GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY
MINUTES OF THE FACULTY SENATE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING
DECEMBER 10, 2020
ELECTRONIC MEETING - 2:30 – 4:30 p.m.

Present: Lisa Billingham, Melissa Broeckelman-Post, Richard Craig, Shannon Davis, Provost Ginsberg, Renate Guilford (Associate Provost for Academic Administration), Bethany Letiecq, Kumar Mehta, Janette Muir (Associate Provost for Academic Initiatives and Services), Solon Simmons, Suzanne Slayden.

I. Approval of Minutes: In progress, to distribute soon.

II. Announcements – No specific announcements made, other than the two guests attending Executive Committee.

III. Progress reports, business, and agenda items from Senate Standing Committees

A. Academic Policies – Suzanne Slayden
   No report.

B. Budget and Resources – Tim Leslie
   - Committee is continuing its work on requesting faculty engagement in discussions leading up to decision-making in various spheres.
   - Has requested inclusion of faculty member in group responsible for online tuition and fees.

C. Faculty Matters – Bethany Letiecq and Solon Simmons

   Faculty Evaluation of Administrators (FEA):
   - Quantitative data from the FEA has been prepared for the report.
   - Committee is discussing on how to manage and report the qualitative data.
   - Discussion ongoing regarding separately publishing the quantitative data earlier, and usefulness of doing so.

Discussion:
- Would be a good and acceptable practice based on precedence set by COACHE of reporting quantitative data analysis earlier and later including the qualitative data (when analysis was completed).
- The separation would be very useful – especially if qualitative data lends useful context. This would help encourage responders to include rich qualitative data.
- During discussion on timing of FEA, Provost Ginsberg noted that it would be more effective to have FEA report’s release coincide with annual evaluation process. There was generally a consensus on revisiting FEA timeline to allow it to be most impactful.

Faculty Evaluations During COVID:
- Committee has received a lot of input and is currently discussing it.
- Working collaboratively with Kim Eby (Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs and Development) to connect the committee to conversations nationally with regard to faculty evaluations during COVID.
• One of the very strong recommendations is that teaching evaluations should be set aside or should be treated very differently during COVID. Particularly because of the conditions: online virtual learning spaces and the lack of validity and reliability of the questions in student evaluation of teaching.
  o Some institutions have decided to not share make the results of teaching evaluation public.
  o Concern that university is willing to recognize the student burden by offering alternative grading system, but thus far has not shown willingness to recognize the faculty burden.
• Committee also has some recommendations about changes in research and to service as well.
  o Conversations around using individual COVID impact statement for evaluation. There has been significant reservation/opposition to such approach because: a) writing such a statement is burdensome; b) individual discomfort about documenting reasons hampering their productivity; c) concerns regarding privacy, biases of evaluators, and potentially inclinations of individual units.
• Senator Letiecq shared research indicating that women do not benefit from tenure clock stoppage while men do. Senator Letiecq stressed that while no empirical is available from COVID related stoppages, we need to be mindful of these gender gaps in benefits while assessing impact of policies.

Discussion:
• Provost Ginsberg noted that we need to be careful about how the data from student evaluation of teaching is used (for Fall 2020 and Spring 2021). The broad variation in types of courses and modalities needs to be acknowledged. At the same time, the data can be informative for the faculty in conducting self-assessment.
• Considering how quickly online evaluations are processed and made available -- Senator reiterated the urgent need for Provost to decide on whether the evaluations will be made public. Senator suggested that Provost should place a temporary hold on making them public while considering different arguments.
  o Provost Ginsberg agreed and has instructed Gesele Durham (Associate Provost for Institutional Effectiveness and Planning) to ensure that evaluations are not made public until thoughtful consideration has been given to the issue. He invited members of EXC to participate in the conversation with him and other stakeholders.

D. Nominations – Melissa Broeckelman-Post and Richard Craig
   No report from Nominations.

E. Organization and Operations – Lisa Billingham
   No report now; but will have a number of things in February.

IV. Other Committees/Faculty Representatives – none.
V. New Business, Updates, and Discussion

**INTO Mason faculty relationship with Faculty Senate**

- Janette Muir and Renate Guilford joined to help inform the conversation.
- Chair Davis provided the context of Executive Committee's desire to extend representation of INTO faculty in the Faculty Senate. Drawing on the recent approval of ex-officio representation for Mason Korea Faculty, she spoke to the need to better understand INTO faculty's role, employment and reporting structure to help identify the appropriate form of representation in the Faculty Senate.
- Associate Provost Guilford: INTO Faculty
  - Are term faculty employed by GMU
  - Fall under Provost's office
  - Janette Muir acts as their Dean
- Associate Provost Muir:
  - Several programs are administered by the Provost Office. Typically, these are joint programs across colleges and are classified as "UN".
  - Shared that there are faculty other than for INTO who also belong to this category, and asked EXC to consider implications of extending representation only to INTO faculty.

