

Minutes of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences
The College of William and Mary
April 6, 1999, Millington 150

The meeting was called to order at 3:35 p.m. by Dean P. Geoffrey Feiss, presiding.

I. Minutes of the Last Meeting

The Secretary proposed amending the posted minutes of the March meeting, to note that section II/B/14 of the Faculty Handbook relating to the Graduate Program had also been approved. The minutes were then approved as amended.

II. Reports of the Administrative Officers

In light of the long agenda, Provost Cell did not make a formal report.

Dean Feiss noted that the Committee on Graduate Studies has accepted the report on academic climate issues in graduate programs; it is available on the web and will be discussed at the May meeting, though (with approval from Faculty Affairs) he has already implemented one of its proposals by naming Professor Leisa Meyer as an Ombudsperson for climate issues

Dean Feiss also explained the allocation of funds for faculty salaries. Though the total funds available would work out to a 9.4% per capita raise, he noted that a share of these funds were set aside for 1) retirement "bumps," 2) promotion "bumps," and 3) equity adjustments. For the latter, he used data available from CUPA which show that the average salary of some faculty cohorts at the College is well below that of corresponding cohorts at peer institutions: his aim was to bring all cohorts here to at least the midpoint on these cross-school rankings. These allocations removed roughly one-third of the overall funds available, so that the average merit-based salary raise for this year will be 6.2% (he did not renormalize across departments). Dean Feiss concluded that this was a good year to readjust in the effort to remove major inequities, as this year's overall increase in the salary pool is likely to be the highest for some time to come.

Dean Feiss also mentioned that the Committee to Update the Strategic Plan is meeting weekly and would schedule public meetings before the end of the spring semester.

Finally, Dean Feiss congratulated Professors Rasmussen and Pratt for winning Fulbrights, Professor Serghi for being awarded a Whittaker Composer award, Professor Howard for receiving an ACLS grant, and Professors Heidemann, Cristol and Zwollo for their NSF Faculty Career Development awards totaling over one million dollars.

III. Nominations and Elections

Gene Tracy presented the following slates of nominees [X denotes elected].

Procedural Review Committee (select two)

Stewart Ware (Biology)

X Leisa Meyer (Women's Studies)

X John McGlennon (Government)

Kimberley Phillips (History)

Degrees (select one)

Todd Avert (Physics)

X Carla Buck (ML)

Retention, Promotion and Tenure

Area 1 (select two)

Jim Harris (Philosophy)

Marlene Jack (Art/Art History)

X Jacquelyn McLendon (English)

X John Oakley (Classics)

Area III (select one)

X Norman Fashing (Biology)

Hugo Woerdemann (Mathematics)

IV. Faculty Affairs Committee

David Dessler reported on FAC's findings in response to the Dean's request to examine how Arts and Sciences evaluates teaching effectiveness, and in particular the validity of quantitative student evaluations. FAC examined the latter according to three criteria: 1) do evaluations correlate with other indicators of effective teaching (convergent validity); 2) are student's ratings of teachers influenced by factors other than teaching effectiveness (discriminant validity); and 3) are evaluations used properly in the assessment of teaching (consequential validity).

FAC's review of the literature indicated that the answer to the first question is yes: hundreds of studies confirm the validity of student evaluations (and indeed the lack of validity of any other data source, such as peer review and classroom visitation). As for the second issue, Dessler said that the data indicate probable biases but with small effect, and the issue warrants further study (e.g. does a correlation between expecting higher grades and reviewing a teacher positively indicate that the latter is "buying grades" or that the former is working harder?). He concluded the report by indicating that FAC had not yet fully examined the third question, but anecdotal evidence suggests undue emphasis is placed on marginal statistical differences between teachers' ratings (e.g. 4.0 vs. 4.2).

Dessler reported FAC's conclusion that any acceptable system of teaching assessment will make use of quantitative evaluations; that--though departments may have distinct policies, all should make use of relevant research in this area, meaning that course

evaluations should be partially standardized across departments and programs in order to reflect this shared knowledge base; and that two motions advanced today represent the first steps in a process intended to improve the assessment of teaching, with additional discussions to be carried forwarded next year among FAC, DAC and the Dean.

FAC's first motion suggested modifying Paragraph II/A/6 of the Faculty Manual on Student Course Evaluations to include language stipulating that "all departments shall use a survey instrument that enables the collection of quantitative data on teaching performance, and shall include on this form common questions approved by the faculty."

