



**USU FACULTY FORUM
MINUTES
NOVEMBER 1, 2010
Taggart Student Center Auditorium**

The Faculty Forum is convened at and in lieu of the regularly scheduled November meeting of the Senate. This annual scheduled meeting of the Faculty Forum will be open to all faculty members to attend and speak, with the exception of the President of the University, the Provost, the presidential appointees, deans and department heads, and the student members of the Senate, unless specifically requested by the Executive Committee of the Faculty Forum...Participants may discuss subjects of current interest, question and debate any policies and procedures, and formulate recommendations for consideration by the Faculty Senate...The Faculty Forum Executive Committee will set the agenda for the November meeting...The agenda will include all items raised by the petitions(s), together with items deemed pertinent by the Executive Committee." (Code Section: 402.9.1 & .9.2)

The purpose of the Faculty Forum is to forward items to the Faculty Senate that the faculty deems important. No administration is present and no reporters are allowed, in order to create an atmosphere of openness so that faculty members can speak freely. The Faculty Forum is not a governing body; therefore no business can be conducted during the meeting.

Welcome and review of the outcomes of last year's forum discussion – Vince Wickwar

Vince Wickwar called the meeting to order at 3:02 pm. The agenda was set by the faculty of the Faculty Senate Executive Committee by soliciting as much information as possible from constituents regarding issues important to faculty.

The Faculty Forum was broadcast to the Distance Education sites and the USU-CEU campus via Interactive Broadcast. It was also transmitted to Extension faculty via webcam.

The outcome of last year's Faculty Forum is posted on the Faculty Senate webpage under "Faculty Forum - November 1, 2010"; it is attached to the agenda for this meeting.

Forum Discussion Items:

Are faculty being adequately consulted on issues affecting health care benefits? If not, how can we strengthen the process and procedures? In addition, what suggestions do you have for future changes in health care benefits?

An example of things that are problematic: the new Federal mandates for mental health parity allows self-funded entities to exempt themselves from the parity restrictions, and USU has chosen to do this. Faculty received a notice over the summer that the decision to exempt ourselves from the new law had been made. The intent of the parity law was that you could not put constraints on mental health services that were not put on other kinds of medical services. This is an example of an issue where faculty are not being adequately consulted. Instead, Human Resources is dealing with these types of issues. There used to be a lot more consultation between the faculty and Human Resources on these types of issues but that appears not to be happening anymore. Another faculty member expressed frustration at the lack of a clear process for getting input from and information to faculty; with the changing regulations nationally it would be nice to have a clear system in place to communicate impending changes. There is a small

committee, Employee Benefits Committee, with 3 faculty representatives that makes all of the benefits decisions; the question was raised if this committee should be enlarged to provide more faculty representation. It was stated by a person on that committee last year, that the committee did not make decisions: they were being told what the decisions were that had already been made. This is another issue that should be questioned and discussed. Previous committees or subcommittees with faculty representation were very involved, but then the committee configuration was changed. The BFW committee has discussed this extensively and is working with HR to look for more faculty involvement.

What are the impacts of increasing enrollment at a time of decreasing faculty numbers? What should be done about these?

The quality of education has been affected; we are doing more with less. For example, budget cuts have eliminated teaching assistants in many departments and therefore caused the instructors to change the assignments given to be less writing intensive, etc. As enrollments increase it seems the quality of students are decreasing and the students are not well prepared for college. There needs to be some discussion on better preparing students for college. A faculty member stated that their department has decreased in size by about 40% yet has the same committee requirements and number of classes to be taught with increasing enrollments. This comes at a time when we have more research funding so now we have to manage increased teaching responsibilities, research responsibilities and committee responsibilities; we need to be honest and serious about how we are to prioritize these things.

What are the implications of the proposal to merge the School of Graduate Studies and the office of the Vice President for Research?

A discussion has been initiated in the last month by central administration, likely due to the impending retirements and changes in roles of the VP for Research and the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies. A faculty member commented that the School of Graduate Studies had recently implemented a health insurance program for their students and questioned if the office of the VP for Research would have championed the cause in the same way. A comment was made that the Graduate Council is seeking feedback on this issue from as many constituencies as possible.

The University leadership has stated that improving faculty compensation is a high priority in coming budget discussions. What are the top priorities of faculty for new compensation? Should we target salary inversion and compression, overall cost of living adjustments, and/or merit pay increases?

