Notre Dame. The committee intends to investigate, determine whether there is a problem, and if so consider possible solutions. Second, student comportment with respect to academic honesty. There seems to be a disconnect, nationwide, between students' and professors' views and expectations on such issues. The committee intends to explore the matter and offer constructive proposals. Work is underway on these two issues. Finally, the Course Instruction Feedback program. In the Spring, the committee intends to study the results of the Fall administration of the new CIFs.

News from the Administrative Affairs Committee

Seth Brown, Chair

This semester, the Administrative Affairs Committee has been examining the changes being considered to the process for reappointing, tenuring, and promoting T & R faculty, and the changes to the process for appealing unfavorable decisions in these cases. The current appeals system is universally considered unwieldy and ineffective, and so a proposal was formulated by a small working group to implement changes in the appeals system, which was felt to require correlative changes in the actual process for reappointment, tenure, and promotion. The committee generally felt that the proposed changes were welcome in their enhancement of the transparency of the process and the fairness to the candidate, but suggested four specific changes, which were ratified by the full Senate in December: (1) The proposal already suggested that candidates be informed by the Dean of the status of their case in January; we recommended that this information include the outcome of the votes by the departmental CAP, the department chair, and the Dean. (2) The proposal suggested that certain sufficiently negative cases be terminated after review at the Dean's level and not proceed to the Provost for further consideration; the Senate suggested that candidates be able to have such cases continue to be considered, as long as they are willing to waive their rights to appeal based on errors, discrimination, or bias at the department or college level. (3) The Senate suggested clarifying the requirements for record-keeping and information flow between the Deans and the Provost. (4) The Senate suggested a uniform procedure whereby all candidates can supplement their cases with new factual information (publications, grants, etc.) up to a fixed date in early February. (See the Senate website for more details on all these proposals: <http://facultysenate.nd.edu/meetings/documents/ApprovedSenateTenureAppealsProcess.pdf>.)

A version of this proposal, revised based on the Senate's input as well as that from other sources, will shortly be made available to all faculty for comment. Given the importance of these procedures in faculty's careers, I strongly encourage you to examine both the revised proposal and the Senate's comments on the original. A mechanism for feedback will be given when the proposal is made available. The final decision on the proposal is made by Academic Council (subject to the approval of the President and the Trustees), so it is also appropriate to communicate your views to your Academic Council representative(s) so that they can make an informed vote on this matter.

News from the Benefits Committee

Nasir Ghiaseddin, Chair

The Benefits Committee meets on a regular basis with Human Resources to provide input on possible changes to faculty benefit packages. The committee is reviewing salary information to monitor average faculty compensation relative to peer institutions. The committee is happy to help resolve problems with healthcare claims involving Meritain. If you have any concerns, please bring them to my attention.

News from the Student Affairs Committee

Kristin Lewis, Chair

The Student Affairs Committee will address three main issues this year. First, we will examine expectations of student behavior in the classroom, from the perspective both faculty and students. The committee will facilitate a series of discussion groups with faculty and students during January to collect information and assess the issues. Second, in cooperation with the GSU, we will investigate ways to improve funding for professional development opportunities for graduate students. Finally, the Student Senate has recently asked that the Faculty Senate consider policies for excused absences to attend professional interviews. We plan to survey departments to determine what policies for such absences are currently in place.