

Faculty Affairs Committee Annual Report 2023/24

The FAC met nine times over the course of the academic year 2023/24. One of these meetings consisted of a guided tour with Ashley Flintoff, Director Planning and Space Management with the office for Facilities and Management, of potential locations for a faculty club, which was one of the matters we have been working on and trying to bring forward. Despite support from the Provost and the President, it is, at this point, not clear what is going to happen since several of the buildings we have looked at, specifically, the Music Annex, which appears perfect for the purpose of a club, may be taken up by the future school of public health. The FAC will revisit this matter next year.

In Fall 2023, FAC received guests Kelly Dormer, Director, Undergraduate Affairs, and Zach Krug, Student Academic Engagement Specialist, to discuss the success and challenges of the newly initiated FIG (first-year interest groups) program. This matter too will be revisited after the program has gone into its second year.

The committee further discussed the removal of the university policies from the syllabus, which, in consultation with the Curriculum and Instruction Committee, resulted in a resolution that was subsequently overwhelmingly approved by the Academic Senate. The University Policies are now available directly on Canvas and will be annually updated by the administration.

Another issue we addressed was the inordinately complex and at the same nebulous grade appeal process. In tandem with the problematic practice of administrators changing grades without consulting faculty, this matter requires further consideration and will be pushed forward into the new academic year. Questions to be addressed: what are the different policies in the schools? What is in the student code of conduct regarding grade appeals? What needs to be changed in this process? We agreed that there ultimately needs to be a university-wide policy/process.

The FAC discussed Faculty Well Being at every meeting: the major concern emerging from these discussions is the fact that faculty and academic staff feel increasingly over-extended, being asked to take on more and more tasks without compensation. There is an overall sense of malaise among faculty and staff, who feel that the persistent focus on student success, the ongoing administrative bloat, and budget cuts have led to a situation in which few faculty feel seen and valued for the work they do, let alone being rewarded for the tasks, e.g., involving recruitment and retention, that keep being added to their workload.

We met with Richard Pineau, Associate Professor of Teaching and Chair of the AI-subcommittee of the Academic Senate, to be updated on the developments in AI and the work of the committee. FAC is concerned about the possibilities for academic dishonesty offered by AI and appreciates the guidance provided by Richard and his committee.

Another issue we discussed was the office of the ombudsperson, with guest Naida Simon, Academic Staff Member in the Provost's office, who was appointed with David Strauss as co-interim person in the ombuds-office by Laurie Clabo. The primary role for this person thus far has been to be a student advocate within the Tuition and Finance Appeals Board (TFAB). The FAC agrees that the Ombuds Office needs to be reinstated with a full-time, independent ombudsperson with a clear line of accountability to the Provost or the President. The position should be filled after a proper search, not by appointment. The office should fulfill a much more significant role by not only focusing on students, but also on faculty and academic staff. At this point, as is clear from the climate survey, faculty have no idea where to go with their complaints.

Since faculty are more and more burdened with expectations for recruitment support, the FAC decided to invite Carolyn Berry, Senior Associate Vice President for Marketing and Communication, to find out what her office is doing in this regard. We learned that there is no dedicated social media staff at the university level, but reliance on students, nor is there consistent recruitment at the graduate level. Recruitment happens within each unit's graduate program. Most undergraduate-level events are handled by advisors, who are taxed and overwhelmed, so that they are leaning on faculty. President Espy has hired a consultant to assess if there are resources to increase communication staff.

In Winter 2024, the FAC met with Boris Baltes, Senior Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs and Associate Vice President of Academic Personnel, to discuss the SET and the report produced by the 2N SET committee. The FAC agreed that the proposed recommendations are a step in the right direction but expressed concerns about the actual writing of the questions, some of which can be easily misinterpreted. The FAC also worried that there are no questions at all that ask after the students' engagement and investment in a course. The form is also very long and should perhaps be abbreviated. The biases that are inherent in the SET should be addressed. A huge problem is the lack of participation.

The group agreed that we want to meet with the new VP for enrollment management. We need to make clear that retention falls within our purview but that increased enrollment may result in even more overburdening of faculty. There is also a clear need for additional advisors.

In our penultimate meeting, we had Darin Ellis, Associate Provost for Academic Programs Associate Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness Office of the Provost, as a guest to talk to us about SWEET, the undergraduate student survey currently on its way. Ellis asked us for assistance, since they had a pretty poor response rate last year. There might be ways to enhance the results through better marketing/incentives.

We further discussed the Wayne Experience, the requirement of which is going to be suspended for one more year. In addition to the FAC-proposed Reading, Writing, Critical Thinking course, there might be several other alternative options to be piloted next year. It may be helpful to include SWEET results in the decision-making process. It might also be a good idea to expand the Orientation program in a WE-oriented way and thus meet at least part of the latter's objectives.

Topics/matters addressed:

- FIGs
- University Politics (removal from syllabus)
- Grade Appeal process
- Ombudsperson
- AI
- Recruitment/Marketing
- Faculty Club
- Faculty Well Being
- Wayne Experience
- SET—2N SET Committee report
- SWEET
- Wayne Experience