Faculty Council Report on Academic Year 2010-2011

This academic year the Faculty Council, formerly “Advisory Council” met monthly, undertook a number of tasks, and strove to develop the means more effectively to pursue its official business.

A chief accomplishment of the early part of the year was the reconciliation of the three School governance documents with the new College governance document. Special thanks are due to the subcommittee of David Payne, Sandy Schneider and Hari Srikanth for their careful and effective work on this project.

The council also undertook a review of the CAS-specific data collected in the campus climate survey. Special thanks here go to Jim Cavendish and Christine Probes. The review of the data did not reveal any substantial negative comparisons with the campus wide results. It did reveal that CAS staff members are considerably less content than faculty, and this we agree should be of concern to all of us. The qualitative data also suggested that there are faculty concerns regarding the emergence of a two-tiered faculty structure. Some faculty also expressed the sentiment that conservative political and social views are not accorded due respect by many faculty.

Fall Assembly was fairly well attended, and our guest speaker was Paul Dosal, of Student Success.

This year the Council took several measures in the attempt better to fulfill its charge to “represent the interests of CAS Faculty to the Office of the Dean”. To this end, Council sought and received an invitation to have a member attend the Council of Chairs meetings. We have also developed and launched a Faculty Council webpage, linked to the CAS homepage, (thanks to Michael Abrahams and Michelle Dye) which informs faculty about the role of the Council, and has links to members department pages, archived Council minutes, and schedule of Council events. Most important is a link to a new Faculty Council email address, through which CAS faculty can communicate their questions, concerns, recommendations for Agenda items, and the like.

Council also held its first ever Town Hall meeting last month, generously funded by the Dean’s office, at which the Website launch was announced, and at which we had a wide-ranging discussion of various issues. Prominent among these was the Union drive to secure 50% membership, lest it be busted. Considerable sentiment was expressed to the effect that the Union should reduce its membership fee, if only temporarily, in order to ensure its survival. The Union representative in attendance, Prof. Greg McColm mentioned the $300 rebate for new members, and the facts that
the membership fee is a frequent topic of discussion at union meetings, and that a main motive for not lowering the fee further is that the union expects to have high legal expenses to litigate anticipated anti-union state action.

Faculty in attendance at the Town Hall meeting expressed a wide range of concerns. Some of these centered on the Student Success initiative. In particular, faculty members lodged the complaint that the writing skills of our students are often not up to par, and that the writing center is woefully understaffed and without sufficient resources effectively to meet the very high demand that would reflect real student needs. A related issue that arose concerning the DWF rates was the fact that students are often enrolled in classes for which they are insufficiently prepared -- for example, fourth year exit classes in a discipline to which they have had no previous exposure. Further, results of centralized scheduling have made it nearly impossible to schedule discussion and quiz sections for large lecture classes, which are best practice standard for a wide range of especially challenging classes. There seems to be some fairly wide sentiment that the scheduling tail is wagging the pedagogical dog in a way that presents genuine impediments to real student success. Another complaint was that the physical set-up of some new classrooms, in for example Cooper Hall, makes break out into small discussion impossible, and is otherwise ill suited to effective pedagogy. Decisions made centrally often have consequences for pedagogy, and more effort should be made to take these consequences into account, perhaps by more extensive consultation with the professors and instructors who use the rooms.

These faculty concerns were duly reported to the Deans at our second to last meeting on April 1st, at which time Council completed its other major responsibilities of filling vacancies on the College’s standing committees and arranging this Spring Assembly.

Among the issues to which the Council intends to devote attention in the future are space and scheduling, discretionary raise distribution, meaningful student success measures and strategies for the College and anything else on which you as faculty ask us to focus.

Finally, Council wishes to thank Mary Sweely for her dedication and hard work, which is vital to Council’s functioning at all, and Sharon Johnson-Hamilton as well, for her effective and essential management of the committee staffing process, among other things.

Richard Manning

CAS Faculty Council Chair