

Spring 2009

Faculty Senate Newsletter

Message from the Chair

Dear Fellow Faculty Members,

This semester turned out to be busier than expected for the Faculty Senate with issues ranging from President Obama's visit to revisions of the tenure and review procedures in the Academic Articles to a request from the Student Senate for clarification of the absentee policy for job and graduate school interviews. I commend the reports on these issues from the Senate's standing committees to your attention.

As we look towards the coming academic year, I encourage all faculty to bring issues to the attention of his or her unit's senator. The Faculty Senate currently enjoys the respect of the administration and our perspectives do make a difference. So please continue to let the Faculty Senate know about your concerns.

I am pleased to announce the officers and committee chairs for the 2009-2010 Faculty Senate.

Officers

Chair - Thomas Gresik, Economics and Econometrics

Vice Chair - Morten Eskildsen, Physics

Treasurer - Parker Ladwig, Hesburgh Libraries

Co-secretaries - John Griffin, Political Science and Joyelle McSweeney, English

Committee Chairs

Academic Affairs - J. Keith Rigby, Civil Engineering and Geological Sciences

Administrative Affairs - Seth Brown, Chemistry and Biochemistry

Benefits - Nasir Ghiaseddin, Management

Student Affairs - John Gaski, Marketing

Best wishes for a productive summer,

Tom Gresik

Chair

Faculty Senate Statement Regarding the Invitation to President Obama to be the Commencement Speaker and to Receive an Honorary Degree

Passed on April 22, 2009

The Faculty Senate supports the decision of Fr. Jenkins to invite President Barack Obama to deliver this year's commencement address and to bestow upon him an honorary Doctor of Laws degree.

The Faculty Senate affirms that the invitation to deliver the commencement address and to receive an honorary degree reflects the University's tradition of honoring our nation's leaders and encouraging dialogue with them on issues important to the extended University community and to the nation.

The Faculty Senate recognizes that President Obama holds positions that are consistent with the teachings of the Catholic Church and positions that are inconsistent with the teachings of the Catholic Church and respects both those in the University community who support and those who oppose President Obama's visit for reasons of faith or conscience.

A number of outside groups have suggested that they would use the commencement ceremonies to advance their positions. The Faculty Senate respectfully asks those groups to find other venues to convey their opinions to President Obama or to the University of Notre Dame.

News from the Academic Affairs Committee

Julian Velasco, Chair

This year, the Academic Affairs Committee considered three issues.

First, grade inflation. After meeting with Institutional Research, we learned that the simplest accounts of grade inflation do not hold water. Although grades have been rising, this tends to follow the rising credentials of our students. Given this correlation, and the differences among disciplines, no further action is planned at this time.

Second, student academic honesty. We have considered the issue extensively and are in the process of preparing resolutions regarding this issue. Because of time constraints, we could not complete the task before the end of this semester. Our proposals will be forwarded to next year's Academic Affairs Committee for consideration early in the Fall semester.

Finally, we began the process of monitoring the administration of the new CIFs. Preliminary data showed that, despite the lower-than-expected response rate, the worst fears did not pan out. In fact, results from the new CIFs tracked the old TCEs approximately as expected. Institutional Research is preparing a memo for distribution to the faculty that will discuss the findings, and the University is making a strong push to increase the response rate this semester. One of the most important factors is whether the faculty members have encouraged their students to fill out the CIFs, and you are encouraged to do so. We will continue to monitor the situation in the future.

News from the Administrative Affairs Committee

Seth Brown, Chair

After the conclusion of the discussion of the appeals process for T & R faculty, the Administrative Affairs committee this semester turned to the analogous processes for appealing unfavorable promotion or reappointment decisions for library, research, and special professional faculty. The committee examined a draft proposal which proposed a number of changes to streamline the process and make it parallel (where appropriate) with the T & R process. We suggested further changes to make the process for research faculty analogous to those for library and special professional faculty (in particular, that the review committees be elected by the research faculty as a whole rather than by the college council of the appellant), which have been incorporated into the current draft document. This draft has been circulated to all library, research, and special professional faculty, and will be considered by Academic Council early in the fall.

News from the Benefits Committee

Nasir Ghiaseddin, Chair

The Faculty Senate Benefits Committee has been meeting with HR representatives in charge of faculty benefits on a periodic basis to discuss and provide input on issues affecting the faculty. We met with HR on a regular basis, usually once a month. These meetings were generally very useful in bringing the faculty perspective to their attention and influencing the policies regarding faculty benefits. It also provided a mechanism for resolving issues faced by the faculty in their dealings with Meritain Health and other health care providers.

In 2009, for the first time in recent history, the premiums for health care insurance for most plans were reduced. This can be attributed to several factors, including a reduction in some administrative fees, a renegotiated drug plan with Medco and an improvement in employees' health. The most recent statistics show University employees are using more basic and preventive health measures like office visits and medications relative to past years and less other more expensive medicals such as inpatient, outpatient, and x-ray labs.

The Office of Human Resources agreed to implement a Roth IRA plan as part of 403(b) retirement plan. HR promises that this plan will be implemented beginning January 2010.

The Benefits Committee will continue to meet with HR representative during the summer to participate in benefits discussions and provide input on health care initiatives that will be suggested by HR for 2010.

News from the Student Affairs Committee

Kristin Lewis, Chair

At the April 7th meeting, the Faculty Senate approved a resolution on Absence Policies for Professional Interviews. The resolution "strongly encourages all faculty to specifically address a policy for absences for professional interviews in their course syllabi. Professional interviews may include those for internships, graduate and professional schools, and post-graduate employment."

This resolution was written in response to a Student Senate resolution asking for faculty consideration of absence policies for professional interviews. The Student Affairs Committee conducted a survey to assess the current policies in individual departments and found that the majority of departments did not have an official policy, and preferred to let each faculty member set the policy for his or her own course. Based on the results of the survey and further discussion among the Committee and Student Senate representatives, the addition of this information to course syllabi was proposed. The intention of this resolution was to better inform students of existing policies while maintaining faculty flexibility.



UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME

Faculty Senate

445 Flanner Hall
Notre Dame, Indiana
46556 USA

Phone: 574-631-7612

Fax: 574-631-4783

E-mail: facsen@nd.edu

Website: <http://facultysenate.nd.edu/>

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.