Meeting of the 2014-15 Faculty Senate

This meeting was held February 12th, 2015 from 9:10 – 11:10 in Shapiro Campus Center Room 313.

Present: Ulka Anjaria, Sarita Bhalotra, Daniel Bergstresser, Joe Cunningham, Matthew Headrick, Jens Hilscher, Eli Hirsch, Sarah Mead, Susan Parish, Thomas Pochapsky, Jeffrey Prottas, Liuba Shrira

Absent: Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman, William Flesch, Ellen Schattschneider, Laurence Simon, Joseph Wardwell

Approval of Minutes
The minutes of 11.21.2014 were approved by the Senate via email.

Discussion of proposed amendment to Faculty Handbook to establish a standing tenure committee; Dean Susan Birren and Provost Lisa Lynch in attendance

Currently, the University has an ad hoc committee for tenure decisions. While this is the system the University has used since the beginning, and is a system favored by a slight majority of universities, many institutions have moved in recent years to a standing committee. The Dean’s office is putting forth a proposal to move to a standing tenure committee; currently, the proposal is still at the discussion and recommendation stage. Any proposal moving forward would have to go through a faculty meeting.

As presented, the reasons to make the move to a standing committee are:
   1. A standing committee is ultimately fairer for faculty going through the tenure process.
   2. A standing committee would be faster, and help the university make tenure decisions in a timelier manner.

With an ad hoc system, there is an inconsistency of standards applied from committee to committee. In a standing committee that is stable over a period of time, the idea is that even though standards for each discipline are different, the same people apply them in a set way over a certain period of time.

In the current ad hoc system, there is also a committee member from outside the University. This person is there to offer a perspective outside of the University but within the field of the tenure candidate. The outside member ideally can speak to the quality of the candidate’s research and interprets the letters of recommendation from other scholars in the field. This is a part of the system that current faculty members seem to particularly enjoy, but it does put a tremendous amount of power in the hands of the outside member.
Faculty members like being able to get a personal sense of who the letter writers are, and find having outside members can turn committee meetings into places for particularly scholarly discourse. There is a sense that the affection for the current system may lay in the scholarly nature of these discussions, without reference to whether it works well as a tenure deciding process. There is further concern that while ideally committees are looking for tenure candidates to be skilled in the three areas of teaching, service, and research, the outside member would only know about and thus shift focus to the research aspect. It is further suggested that while outside members were probably important when the University was young and establishing its reputation, as a more mature institution it is useful to consider a structure that isn’t necessarily dependent on external validation.

Ad hoc committees are also incredibly time consuming to create, between finding faculty to join and arranging times for them all to meet; obviously, with a standing committee, there is no need to redo this process for every tenure decision. Additionally, while the ad hoc committee may take more labor hours to process, the handbook mandates a timeline in which tenure cases have to be addressed; it is important to remember that currently promotion cases are not under the same mandated timeline, so non-tenure positioned faculty see their cases severely delayed in favor of addressing tenure cases instead.

All of the deans are in favor of moving to a standing system but want to hear from faculty before moving forward.

Acknowledging that the University still would need to figure out the best version of this system for its own use, the standard setup for a standing committee is:

- a committee ranging in size from usually 8-10 people (up to 30 at large universities)
- one joint committee across different schools within the university
- the department comes up with a recommendation and dossier, which goes directly to the standing committee and its chair
- if a member of the standing committee is in the department of the person under consideration, they may recuse themselves, with alternate committee members a possibility
- each committee member works on each case, with a subcommittee of 2-3 people delving deeply into a case and making a recommendation to the larger committee, which then votes
- there are no members external to the university

A number of concerns and questions regarding what a standing committee would look like were addressed and are listed below; many bring up key points to keep in mind, but do not necessarily have answers at this point in the process.

What exactly is the role of the committee? Do they evaluate the individual, or the decision and process of the promotion as put forth by the department?
Should negative department decisions go to the committee (currently they do not)?
Should the committee be school specific, or have one standing committee combining all schools within the University?
Should outside committee members be included? One option for this would be a standing committee with a rotating ad hoc member, which would potentially, but not necessarily, be an outside member.
Would it make more sense to stay with an ad hoc committee, but have no outside member? How would the committee be created? Other schools use a variety of methods, including voting on members by faculty and appointing by administration.
What negatives have we heard from other places with standing committee? Some institutions have permanent or semi-permanent members, which can lead to a concentration of power amongst a few faculty members. One potential way to combat that is to have a large enough committee with short terms for members.

Further, the role of the department representative as currently maintained was questioned. Often the department representative ends up recapping the departmental report, which seems redundant, or answering questions with information that would be better suited for the department report, thus potentially negating the need for the departmental representative.

Moving forward, as this is a handbook issue, a handbook subcommittee would need to draft a proposal for a change. First, there needs to be more discussion involving the faculty and solid support before moving forward with a handbook change.

Dean Birren has talked to the faculty chairs already and is open to talking to more faculty about the decisions surrounding a change. She has put together a document that spells out any changes necessary in a move to a standing committee and what the different possible models look like. In the next chairs meeting she will urge department chairs to take this document to their departments and to bring up the committee change in their next department meetings.

It was further suggested that any data Dean Birren could provide about how and why the current system is failing would be incredibly useful, as many are not aware as to how long current delays in tenure decisions are, or how dysfunctional the current system is.

A further discussion of this change will be put on the agenda for the next faculty meeting. All Senate members are urged to speak with their constituents about the proposal, and to encourage their chairs to further speak to faculty. The Senate has a further responsibility to decide whether it supports the proposed change; a vote is suggested for the next Senate meeting.

Susan Birren left at 10:30.

**Presidential search issues, faculty involvement**

Lisa explained how the presidential transition will be handled. Fred Lawrence will remain president through the end of June, with Lisa taking over as interim president July 1. After
serving as interim president for one year, she will return to her position as provost and work with the new president in their transition for one year. She will not be a candidate for the presidency herself. After this, she will go on sabbatical and allow the new president to appoint their own team. All of this is per the agreement Lisa has made with the Board of Trustees. This structure should help ensure the transition does not derail any progress the University is making.

For the year that Lisa is interim president, the office of the Provost will also need to be filled. Currently Lisa is in discussion with provosts and presidents at other institutions to see how they've handled this in their own transitions. Some have taken the Vice Provost for Research and made them interim Provost, since so much of the work of the provost is in research. The University has not had a full time Vice Provost for Research since 2008, and a search is currently underway to fill this position. Then, the university could search for an interim Provost, or leave the position open and delegate parts of the role out to multiple people.

Ultimately, the establishment of a presidential search committee that begins the search process quickly is most important. How said committee is formed is the domain of the chair of the Board of Trustees.

Additionally, the university’s reaccreditation process has been put on hold, with a letter having been sent requesting a one-year delay (with no penalty).

Lisa Lynch left at 11:00.

**Letter of appreciation to President Lawrence**

A public letter of appreciation to President Lawrence for his service has been suggested, Sarah Mead having written up a draft that has been accepted by the Senate Council. The Senators will read the letter and decide via email if they will sign off on the content of the letter and if it should be sent.

Meeting adjourned at 11:10.

**Addendum**

**Letter to the President**

Ultimately, since a unanimous decision could not be reached, it was decided that the Senate would not publish a public letter regarding the President’s departure.