

Minutes of the Faculty Senate

The Faculty Senate met for over an hour on Tuesday, September 2, 2003 in ECTR 116. 58 Senators attended.

Speaker Hugh Wilder called the meeting to order. He welcomed Senators to the academic year's first meeting, and announced that George Pothering (Computer Science) had graciously agreed to serve this year as Parliamentarian. Mr. Wilder also acknowledged Debbie Vaughn, who will continue to serve this year as the Senate Webmaster and to provide technical assistance in displaying agenda items and other documents during Senate meetings. He thanked both faculty members for their generous assistance to the Senate.

The minutes from the April 2003 Senate meeting were approved, and the Speaker then invited nominations for Speaker Pro Tem (a Senator who will preside over Senate meetings if the Speaker is unable to do so). Glenn Lesses (Philosophy and Religious Studies) nominated Bev Diamond (Mathematics). No other nominations were forthcoming, and Ms. Diamond was elected by acclamation. ("Stay healthy," she admonished the Speaker.)

The Faculty Secretary circulated the roster for Senators to sign, and asked that they update any information that needed correcting. She reminded Senators that they are always elected to serve a specific term of two years, and that if a Senator could not complete that term (because of going on sabbatical, for example), then a replacement Senator would be elected who would complete only the remainder of that term.

Reports

Provost

The Speaker welcomed Dr. Elise Jorgens, the new Provost, who has come to the College from Western Michigan University. There she was a member of the English Department, a Dean, and, most recently, Interim Provost. Ms. Jorgens greeted Senators, explaining that she simply wanted to let them know that she looked forward to working with them. She added that she is delighted to be joining in the "exciting work going on at the College."

Business Affairs

Mr. Gary McCombs, Senior Vice-President for Business Affairs, along with Sam Jones, Director of the College Budget, made a presentation on the College's current budget. "I told Sam to be as positive as possible," Mr. McCombs began, and Mr. Jones explained that, therefore, the presentation would be brief. Mr. McCombs explained that in the near future, there is "no relief in sight" from the state budget shortfalls that result in decreases in allocations to the College. More and more states are coming to view higher education as a discretionary rather than an essential state service, and South Carolina is part of this trend. Since 2001-02, the College lost 8.8 million in state appropriations. This meant that the percent of our total budget that came from state revenues went from 31% to 21%.

Cuts of this nature could obviously diminish or eliminate the improvements planned in the Fourth-Century Initiative, so the College needs to find some way to make up the shortfall (from 34 million in appropriations in FY 2001-02 to 26.4 million in this fiscal year). Unfortunately, the College has already exhausted its reserve funds and cut its operating budget (by 5% in FY 2002-3, with another 1.5% cut planned for 04). Other economies include restrictions on purchases and travel and the elimination of non-essential programs such as the Lightsey Center and the Annot program. There is not much left to cut. Hence, the best source of funding available for the College is increased tuition. The College has raised tuition and fees by 18%, and must use 65% of this new money to offset state funding reductions. However, the Fourth-Century Initiative continues. There were two new faculty lines and 18 staff lines added in 01-02, along with more money for advising. This year, there are 23 more new faculty lines, increased funding for financial aid, and a 2% salary increase. In this economic climate, such additions are remarkable.

Mr. McCombs then responded to questions from the floor. He reported that the college was ahead of its goal to lower enrollment by 300 this year, and that he did not foresee increasing the percentage of out-of-state students as a way of increasing the total tuition we collect. He also noted that a half-million dollars in this year's budget had been set aside to use for merit and equity increases that have yet to be assigned. Mr. McCombs also confirmed that the Master Planning effort was still underway, state budget cuts notwithstanding.

Academic Planning Committee

Bill Olejniczak reported to the Senate on the progress of the committee he had chaired last year. He noted that the committee had been working for over a year on this project, and as yet had no proposal to bring to the Senate. Mr. Olejniczak told the Senate that his Committee had been asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the existing course called Freshman Seminar, and at the same time was charged with developing a proposal for an academic component of the first-year experience of our students. The committee did extensive research on the way such courses are organized and delivered at many other institutions. It has also sought feedback from deans and chairs, in hopes of devising a program that will have the support of all faculty. Certain principles emerged last year: the class would be required of all first year students, the class size would be small, and the classes would be taught by regular faculty. The director of the program would be a faculty member and would report to the Provost and to the new vice-president in charge of the first-year experience.

