

UFAC Memorandum of Concern

October 7, 2021

Several faculty members from different departments and buildings have expressed concern to members of the UFAC about how decisions regarding space are considered and how space is allocated on our campus.

On a small campus like ours, space is one of the most sought-after resources. When spaces become available, such as when departments move, there are typically many parties on campus interested in the vacated space. In addition, when new programs or centers are created, decisions must be made about where they should be located. It is our understanding that the decision of what to do in these situations falls under the purview of the UMW space committee. However, after discussions with faculty and looking into this issue further, we have serious concerns with the way this group has been operating.

Specifically, those who make decisions about the allocation of space on our campus do not make available spaces known to the campus community, solicit requests for spaces, provide a time frame for when they meet or when decisions will be made, or announce when spaces have been reassigned. The membership of the space committee is not posted publicly, so the UFAC does not know who is on the committee and whether or not faculty are sufficiently represented. Faculty have expressed concerns to UFAC about how attempts to communicate with the space committee have been repeatedly ignored and, in several instances, members of the space committee have refused to meet with various departments or groups on campus.

The result of this is a system where faculty and staff do not have sufficient voice in how spaces are appropriated. We do not have the opportunity to make a case on how a space can best be put to use to serve our student body – or the opportunity to work collaboratively and creatively across departments to find mutually-beneficial solutions to space constraints. Instead, spaces are allocated by the committee with no established process or explanation, which can contribute to the appearance of cronyism or preferential treatment and to decreased faculty morale.

It could be argued that the administration needs to retain the ability to assign spaces unilaterally, as it does when deciding whether to replace or add faculty lines. However even in this case, there is a clear call for hiring proposals sent to all departments, a timeline for decisions to be made and a clear communication of outcomes. If the administration seeks to retain the ability to assign spaces without faculty taking part in decisions, they should at the very least make the process more transparent.

The UFAC therefore recommends the following:

That the members of the UMW space committee be clearly listed on the UMW website and that the committee include at least one member of the full-time faculty.

That the committee establish clear procedures and guidelines for how requests for space on campus should be submitted and for how decisions will be made, including providing a timeline for such decisions.

That the committee respond to faculty questions in a timely manner.

That the committee publicly post their meeting dates and times.

That the committee post their meeting minutes. Although the UFAC understands the sensitive nature of some space decisions, other established committees at UMW, including Promotion and Tenure as well as Sabbaticals, Fellowships, and Faculty Awards, similarly discuss confidential and sensitive information but still maintain a record of meetings.

We believe that these recommendations will help ensure a more transparent and equitable decision-making process.