Comments were made regarding President Albrecht's statement at the first Faculty Senate meeting of the year that he had communicated to the Regents and Trustees that compensation for employees is the top priority for the coming year. It is uncertain if the legislature will provide funding for it, but he is committed to some sort of token compensation for faculty and staff. It was also mentioned that the BFW committee wants to be very active in this process and faculty need to contact their senators and BFW representatives to express their views.

How do we deal fairly with tenure and promotion of faculty at all campuses (i.e., RCDE, USU-CEU, and Logan) whose role statements are mostly teaching?

There was a lengthy discussion in general and specifically with regard to teaching on how the code is interpreted regarding the meaning of the words "excellent" and "effective". Some people asked that the words in the code be more clearly defined. Others felt that such specificity leads to nuances of language and that a return to more simplicity would be helpful. It was stated that often decisions on promotion and tenure are made on arbitrary definitions. It was suggested that an ad hoc committee be created to address this issue and establish some criteria for evaluating faculty with role statements based mostly on teaching.

Considerable concern was expressed by a number of people about the evaluation of teaching. In addition, faculty members expressed many concerns, among them that more time is spent documenting activities than actually teaching, and that anxiety is not necessarily about their performance as teachers but about a constantly changing process. Comments from tenured faculty included the need to produce a good role statement and the fact that information was available from several workshops at USU on how to put together a good teaching portfolio. People should contact their Faculty Senate representative or members of the ad hoc Committee to Recommend Code Changes to Integrate USU-CEU if they have other information that would benefit their colleagues in this situation. (Names of representatives and committee members can be found on the faculty Senate website.) Endemic to any P & T decision is subjectivity. We are trying to objectify something that is not possible to do. In essence all aspects of the role statement must be dealt with, teaching as well as research. Some faculty with role statements with very small amounts of research are feeling less than appreciated when faculty are told that they can get merit raises for their top performing researchers. When you do primarily teaching this is not a very positive message to send out over something that on paper you are only suppose to be doing 10% of the time. Last year there was another ad hoc committee (ad hoc Committee on Pre-Tenure Mentoring and Evaluation) that came about from a recommendation of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities when faculty feedback indicated there was confusion about the conflicting roles of the Tenure Advisory Committee on mentoring and evaluation. This committee produced a code change to clarify the roles of the Tenure Advisory Committee, the responsibilities of that committee, and the actions the committee needs to take (Section 405.6.2(1) of the Faculty Code). This ad hoc committee also recommended the need for training for the chairs of these committees. Furthermore, as a result of the work by the Faculty Evaluation Committee last year, new teacher evaluation procedures will be introduced in the coming year. As already mentioned, there is currently an ad hoc committee working on code changes needed for the integration of USU-CEU. This committee is very sensitive to this evaluation process and the committee includes two members from USU-CEU.

How do we better integrate faculty at RCDE and USU-CEU into their departments here on campus?

Distance can never be eliminated, but great strides have been made. For instance, departments have made significant expenditures to upgrade conference rooms for the technology to include distant faculty members. Logan faculty would like more feedback from faculty at USU-CEU and regional campuses on what their needs are. Efforts to have more interaction with off-campus faculty would be good. There still seems to be a perception that teaching off the Logan campus is not on a par with courses taught on the Logan campus. The only way we can get rid of that perception is by having faculty interact and by recognizing that distance faculty belong to their departments. Quality and program issues are department issues; improving department connections is where we can make the greatest improvement. USU-CEU is experiencing a difficult transition in going from an independent institution to being part of a larger established institution. Contact by departments has begun but some teaching units at USU-CEU still do not know what department they will be associated with on the Logan campus. (As stated, this contact has begun. According to the MOU it will be completed by January 1, 2011.)

Open forum – other topics of interest from faculty members

Faculty raised several issues during the open forum section of the meeting. A faculty member stated that there appears to be a growing number of administrators at the University in spite of budget cuts. It was clarified by others that the issue of more administrators was raised and discussed last year in the faculty senate and referenced in the information sent out to faculty members for the Faculty Forum. It was determined that there have been changes in classifications of positions, but that the number of actual administrators has gone down. The report that was presented to the Faculty Senate discussing this is included with the minutes of the March 29, 2010 meeting and is available on the senate website in the archive section.

Students are spearheading the building of a new recreation center on campus. Is there a provision for faculty and their families to use this facility?

There are significant safety issues with the street that runs through the middle of campus and faculty wonder what can be done to improve this.

Concern was raised over the air quality in Cache Valley during wintertime inversion periods and the health issues it presents. This faculty member felt that the university should be more aggressive in doing something about air quality because USU is responsible for providing a safe working environment for its employees.

The meeting adjourned at 4:43 pm.