FAC's second motion proposed that each department and program ask students "How would you rate this instructor's overall teaching effectiveness?" with possible responses to be labeled 1= very poor; 2 = poor; 3 = fair; 4 = good; and 5 = excellent.

Concerns raised by faculty included the impact of this change on departmental autonomy and uses to which such data would be put. Dessler responded that all departments but one currently employ quantitative evaluations and that 18 of 23 ask a question basically the same as the one proposed by FAC. Another concern raised was that overall teaching effectiveness can not be measured with one number and that such quantitative data are not helpful because the coefficient indicates nothing about the means. Some faculty expressed a preference for qualitative written evaluations. Others responded that their departments make use of both. A proposal was made to ultimately turn over the evaluation to the Student Assembly.

The first motion passed with an amendment specifying that the common questions shall be "approved by the Arts and Sciences faculty."

The second motion passed with an amendment modifying the wording of responses as follows, to ensure parallelism: 1 = poor; 2 = below average; 3 = average; 4 = above average; 5 = excellent.

On behalf of FAC, Dessler also initiated a discussion of formal grade review procedures. Dean Gross briefly reported on a case in the graduate program as well as a corresponding change in graduate grade reviews approved by COGS: this new procedure involves the Dean as an umpire rather than leaving the final decision ultimately up to the instructor alone. FAC proposed instituting this procedure in the undergraduate program as well. At the proposal of a member of the faculty, discussion of this issue was postponed until the May meeting.

V. Educational Policy Committee

Professor Cooke reported to the faculty, pursuant to its request in April 1998 that there be a review of the new Continuation Standard, mid-semester reporting system, and Academic Intervention support services, all approved at that time. He summarized the new standard, which will--effective fall 1999--require students to achieve at least a 2.0

after four semesters, noting that it was intended to encourage better academic performance. Data indicate that

Cooke also reported on a trial run of Academic Intervention program in 1998-99, which included students who took part voluntarily now (though the new Standard is not yet in effect). Participants' QPA's rose on average by .08; non-participants--that is, students whose grades would place them below the future Standard--fell by .02 between Spring 1998 and Fall 1998. A larger number of students, mainly freshmen, entered the program in Spring 1999.

Cooke reported that 659 mid-semester grades of marginal or unsatisfactory were reported in the fall of 1998; 216 became D's or F's, 76 became A's or B's and 135 W's or P's. Yet a total of 2000 grades of C- or worse were reported in fall 1998, indicating that many faculty did not file mid-semester reports. Only a small share have reported thus far this spring. He urged faculty to revise their schedules so that some performance measure is available by mid-semester, and recommended that those faculty who teach first or second year students in particular take part.

On behalf of FAC, Cooke presented two motions. The first would require that students take part in the Academic Intervention program or have their registration held.

The second motion would slightly alter the new minimum Continuance standard for freshmen and sophomores from a 1.7 GPA and 24 credits after two semesters to a 1.7 and 21 credits (and from a 1.85 and 36 credits to a 1.85 and 33 credits after three semesters). This modification would make it possible for students who are struggling academically in their first year to avoid academic probation by reducing their course load somewhat.

Responding to an EPC report that accompanied these proposals, some faculty pointed out that nearly 90% of those students fall just below the new 1998 Continuance standard of 2.0 after four semesters would ultimately graduate, not substantially different from the graduation rate for those in the 2.0 to 2.5 range: this raises questions about the real point of the change. Cooke responded that even the current (pre-1998) standard motivates students to improve their performance

Another set of questions focused on why credit earned in William and Mary summer school did not count in helping students get off of academic probation: students might do well enough in the summer to raise their overall GPA above the overall minimum but because these grades could not be counted might still remain below the standard in the fall semester. Cooke replied that even current Continuance standards do not allow summer school credit to be counted in getting off of probation; the aim is to ensure that students on probation can achieve a normal rate of progress, and that summer courses offer too little indication of that. He added that the number of cases of students who would rise above the overall Continuance standard thanks partly to summer work, but still fail to meet expectations for getting off of probation in the fall, would be small, and that the Academic Status committee would make an exception in any such cases.

Both EPC motions carried.

VI. Old Business

No old business was raised.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Clay Clemens, Associate Professor of Government

Secretary's Note: Given that controversial agenda items such as student evaluations and continuance requirements apparently helped increase attendance at this meeting, faculty should be alerted that May's agenda may include motions to raise the minimum teaching load to 6:6, abolish grades, cancel merit pay raises and eliminate several large departments.