

UMW Board of Visitors
Faculty Representative Report
October 31st, 2024
Davis Oldham, UFC Chair

The primary focus of the UMW faculty this academic year continues to be the revision of our several aspects of faculty governance. While many of these changes are long overdue, the pending redistribution of academic departments across colleges developed during the 2023-2024 academic year has provided a necessary impetus to make several changes.

The biggest change will be to the current university faculty council (UFC), which is a representative body of 18 faculty members: 9 from the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), 3 from the College of Education (COE) and 3 from the College of Business (COB), with an additional 3 at-large representatives. This system, which arose in 2015 from the need to have sufficient representation from all three colleges, places an undue service burden on the two smaller colleges (COE and COB). In the last 3 years, the University Faculty Organization Committee (UFOC) and a summer handbook advisory group have researched how faculties organize their governing bodies. Three categories emerged: a faculty council made up of representatives from groups of departments, a faculty senate in which each academic department sends one representative, and a faculty of the whole.

At the September UFC meeting, faculty members preferred the first two options, with more preferring the senate model. This model provides flexibility as departments change in size, merge, or split. It also should improve communication, as news and action items from UFC will flow from representatives to their departments. In the current model, many departments do not have a representative at UFC. The primary concerns with this model were the service burden of small departments, representation of larger departments, and lack of communication between the UFC and academic departments, especially those which do not have representation. I discussed these concerns with the Provost and the UFC Executive Committee; we concluded that small departments could share a representative, and that large departments may eventually split into multiple smaller departments. This process would naturally alleviate the underrepresentation problem.

At the October UFC meeting, the faculty agreed to vote on a new faculty governing organization. Approval of change to the UFC requires the approval of the governing bodies of all three colleges. Each college's governing body has the right to determine how they will make their decision: the governing body could decide on its own, or it could call a vote of all the members in its college. Currently, these college councils are discussing and voting on the proposed faculty senate.

In addition to reimagining faculty governance at the top level, we have also begun discussing ways to improve our standing committee organization. The UFOC and the summer handbook group also provided much-needed guidance on this. Currently, 18 different committees report to UFC. Many of these committees were created in response to changing general education requirements. The extensive number of committees has created an additional burden on COE and COB, as these committees require representation from all colleges. Additionally, the

workload can vary widely from committee to committee. Merging some committees together could address both workload and service burden challenges.

At the November UFC meeting, faculty will vote on approving changes suggested by the summer handbook committee. These include correcting errors and inaccuracies (e.g. references to the Associate Provost for Academic Affairs and the Associate Provost for Academic Success and Student Engagement, as these positions no longer exist), deleting redundant sentences and information, updating information that was out-of-date and inaccurate (e.g. Code of Virginia references, distinctions between program directors and chairs of academic departments), and reordering sections to be more logically organized and streamlined (e.g. faculty appeals).

As part of regular UFC business, we voted on several proposals related to academic and curricular policies. The University Academic Affairs Committee (UAAC) recommended modifying the restrictions on overlap between two majors. Currently, students cannot count more than 9 credits for two different majors. The UAAC approved a faculty proposal to allow the overlap to be 12 credits (up to 3 classes). This keeps the existing policy largely in place but grants the ability for double-majoring in disciplines which share 4-credit courses, typically labs. This motion was approved.

The UFC also discussed a motion to allow the UFC Executive Committee to grant emergency approvals for designation of courses. This proposal was brought forth by the FSEM committee, as they face a particularly challenging deadline to advertise FSEM offerings for incoming students and begin the process of building student schedules. Their motion gives the FSEM and curricular committees (the general education committee and designation committees such as writing, speaking, and digital intensive) the ability to have approvals happen between the November UFC meeting and the next UFC meeting in January.

Dave Kolar, Associate Professor of Psychology, and Sarah Lindberg, Director of First-Year Admission, have collaborated to launch the Faculty and Staff Fans of Athletics Group. Their goal is to support student-athletes and increase community connections. UMW student-athletes have chosen a Division III school to grow academically while continuing to develop in their sport; likewise, faculty and staff at UMW enjoy celebrating the successes of UMW students beyond the classroom.

Faculty have been involved in many different areas of professional and scholarly activity. The semester has had several colloquia by faculty in the social sciences, including Nora Kim (sociology) and Brooks Kukyendall (music). Victoria Russell, director of the Center for Teaching, has scheduled several pedagogy colloquia from faculty in a variety of disciplines and roundtable discussions of artificial intelligence issues. This fall, faculty (and many cases UMW students as well) have presented their work at a variety of venues. Representative highlights from an extensive list of venues include the OpenAI Higher Ed Forum (Anand Rao, Communications and Digital Studies), a meeting of the American Chemical Society (Nicole Crowder, Davis Oldham, Randy Reif, and Sarah Smith, Chemistry), International Visitor Leadership Program (Steven Farnsworth, Political Science), and the 2024 Rhetoric Society of America (Emily Crosby, Communication). Faculty and staff also frequently gave their expert opinion through radio interviews and in news articles.

Faculty also joined staff at monthly admissions events. Departments send at least one representative to meet with prospective students and families, and are joined by faculty admissions fellows, who have taken on additional responsibilities to work with admissions in recruiting future UMW students.

Respectfully submitted,
Davis Oldham, UFC chair