The Committee had initially come to the conclusion that these goals could be accomplished through an "add one hour" model—an existing course with a smaller class size and one more contact hour. The faculty member would spend more time with these freshmen than is usually possible in a regular version of these classes. After receiving feedback from deans and chairs, however, the Committee is now considering another model, that of the "special seminar." Tom Kunkle (Mathematics) asked what the content of a special seminar would be. Other faculty addressed the distinction between this

proposed course and the existing Freshman Seminar, which focuses on study skills, understanding the nature of a liberal arts and sciences education, and interpersonal issues that college students face. Trisha Folds-Bennett (At-large), also a member of the Committee, noted that other universities teach the type of course the Committee wishes to introduce, which is not like our existing Freshman Seminar. This is a “Special Topics” genre of class, but one that is especially designed for freshmen. The College could offer sections of this class in a variety of individual topics taught by faculty according to their own interest, just as they now teach upper-level seminars on specialized topics. Ms. Folds-Bennett noted that often students don’t get the opportunity to take an “interesting and jazzy” course of this kind until they are juniors or seniors, and that freshmen would be likely to become much more engaged in intellectual pursuits and much more connected to the College if they could take a small class like this very early in their college careers.

A discussion ensued regarding the current state of Freshman Seminar. Godwin Uwah asked, “What is broken about Freshman Seminar?” –i.e., why is this course seen as its replacement. The Provost noted that many who now teach Freshman Seminar are not roster faculty. Alex Kasman said that he thought this existing class did not do enough to stir students’ intellectual curiosity or to give them an idea of the sort of courses they would be taking throughout their time at the College. Rich Bodek wondered why there were so many more sections offered in FRSR than there had been in the past. Trisha Folds-Bennett noted that there is currently no systematic oversight of FRSR since it has no “home” academic department to review it, and that last year only 2 roster faculty were among the instructors. Godwin Uwah noted that adjunct faculty are also our colleagues. After further questions and discussion, Mr. Olejniczak retired, promising to report to the Senate when the Committee had a proposal for it to consider.

The Speaker

Mr. Wilder noted that there are 56 new faculty, half of them occupying new lines. He also told faculty that several committees working on behalf of the Fourth-Century Initiative, such as the Committee on Workload, would be concluding their work this year. In short, it promises to be an exciting academic year. He reminded faculty of the fall meeting of the full faculty, to take place September 22nd.

The Speaker then thanked all who worked on this year’s Convocation, an event he believed was highly successful. He appreciated the high faculty participation at the event itself, and noted that Steve Olsen, the speaker, met with many students while he was on campus. There are several classes this semester that will continue to study the book and some of the issues it addresses. (Susan Morrison noted that a few copies of the book are still available in the Academic Affairs office.) Thus, Mr. Wilder said, Convocation provides our students with an important intellectual experience. Faculty who have ideas or comments about this year or about future Convocation should share them with him or Susan Morrison, and should be on the lookout for an open invitation to serve on the Convocation Committee for Fall 2004.

Mr. Wilder announced a few more upcoming events in which faculty could participate: Family Weekend (11/7-11/9), an event where faculty are especially welcome, and the Ice Cream Socials on October 6-9 that the President is sponsoring for each class of students. These occasions are part of a larger effort to strengthen students' identification with their own classes, both now and after they graduate.

In a final update, the Speaker noted the success of a resolution the Senate approved in April 2003, to save the Sottile Tree. We also approved the formation of an advisory committee (the Tree Committee, it came to be called) to have input when the College considered removing or planting trees. This summer, that committee was called upon, the Speaker told the Senate. In this case, it participated in a decision to remove a diseased tree rather than to save a healthy one, but even so, the mechanism the Senate proposed is now in use.

With no further business or Constituent Concerns, the meeting adjourned at 6:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Julia Eichelberger
Faculty Secretary

Fall Semester Faculty Senate Schedule:

First Tuesdays • 5:00pm • 116 Education Center

October 7 (agenda deadline 3:00 pm, Thursday, September 25)

November 4 (agenda deadline 3:00 pm, Thursday, October 23)

December 2 (agenda deadline 3:00 pm, Thursday, November 20)