

Spring 2011

Faculty Senate Newsletter

Message from the Chair

The academic year that is slowly coming to a close was a particularly frustrating one for the Faculty Senate. Ideally the senate works closely with other units of the University on the formulation of policies that have a significant impact on faculty interests. While the senate has no veto power over policies that it opposes, it can, by virtue of the quality of the arguments that it makes, keep poorly conceived policy proposals from taking effect, just as it can help make intelligently conceived policy proposals better than they were when they were first drafted. For either of these things to happen, however, the Senate should be involved in the assessment of policy proposals early in the process by which they will be voted up or down and surely not late in the game, when almost the only thing that the Senate has time to say is an ineffectual and unproductive “Yes” or No” to the proposal in question.

During the current academic year, the Academic Council had an ambitious agenda. Who should be included in the special professional faculty? What constitutes a conflict of commitment? What procedures should precede the imposition of a serious sanction on a faculty member? What constraints should there be on faculty service on the Provost’s Advisory Committee or on the Faculty Board on Athletics? Each of these questions was on that agenda, and each of them had obvious relevance to the faculty. None of them, however, received anywhere near the sort of senate attention that they could and should have received. And the reason for that was that none of them came to the senate’s attention in a timely fashion.

Notre Dame incurs two different kinds of cost when the Faculty Senate is, as a practical matter, left out of the policy-making loop on matters that concern the faculty. First, and most obviously, it runs the risk of poorly conceived or poorly articulated policy proposals taking effect. Second, and less obviously, it increases the probability, a probability that is already distressingly high, that faculty governance will, for the vast majority of our faculty, mean nothing to them. For over a century, however, a faculty role in university governance has been seen, correctly in my view, as essential to the proper functioning of a university, and as preventing its being overwhelmed by non-academic, even anti-academic, interests. One would have to be willfully blind to what is happening elsewhere in academia to think that the concerns about the baneful effect that non-academic interests could have on the proper functioning of a university are a thing of the past.

Message from the Chair, continued

As my year of service to the senate as its chair comes to an end, it is my hope that my successor as chair will have much more success than I did at convincing the University administration that all of us, faculty and administration most of all, but students and staff as well, benefit from the existence at Notre Dame of a Faculty Senate, the voice of which is heard early and often in the process by which academic policy is made here. We cannot afford to stay on the path on which we traveled this past year.

John Robinson
Chair

News from the Academic Affairs Committee

Judy Fox, Chair

The Academic Affairs Committee was very busy this semester. The committee had previously conducted a survey of faculty needs in terms of examination time and discovered a substantial minority of faculty members who indicated a need for a longer exam time. This semester, the committee met with the Registrar and arranged for a trial run this exam period. Longer examination times were arranged for those faculty members that indicated a need. After making the arrangement, the current registrar resigned to take a new position. We will, therefore, need to follow up next fall with the new registrar.

The committee vetted and provided comments and suggestions to the Advanced Studies Committee of the Academic Council on proposals for a Post-Doc Policy, the creation of an integrated biomedical program and a masters in science for applied and computational math.

In conjunction with the Administrative committee, we discussed a proposal to change the Academic Articles as it related to the definition of special professional faculty. The joint committees drafted a response opposing the changes (see [Senate Response - Report by the Academic Affairs Committee on the SPF Proposal](#)). The response was presented to and approved by the Faculty Senate as a whole and sent to the Faculty Affairs Committee of the Academic Council. The committee, again in conjunction with the Administrative Affairs committee, discussed a proposal to amend the Academic Articles to change the composition of the Provost's Advisory Committee. The joint committee voted not to comment on or oppose the proposal. The recommendation was presented to, and approved by, the Faculty Senate in a special meeting.

The Academic Affairs committee discussed following-up on the Provost's efforts to hire and retain female and minority faculty and decided to give the initiative a full academic year before requesting information about its progress. Therefore, this is an issue that will be forwarded to the committee for consideration in the 2011-2012 academic year.

News from the Administrative Affairs Committee

Seth Brown, Chair

This semester, at the request of a number of concerned faculty members, the committee revisited the issue of shuttle service between South Bend and Chicago that we had initially considered in the fall. In the fall, we had considered the merits of a shuttle that left Chicago in the morning and returned from Notre Dame in the evening (“Chicago-to-ND”) and would be of value principally to faculty that live in the Chicago area and must commute to Notre Dame. We had not considered in any detail the possibility of a shuttle service in the reverse sense, leaving Notre Dame in the morning and returning from Chicago in the evening (“ND-to-Chicago”). (Since the two routes would serve different clienteles, and since they would overlap in time and could thus not use the same buses and drivers, the two routes are largely independent of each other.) Both Chicago-to-ND and ND-to-Chicago shuttles were seen by the committee as potentially useful for faculty recruiting by making spousal employment in the Chicago area more palatable by easing the required commute. Of the two, the ND-to-Chicago route was seen as preferred, since it encouraged residence in the South Bend area, which would make it easier for the faculty member to participate fully in the University community. Furthermore, the ND-to-Chicago route was seen as having benefits for the large number of faculty (and students) who live near Notre Dame but would benefit from easier access to the scholarly and cultural assets available in Chicago (e.g., research at university libraries, class trips to the opera, etc.). Given these considerations, the committee was strongly in favor of exploring the possibility of establishing a ND-to-Chicago shuttle service. The committee remains unenthusiastic about pursuing the Chicago-to-ND route at the current time.