Discussion:
- Faculty Senators are allocated by College. So, the representation would not be restricted to INTO, but would be for all Faculty under Provost's office.
- Associate Provost Muir noted that while this structure provides for agility in the interdisciplinary space, it also creates a feeling of being disconnected for the faculty.
- There was extensive discussion regarding:
  - Different programs that are under Provost’s office and appropriateness of this structure.
  - What definition within Faculty Handbook would best fit the organization? It was agreed that the entire pool of faculty under "UN" classification will be considered as a single collegiate unit.
  - Contracts of these faculty state that their appointment would be governed by Faculty Handbook. There was discussion and seeking clarification regarding how the Faculty Handbook is applied since they do not have a "unit". Specifically, questions regarding renewal and promotion.
    - As of right now, none of the faculty have been promoted. Some of the faculty have been with Mason for 20 years with annual renewal of employment contract. Associate Provost Muir is working with faculty to develop process for promotion.
    - Associate Provost Muir shared specific examples of diversity in purpose of recruiting the faculty and their workload policies.
- Senator expressed surprise regarding faculty contracts stating that they are governed by Faculty Handbook, whereas the structure and governance does not conform to Faculty Handbook.
- Senator suggested that the issue of representation be addressed along with revision of the charter.
Discussion regarding the logistics of Faculty Meeting and the needed quorum for approving revision of the charter.
Discussion concluded with decision to:
- Gather additional data regarding the unaffiliated faculty (FTE, term faculty, tenure line faculty, etc.)
- Report to the Executive Committee at the next meeting.

**Provost Ginsberg**
- Five finalists for VP for Research position will be invited for virtual campus visits in mid-January.
- Spring 2021:
  - Decision regarding the modality will be made by Jan 15, 2021.
  - Asking all faculty to be prepared to transition to be fully virtual (if necessary).
  - Enrollments:
    - Have increased and are within 1.5% of enrollment last year.
    - Expressed concern with greater decline in enrollment for freshmen and sophomores (compared to Fall 2020).
    - Reinstated Dean’s List in Fall.
- Alternative Grading: After consideration of implications, recommendation for retroactive alternative grading system for Summer 2020 will not be accepted. The decision was based on legal ramifications as well as challenges associated with students who have already graduated.
- With sharp rise in failing grades in K-12, Mason is partnering with K-12 community to study challenges with student learning.

Discussion:
- Senator asked if percentage decline in freshmen enrollment was available.
  Provost Ginsberg did not have exact numbers.
- Senator queried about change in transfer students.
  Provost Ginsberg: New transfers are down, though not precipitously.
- Senator commended Mason collaborating with K-12 to study and understand causes for gap in student learning and shared the need to record the data for familial and housing variables to capture the broader context.
- Senator asked Provost’s office to consider sharing aggregate statistics on choice to use alternative grading system, such as: % students choosing, its impact on GPA for the semester, etc. The data would allow better insights into the impact.

**Chair Davis**

Meeting with BOV Liaison Visitor Tom Davis
- Encouraged all committee chairs to invite Visitor Tom Davis to one of the committee meetings to collectively have conversation with him.
• In Spring 2021, Executive Committee to have a meeting with Visitor Davis separate from regularly scheduled meetings.

Planning for 2021-2022 Faculty Senate meetings
• Asked Executive Committee to consider options: a) extending the duration of Faculty Senate Meetings by 30 minutes to 1 hour 45 minutes; or b) Changing the frequency of meetings.
• Also, whether the meetings for 2021-22 be partially or whole virtual?

Discussion:
• Often Senators have classes starting at 4:30 PM and extending meetings to 4:45 PM may create problems.
• Senator shared that longer meetings are not necessarily more productive and increasing frequency of meetings would be better.
• Senators discussed implications of increasing the frequency of meetings on teaching availability, and also on committee meeting times (which are often held at the same time during the weeks of no Faculty Senate Meetings).
• Benefit of allowing attending the meeting by Zoom enables broader faculty participation, including for those from other campuses.
• EXC members discussed possibility to continue the meetings on Zoom for 2021-2022.
  o Allow greater consistency in face of all the uncertainty around COVID.
  o Members noted the attendance at FS meetings on zoom regularly exceed 150 and have been up to 300 for some of the meetings.
  o Faculty have expressed appreciation for being able to easily join the FS meetings.
  o Senators noted on the value of in-person networking and meeting.
  o Senator shared suggestion of standing committees possibly hosting breakout rooms for faculty to engage directly with the committee. Executive Committee members liked the idea but also expressed concern about increasing service commitment the is not broadly appreciated or recognized.
  o After additional discussion on ways to increase engagement with faculty and pros/cons of Zoom meetings, Chair Davis closed the discussion with request for members to think about the options before January meeting of Executive Committee.

Meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted.

Kumar Mehta
Secretary