

Minutes of the University Faculty Affairs Committee (UFAC)

August 17, 2017

3:02-4:20 PM, Woodard 132

Present: Cate Brewer, Betsy Lewis, Miriam Liss (chair), Marie McAllister (secretary), Xiaofeng Zhao.

Absent: Courtney Clayton.

Guest: Debra Schleef, Office of Institutional Analysis and Effectiveness

2017-18 PLANNING: Fall meetings are tentatively scheduled for 8/30, 10/4, and 11/8 at 3:30 pm. Agendas will be stored in a Dropbox folder Miriam will share. Draft minutes, approved minutes, and any actions items for the UFC will be posted on the UFAC website. The tentative agenda for 2017-18 that we drew up in April at the request of the UFC chair can be found at <http://ufc.umw.edu/files/2017/03/UFAC-tentative-agenda-2017-18.pdf>.

I. OLD BUSINESS

1. FACULTY EVALUATION: The UFAC has been asked to consider three aspects of evaluating teaching:

A) How to increase the rate of return for the current student evaluation instrument;

Debra Schleef reports that the return has been increasing a point or two each year since electronic evaluations were adapted. This spring's average rate was 56%. The UFC decided to do evaluations both semesters this year to see if that raises response rate. Debra's office will take several additional steps:

- a) Continue using a Canvas banner, but also use the new Guide phone app for first-years, to remind students that evaluations are open.
- b) Try to outwit e-mail spam filters by staggering the notices informing students that evaluations are open. By sending a batch every few hours, all can be delivered in time for a professor to do the evaluation during class time if desired.
- c) Send a short guide for professors reminding them of options others have used successfully:
 - Have students bring electronic devices to a class session in which time is set aside for completing evaluations as needed.
 - Give all students a few extra points ("or candy") if the class reaches an 85% return rate.
 - Make evaluations an assignment on Canvas, with students checking off that they've done their evaluation to earn their points.

In answer to a question, Debra noted that there is no mechanism for holding grades until evaluations are completed.

B) Whether there is a need to revisit UMW's student evaluation instrument at this time.

None of Debra's research thus far suggests that other schools have developed a superior instrument or one more widely acceptable to faculty. She continues to do research, particularly on bias and evaluation, and notes that the science of evaluation has progressed in the 15 years since we designed our current instrument. However, there has been no particular call to replace UMW's instrument, so if changes are desired her inclination is to tweak rather than overhaul. The Committee decided that other matters were more urgent than revisiting the instrument this year.

During this discussion, one member pointed out that it might be helpful for senior faculty, chairs, deans, and P&T to receive training in how to interpret student evaluation scores, particularly the statistical significance (or lack thereof) of being above or below department averages. No action was taken at this time.

There was also some discussion of whether quantitative data are required. Debra noted that chairs and administrators sometimes need quantitative data, and that research indicates that quantitative evaluations show less bias than qualitative evaluations.

C) Whether faculty would be better served if UMW added additional forms of teaching evaluation.

In her April 2017 meeting with the UFAC, Provost Mikhalevsky noted that departments and colleges at UMW have very different processes for documenting teaching in P&T files, and for mentoring teaching development. She suggested that UFAC examine what other schools are doing for P&T documentation, which tends to be far more robust in the area of teaching, and also consult with our own College of Education.

Betsy noted that CAS chairs were surveyed last year about mentoring and pre-tenure review. Miriam will request those results and research COB and COE practices for our next meeting. Debra noted that COE's tenure & promotion appendix includes a good list of materials their faculty can submit.

There was brief discussion about whether and how grade distribution reports are used in teaching evaluation. Debra noted that chairs get a grouped report, and faculty can request individual reports from her.

The committee discussed the intentions behind considering teaching evaluation this year. We rejected the idea that our purpose is to improve faculty assessment. Instead, our goals are to ensure that untenured faculty receive appropriate mentoring in teaching and that all faculty have ample means to document teaching success. There was informal conversation about how the Center for Teaching Excellence and Innovation might be able to collaborate on these goals. The committee agreed that the first step was to research current practices.

2. JUNIOR FACULTY SERVICE

There was brief discussion of the Provost's request, both to UFAC in April and to all committees at today's committee organization meeting, that departments protect junior faculty from service demands that could put them in a difficult position with senior colleagues, such as assessment. The question of whether UMW needs a Faculty Ombudsperson to assist junior faculty was raised, without action.

Other items on the 2017-18 tentative agenda will be taken up at our first scheduled substantive meeting. The committee adjourned feeling pleased that good work had already been accomplished in its organizational meeting.