The amount of ridership for a proposed shuttle remains unknown, and it was felt that it was foolish to expend the effort to establish a shuttle service if it would be only sparingly utilized. Of course, the expected ridership would in turn depend on the schedule of service, its nature (direct bus route vs. interfacing with the South Shore or Amtrak trains, etc.), and the price point. Profs. Tom Fuja and Katherine Spiess volunteered to lead an *ad hoc* working group to explore these points and report back to the Senate on them. If you are interested in working on this issue, please contact Prof. Fuja (tfuja@nd.edu); participation in this group by both senators and nonsenators is welcome.

The committee also considered a number of changes to policies and to the Academic Articles suggested by the Faculty Affairs committee of the Academic Council. One concerned the creation of a Conflict of Commitment policy (to supersede the present Outside Activities policy). The committee found the general framework proposed to be sound, but suggested a number of improvements, which were ratified by the full Senate (see [Senate Response to the January 14, 2011 Conflict of Commitment Policy](#)). Jointly with the Academic Affairs committee, we also assessed the merits of a proposed change to the definition of the special professional faculty, which would have removed the “administrative” category from that group (a change that would have principally affected academic advisors). Our committees found the proposed change to be very undesirable,

News from the Administrative Affairs Committee, continued

and our critique was subsequently endorsed by the full Senate (see [Senate Response - Report by the Academic Affairs Committee on the SPF Proposal](#)). Finally, also in joint session with Academic Affairs, we considered a proposed change to the composition of the Provost's Advisory Committee which would limit the years of consecutive service of elected faculty members. Based on the desire to get broader participation in the PAC to disseminate insight into how tenure and promotion cases are treated by this group, as well as the need to build a cadre of elected PAC members to serve in appeals of tenure/promotion cases (as required by the new rules for such appeals), the committees found this proposal to have merit.

News from the Benefits Committee

Nasir Ghiaseddin, Chair

The Benefits Committee has been meeting with HR during the summer and throughout the year on a regular basis to learn about the new benefit initiatives HR has been contemplating and provided input in their decision making process. Overall, the Benefits Committee has maintained a good relationship with HR and HR has responded well to our requests.

The Benefits Committee acted on the following matters:

Transition to Retirement Policy: The Benefits Committee drafted a [resolution on the proposed policy for transition to retirement](#) that is under consideration by the administration. In this resolution we strongly recommended that the policy be modified to lower the age limit to 60 and the upper age limit be left open. This resolution was approved by the full Senate with unanimous votes and was forwarded to Don Pope-Davis by the chair of the Faculty Senate.

Off-cycle hiring orientations: It was brought to the attention of the committee that off-cycle hires are not receiving proper orientations in terms of learning about benefits from the University. This matter was discussed with HR. HR explained that off-cycle hires are handled by the Provost's office for faculty and the Graduate School for post-docs. As a result, HR receives the information much later. However, a project team is under way to make the process more transparent so HR can receive the information earlier and reach out to those employees. Departments must also be advised that HR has an orientation twice a month and new employees should be directed to those meetings to learn about benefits-related issues.

Accessible Parking: The adequacy and placement of accessible parking was another subject forwarded to the Benefits Committee. The Committee met with Doug Marsh, Associate Vice President and University Architect, Phil Johnson, Director of Security, and Jannifer Crittendon, Director of Institutional Equity, to discuss this concern. The university officials agreed to look into this matter and take corrective action.

News from the Student Affairs Committee

John Gaski, Chair

The Student Affairs Committee's spring semester was almost entirely occupied with the draft resolution of Senator Phil Bess commending Fr. Jenkins' activities in support of human life. After the committee had approved the resolution unanimously (of those in attendance, with one abstention) for consideration by the full Senate, it was voted down by the Senate at the March meeting, 22-8.

Otherwise, the committee (1) moved toward closure of the exploratory phase of its study of student classroom department issues, and (2) reviewed proposed changes to the academic code as invited and forwarded by the Academic Council. This collaborative review process is an exemplary illustration of the closer consultation between the Senate and Academic Council achieved in recent times.

Notable and to be appreciated in particular is that one Student Affairs Committee member, Lt. Col. Randy Crist, donated considerable time as one of the Senate's representatives on the Campus Life Council.

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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.