Minutes of the CSBS Senate Meeting on 10/17/11

Present: Sunde Nesbit (Psychology), Tim Strauss (Geography), Carol Weisenberger (History), Taifa Yu (Political Science), Cyndi Dunn (SAC), Elaine Eshbaugh (SAHS), Jim McCullagh (Social Work), Philip Mauceri (Dean)

I. Approval of the minutes from 4/18/11

The minutes from 4/18/11 were approved with no changes.

II. Review of changes to SAHS curriculum packet

Dr. Howard Barnes was present as head of the School of Applied Human Sciences. Several minor items were missed in the curriculum review from last spring and had to be corrected in the final curriculum packet.

Last spring, the senate approved splitting the three-hour professional development course in Interior Design into two separate courses to be taken at different points in the student’s sequence. This requires a restatement of the Interior Design major to include the new courses.

The senate had approved adding an Interior Design course (INTDSGN 3129) to the Gerontology major and minor. The school also wishes to remove the existing pre-requisites for this course so that Gerontology majors will be able to take it.

The course Families, Alzheimer’s and Related Dementias serves both the Gerontology program and the Family Services program. It therefore needs to be cross-listed with both prefixes as GER 3161 and FAMSERV 3161. It should be listed as FAMSERV 3161/5161 in the Family Services curriculum rather than as GER 3161/5161. It was also inadvertently omitted from the Gerontology major and minor, where it should be listed as GER 3161/5161. Each of the cross listed sections needs a statement "cannot also receive credit for" the other one. GER 3161/5161 should read "cannot also receive credit for FAM SERV 3161/5161" and the FAMSERV 3161/5161 should read "cannot also receive credit for GER 3161/5161."

Finally the Interior Design major needs to be restated to include the new course INTDSGN 3165.

The senate approved all of the above changes.

III. Response to LAC-RSC proposals for restructuring the Liberal Arts Core

Last spring, the senate wrote a lengthy memo to the LAC-RSC detailing our views of the proposed changes. The LAC-RSC released its final report recommending changes to the LAC in August 2011. All CSBS departments have been asked to draft their own response to these recommendations, recognizing that different departments may have different perspectives and may be differentially effected by some of the proposed changes.
Dean Mauceri met with the co-chairs of the LAC-RSC to express his concerns particularly regarding resources and the university’s ability to staff all of the new courses being proposed for the LAC. He believes that the LAC-RSC is continuing to receive input on the proposed changes and may issue revised recommendations at some point.

In order for any changes to be made to the Liberal Arts Core, they must be approved first by the Liberal Arts Core Committee and then by the University Faculty Senate. Any proposal made to the LACC must include an analysis of available resources. The LAC-RSC may decide to pilot some of the proposed new courses initially on an experimental basis much as is currently being done with the Cornerstone courses.

It was decided that the college senate should take no further action at this time. If and when the proposed changes move to the LACC or the University Faculty Senate, the CSBS Senate may wish to meet with our college’s representatives on those bodies.

IV. Dean’s recommendations for procedures and criteria for promotion to full professor

The dean has recently issued the department heads with recommendations for changes to the procedures and criteria for promotion to full professor. Dean Mauceri stated that these are recommendations only; they are not requirements. His goal is for candidates coming up for promotion to make as strong a case as possible.

To this end, it is important that all accomplishments be appropriately documented in the PAC file. For example, if a manuscript is “forthcoming” or “in press,” the file should include appropriate correspondence from the editor documenting that. Similarly, some CVs are very disorganized and difficult to read. The dean has provided a model CV that faculty members may wish to follow.

In order to be promoted to full professor, the candidate must have “recognized and significant” accomplishments in scholarship, teaching, and service. One way to document this is through external letters of support. It appears that this is standard practice in many departments in the other colleges. In our college, only Geography routinely requires this of all candidates. The dean stated that he is recommending this only for promotion to full professor; he is not recommending external reviews for candidates for tenure and promotion to associate professor.

It was noted that external review letters are often lukewarm. They neither criticize nor highly praise the research. It is not clear that such letters make any meaningful contribution to evaluating the person for promotion. The dean stated that lukewarm letters are still better than no letters and that this helps him make the case to the other deans about the significance of the person’s research. The question was raised of why the members of the PAC, who are experts in the same discipline, are not competent to evaluate the significance of their colleague’s research. In some departments, several disciplines are represented, and the members of the PAC may not always be qualified to evaluate the individual’s research. However, that is not the case in other departments, and some PACs include extensive discussion of the significance of the candidate’s research in their letters of evaluation.
There is also the problem of selecting appropriate external reviewers. Reviewers at R-1 type institutions may understandably have differing expectations for an appropriate record of scholarship than those at more teaching-intensive institutions. This matter needs to be considered carefully when choosing external reviewers.

The question was raised of whether the focus for promotion should be exclusively on a person’s record of scholarship or whether we should be give greater weight to teaching than we do currently. The dean stated that he would support the inclusion of teaching portfolios in the PAC file in order to allow a better evaluation of teaching quality.

V. Concerns about four-four teaching policy

The dean acknowledged that focusing only on journal articles is a very narrow view of research and that the policy needs to be amended to take better account of activities such as books, patents, research reports, and so forth. He stated that the criteria for teaching a four-four course load are currently being reviewed and may be revised.

It was noted that consonant with our institution’s focus on undergraduate teaching, faculty members have been encouraged to supervise undergraduate student research or to incorporate students into their research activities. However, this is time consuming and potentially harmful to the faculty member’s own research productivity. In this and other ways, there is concern that the new policy will encourage faculty to put less time and effort into teaching in order to focus on research.

It was also noted that the policy is liable to have a detrimental effect on service. Many faculty members have historically undertaken quite time-consuming service on various universities committees and task forces. Faculty are less likely to engage in such service under the new policy, and there are already reports of faculty withdrawing effort in this area.

The communication surrounding this change in policy has been abysmal. It is important that policy decisions be made in an open, transparent manner and communicated in ways that are clear and consistent. The provost has made no attempt to communicate directly with the faculty about the rationale or implementation of the policy, and department heads have not been consistent in what information was transmitted to faculty or when. When changes of this magnitude are made, transparent decision-making and clear communication are essential.

Faculty have been receiving very mixed messages from the administration. On the one hand we are told that this is an institution focused on undergraduate teaching and that this should be our highest priority. On the other hand, many recent incentives and mandates appear to be aimed at increasing faculty research and grant writing with the aim of becoming more like a major research institution. Without any sense of clear direction from the administration, the faculty are unsure of where their efforts should be directed. At the same time, faculty have increasingly lost the flexibility to make their own decisions about their prioritization of teaching, research, and service. The university is trying to do too many things and lacks any clear sense of direction or institutional identity. This may be the greatest long-term threat to the future of this institution.
The meeting ended with a discussion of the book *Academically Adrift* and the lack of academic rigor in college classrooms. There are concerns about the administration’s increased focus on student evaluations as a measure of teaching quality and the increased emphasis on retention and graduation rates, both of which may discourage professors from challenging their students academically. There are currently no countervailing pressures to encourage professors to hold students to rigorous standards. Some senators suggested that in addition to the grade in each course, transcripts should also include the mean grade in the course, in order to put the individual grade in better perspective. It was also suggested that the college or university could adopt a standard median grade such that all professors would be either encouraged or required to assign half of their grades above the median and half below. It was pointed out, however, that such a system places students in competition with each other and would discourage them from studying together, learning from each other, and so forth.

The meeting adjourned at 4:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Cyndi Dunn