Representative Faculty Senate Meeting
February 21, 2012
Minutes

Attendance:

Representative Senators and Officers: 41
Ex officio: 0
Faculty, Administrators and Guests: 9
Total Attendance: 51

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 2:50 p.m.

2. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the January 23, 2012 Representative Senate Meeting were approved.

3. President’s Report

President LaFollette reported that the University is in the process of developing a new travel policy and system, which will have a “Travelocity-type” web-based structure. The Faculty Senate Steering Committee (FSSC) will be meeting with responsible University staff to review and give feedback on the policy.

LaFollette also reported that the President’s task force on faculty workload will soon be submitting its proposals, and they will be reviewed by the FSSC as well. There may also be a group working on policies regarding faculty leaves of absence. LaFollette is seeking further information on that issue.

Volunteers are needed for a Presidential task force on making better use of the summer session. Persons who are interested should submit a statement of interest and CV to senate2@temple.edu.

LaFollette pre-empted any questions about the Presidential Search Committee by saying that it is hard at work, and that he cannot provide any additional information beyond that.

4. Vice President’s Report

Vice President Shapiro noted that an updated list of committee vacancies was distributed with the agenda. The list includes both vacancies and, where relevant, the necessary qualifications for eligibility. She stressed the importance of having all committees fully staffed and in operation when Temple’s new President assumes office in the fall. She encouraged Senate Representatives
to speak directly with faculty members in their units whom they believe would be good candidates.

One committee of particular interest is the Bargaining Units Liaison Committee, which needs representatives from the professional schools. Shapiro asked Art Hochner (FSBM) to describe the work of the committee. He reported the committee has been meeting, and that it is helpful to have representatives from non-TAUP schools. The committee works on matters that are subject to TAUP bargaining but have implications for non-TAUP units, such as tenure and promotion policies and procedures.

Hochner also noted that TAUP is preparing for bargaining with the University, and it needs to hear from faculty members on the Tenure & Promotion Advisory Committee regarding any changes in procedure that are needed.

Shapiro reported on several other committee developments. The Committee on the Status of Women has a new chair and two new members. The Research Programs and Policies Committee has published a call for new research proposals. The Faculty Herald is looking for a new editor, and the current edition of the Herald includes a piece by present editor David Waldstreicher describing the editor’s duties and responsibilities. Waldstreicher and Frank Friedman (CST), chair of the Herald editorial board, both described the work and opportunities that being editor of the Herald involves. Interested individuals can either contact Friedman or apply through the faculty senate email address above.

5. Faculty Senate Elections

Karen Turner (SCT), Chair of the Senate Nominating Committee, reported on the status of Senate officer elections. Elections will occur in March-April and will include elections for Senate President, Vice President, and Secretary. The procedures under our revised bylaws have been emailed to all faculty, and the deadline for nomination forms and statements is March 2, 2012. Candidates need to be able to attend FSSC meetings, which occur from 1-3 p.m. on Tuesdays throughout the fall and spring terms.

6. Student Feedback Forms (SFFs)

President LaFollette reported that he has meet with the Provost and the SFF Committee to relay faculty concerns about the proposed move to on-line administration of SFFs in all classes. After hearing his concerns, the Committee has decided to go forward with its proposal, and the matter is now before the Provost, who had not yet made a final decision. LaFollette indicated that this meeting may be the final opportunity for faculty to register concerns about on-line SFFs.

In the discussion that followed, several points were made:

• The quality and quantity of student feedback on teaching is important because it affects the ability of faculty to earn merit for their teaching. Already some Deans are taking the position that merit cannot be awarded for teaching because there is insufficient information to substantiate teaching effectiveness.
• In Boyer, faculty who experimented with on-line SFFs reported a negative experience. Response rate dropped precipitously, and it did seem to affect results, as some faculty members known for their teaching excellence experienced sharp negative changes in student ratings. Boyer faculty are especially concerned about the potential impact in classes with small enrollment, which happen frequently in music instruction.

• As members of the FSSC have frequently expressed to the SFF Committee and Senior Vice Provost Jones, the SFF committee’s claim that a low response rate will not alter the reliability of results seems unconvincing. Absent a strong demonstration of reliability, use of SFFs with a low response rate in judgments about tenure, promotion, or contract renewal could have detrimental affects on faculty careers. This concern counsels for a slower, more cautious approach. One possibility would be to start with tenured full professors who are not as dependent on the results for their careers, and then move gradually down the ranks as experience warrants.

• Faculty members are not opposed to the use of technology. They just need better guarantees that the results will be useful and reliable.

• The SFF Committee’s resistance to tying SFF completion to the timing of release of grades seems inconsistent with experience in other universities, which have used that method to secure better response rates without any apparent problems.

• One of the purported advantages of on-line SFF administration is to provide faculty with quicker feedback, but that has not occurred to date in the on-line experiments done at Temple.

• The SFF Committee’s report does not include data about how many individuals participated in prior experiments, or in how many cases on-line vs. paper results were compared. These data are critical to judging the reliability of some of the SFF Committee’s judgments.

• Faculty support for SFF completion will be a key component in securing student participation. In properly equipped classrooms, faculty members could set class time aside for students to go on-line and complete the forms. But some faculty members who participated in prior on-line experiments found that even with strong faculty encouragement response rates dropped very sharply.

• Given abiding concerns regarding the reliability of on-line SFF results, use of SFF results to evaluate tenure, promotion, or contract renewal seems wrong. We should not be “experimenting” in a way that jeopardizes faculty members’ careers.

President LaFollette asked Senior Vice Provost Peter Jones and members of the SFF Committee in attendance to offer responses.

Professor Joseph DuCette (COE) responded that the SFF Committee investigated the response rate issue very carefully, and it concluded from data both at Temple and nationally that although
response rates do fall, in general the results for professors do not go down, but actually go up just a little. While the number of written comments goes down, the quality of written comments actually goes up. In DuCette’s view, for cost and efficiency reasons it is now time for Temple to move to on-line SFF administration.

Senior Vice Provost Jones responded by noting that the SFF committee has made two important qualifying recommendations to the Provost: 1) that SFF results for a particular course not be released to students unless the class response rate goes above 50%; and 2) that SFF results not be used as an exclusive measure of teaching effectiveness for any “summative” purposes. Jones also observed that if the SFF Committee’s proposal goes forward, professional schools will be excluded from on-line administration for the spring 2012 term.

Jones stressed that SFFs are supposed to be primarily for “formative” rather than summative use, and that the Committee strongly believes other measures of teaching effectiveness need to be developed for summative purposes. He noted that the Committee is committed to continue working on finding ways to improve the student response rate, which should be possible given the experience of other institutions. He also noted that the proliferation of on-line devices (smartphones, tablets, etc.) will make it easier for students to log on and fill out the on-line forms, which should help the response rates go up. Jones supported the idea of instructors setting aside class time for students to log on and complete the on-line forms. While it would not be possible to send reminders to individual students without compromising anonymity, sending out general reminders to the student body to encourage SFF completion should be possible. Jones also noted that the present paper system “disenfranchises” students who happen to be absent on the day the SFFs are handed out. And he observed that delays in giving the results back to professors should be eliminated once the entire system switches to on-line administration.

7. Collegial Assembly By-laws

The FSSC has moved the following resolution:

   The Faculty Senate recommends that the faculties of our Schools and Colleges seriously consider and be guided by the [attached] document prepared by the FSSC titled “Statement of Guiding Principles for Collegial Assembly Bylaws” in reviewing and revising their bylaws.

After a brief discussion, the motion was approved unanimously.

8. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 2:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark C. Rahdert
Secretary