

Faculty Matters Committee
Annual Report to the Faculty Senate: 2016-2017
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The Faculty Matters Committee addressed the following issues during Academic Year 2016-2017:

Faculty Evaluation of Administrators: The committee oversaw the production of the FEA report for 2015-2016 and the release of the FEA survey for 2016-2017, which is still open for faculty participation as of this writing. Production of the FEA report for 2016-2017 is planned for Fall 2017. The committee is currently assessing the usefulness and timeliness of the annual FEA report through conversations with various stakeholders, including faculty, deans, and other administrators. Based on these discussions, revisions will be implemented for the 2017-2018 FEA survey.

Faculty Evaluation of Departmental Chairs: The committee recommended to the Faculty Handbook Committee that language be added to the handbook requiring annual evaluations of department chairs by departmental faculty.

Minimum Qualifications for Department Chairs: The committee discussed concerns that non-tenured or non-tenure-track faculty are chairing some departments at Mason and are thereby in the position of evaluating tenured and tenure-track faculty. The committee is currently collecting information on how common it is at Mason that non-tenure-track faculty are chairing departments.

Requirement that Faculty Generate Salary through Grants: The committee discussed concerns that some tenured or tenure-track faculty are being required to generate a portion of their salary through grants. The committee is currently discussing how to follow up on this issue.

Increasing Faculty Engagement in Governance: Committee members are concerned that only a modest number of Mason faculty are knowledgeable about and engaged in faculty governance at the university. The committee encourages members of the Faculty Senate to request time at departmental and college meetings to report back to their colleagues on Faculty Senate activities. The committee is also exploring the idea of coordinating visits of the Faculty Senate chair to departments to brief faculty about the role of the Faculty Senate.

Trigger Warnings: The committee discussed the issue of “trigger warnings” that would require faculty to warn students about course material that students may find upsetting or offensive. Committee members feel that mandating that faculty provide trigger warnings to students is generally inappropriate. Since no university action related to trigger warnings seems imminent,

the committee decided that the issue should be monitored but that no immediate action by the Faculty Senate is warranted.

Professor Watchlist: Committee members expressed concern about the existence of the “Professor Watchlist” (see <http://www.professorwatchlist.org/>) that lists university faculty who, according to the website, “advance a radical agenda in lecture halls.” The committee worries that the list is an attempt to muzzle faculty and that faculty on the list may be subject to harassment. In this context, the committee expressed its solidarity especially with the one George Mason University faculty member who appears on the watchlist. Since the list is now receiving very limited attention, the committee decided that no action regarding the watchlist is currently needed.

Term Faculty Task Force: The committee requested representation on or some other means of connecting with the Term Faculty Task Force recently established by the Provost. In response, a Faculty Matters Committee member has been invited to become a member of the task force.

Faculty Study Leaves: The committee is interested in faculty utilization of study leaves. Especially with Mason becoming a Tier 1 research university, there is interest in ensuring that study leaves are available in adequate numbers to eligible and interested faculty. The committee is gathering data on current practice related to study leaves to inform its action on this issue.

Textbooks: The Senate received complaints from several faculty members that the bookstore is not clearly differentiating required from recommended course material with the result that students are sometimes buying books and other material that is not used in class. The committee is currently following up on this issue with the university administrator who oversees the bookstore.

Summer Teaching: The Faculty Senate and the Faculty Matters Committee received complaints from several faculty members that faculty requests to teach summer school courses are being inappropriately rejected for financial reasons. This issue was discussed in a Senate executive meeting where the following points were made: 1) funding allocations to departments to cover summer teaching are meant to be somewhat tentative and are not necessarily “set in stone”; 2) communication between central administrators and deans and department chairs about summer school procedures needs to be improved; and 3) summer school teaching is part of a broader issue of overload teaching which should be reexamined.