Meeting of the 2010-11 Faculty Senate

The meeting was held on October 21st, 2010 from 3:00pm-5:00pm in the Shapiro Student Center Room 313.

Present: Bishop, Burt, Dibble, Flesch, Garnick, Hall, Herzfeld, Hickey, Lichtman, Meyer, Molinsky, Morrison, Parmentier, Ratner, Rosenberg
Absent: Nandakumar, Nelson, von Mering
Guests: Dean Adam Jaffe and Marc Brettler from The Faculty Workload Committee
Mark Hewitt and Mick Watson from The Block Schedule Committee

Approval of Senate Minutes from September 16, 2010
Minutes were approved and will be posted on both the main Faculty Senate site as well as the Senate Google page.

Workload Committee
Dean Adam Jaffe and Marc Brettler met with the Senate to review the recent document completed by the Faculty Workload Committee. Dean Jaffe reported that the latest version sought to use the Annual Merit Review as a starting point for this document. He confirmed that much of what is recorded in the report already occurs in the process of evaluating faculty contributions annually. What this report seeks to address is the issue of faculty who continually receive little or no annual merit raise as they are deemed to be not contributing at a significant level. This report has already been discussed with the department chairs and will need to now be reviewed by the Faculty Senate, the School Councils and the UCC.

This new system of review would give the Dean power to require tenured faculty who are no longer engaged in scholarly work and publications to either teach additional courses or take on additional university or departmental administrative functions. The recommendation of the Faculty Workload Committee is to have a faculty committee that would participate in this evaluative process and advise the Dean on actions to take, though the final decision would rest with the Dean. The report suggests that if a faculty member is placed in this category, and refuses to take on additional teaching responsibilities or administrative tasks as assigned by the Dean, then the result would be a 20% cut to annual salary. This number was based on the average course load standing at four courses per year. Therefore, if a faculty member were asked to take on an additional course and refused, that declined course would constitute one-fifth of his/her course load. However, if a faculty member objects on the grounds that they will be engaging in research in the near future, he/she will have up to two years to initiate a plan of action and another two years for the research to bear fruition, or to be considered underway, before any penalty will be pursued.
The report also sought to address class size for faculty by stating that class size be evaluated across the year, rather than by individual courses. This reports set acceptable class size for tenured faculty as forty students across the year. The issue of class size was also addressed in the recent DCC report, with a different standard being applied. The Senate members felt it might be necessary to evaluate both documents on this issue.

One concern expressed during this meeting was the issue of determining an individual faculty member’s contributions or research as valuable or not valuable to the university. Dean Jaffe addressed this issue by saying that the idea of the faculty committee to evaluate such instances was suggested to ensure that these cases would be given fair consideration, but that ultimately any decision would be made by the Dean, and therefore, any grievance would be against the Dean’s decision, not the faculty committee. The grievance procedure would still be through the CFRR.

The question was raised as to what other peer institutions might be instituting or practicing on this front. The Dean did confirm that there are other public peer institutions that have similar policies, but to his knowledge this would be a ground-breaking initiative amongst our private peers.

Dean Jaffe and Professor Brettler left the meeting and the Senate continued discussing the issue. There was some support for the idea of a faculty committee that would serve as an advising body for the Dean on these matters, though the power is within the office of the Dean even without a faculty review. However, others felt that this could be a dangerous endeavor to give certain faculty power over their peers. Many members of the Senate were also concerned about using salary reduction as a penalty measure. It was also mentioned that while the handbook requires a “review” of this policy by the Senate, but does not require a review of the DCC report, that the Senate might consider performing a review of the DCC report as well and issuing an official response to both, especially as it engages the class size issue. There was some debate as to whether this report and policy would actually be able to address the problems it hopes to speak to, that of lower contributing tenured faculty and of increasing enrollments and greater burdens on faculty, or whether these should actually be considered as separate issues.

It was decided that the Senate would like to have a further discussions of this issue before making a statement to the Dean.

*After the meeting, Senate Members continued the discussion of the Workload Report and issued a written “Sense of the Senate” response through Senate Chair Tim Hickey, which is included below.

We were generally supportive of the idea of allowing faculty to voluntarily switch to a higher teaching load if they felt they wanted to spend more time on teaching and less on research for a period of time, without negatively impacting their salary recommendations.
There was also general support for the proposal for specifying the total number of students taught in a year by each faculty as a way of allowing some courses with enrollments under 8 to be occasionally offered.

After an illuminating discussion however, we came to oppose the proposal for penalizing non-research active faculty by raising their teaching rate to 5/year and reducing their salary by around 20% if they refuse to comply.

The reasons for our opposition are:

* it would be counter-productive to simply raise the teaching and/or service requirements for those very few non-research active faculty, because these faculty are often not motivated as teachers either and we are subjecting our students to poor teaching. This will negatively effect our students, our reputation, and our bottom line. Likewise, if the service is worth doing, then we want someone who is willing to do it and forcing compliance will not guarantee good work
* there are other ways we can, and should, approach this problem. For example, making a more concerted effort to develop a plan to increase research or to improve teaching outcomes.
* there is an effective current option of granting a raise of zero, which already is a strong economic disincentive and can reduce a faculty members relative salary by 20% by itself over a period of a five or six years, depending on inflation.
* there are very few non-research active faculty at Brandeis, so this is not a problem that merits such a strong response and this punitive policy could bring substantial negative publicity to Brandeis with no commensurate gain. It could be seen as an attack on Academic Freedom both inside and outside the institution.

We would urge you to continue to work on this workload proposal as it contains some very good ideas, but the proposal for penalization would, in our estimation, not achieve the goals of improving the teaching and research mission at Brandeis and making Brandeis a more attractive place for students to attend and funders to support.

**Block Schedule Committee**

Mark Hewitt and Mick Watson met with the Senate to review the two options currently being proposed by the Block Schedule Committee. Both options will use Thursday afternoons for classes, a block that is currently not used. In addition, both options would increase the number of two day per week meeting blocks. The major differences between the two concerned the combination of meeting days. In one version the meeting days would remain as they currently are structured with a Monday, Wednesday, Thursday schedule and a Tuesday, Friday schedule. The second option, referred to as the “blended option,” would provide a Monday, Wednesday, Thursday morning schedule and a Monday, Wednesday, Friday afternoon schedule.
The conversation among the Senate members centered on the complications that could arise with the “blended” schedule, most notably the potential for confusion among faculty and students with the switch in scheduling days. Watson and Hewitt did confirm that the Registrars office did not feel they could support the blended schedule. The Senate members confirmed that a recommendation should be made to the Provost to support the version of the schedule that keeps the schedule of days constant.

Also, with the addition of Thursday afternoon classes, the Senate will have to make recommendations regarding the timing of University Faculty meetings, since there will no longer be a particular day and time that is set aside, with no classes, for these meetings. While there will no longer be Friday afternoon classes in the new block schedule, this would still pose a problem for observant faculty. The suggestion was made that consideration be given to a rotating schedule of meetings, rather than choosing to continue to have meetings on Thursday afternoons, knowing that this would mean that a portion of the faculty might not be able to attend for a whole semester or even an entire year. Rather, the meetings could float between, possibly, Thursday and Friday afternoons for a fairer distribution. A recommendation on this will be given to Provost Krauss from the Senate.

The discussion regarding the switch from starting classes ten minutes after the hour to on the hour was not resolved. Most of the Senate members were in agreement that either time schedule would be sufficient, though some concerns were expressed regarding the on-the-hour start time and commuting schedules.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00pm.