

Faculty Affairs Committee // Annual Report AY 2017/18

The first months of the AY FAC, like presumably every other committee, was primarily involved with the **General Education Reform** proposal, and its fast-tracking through to the BOG meeting of Nov. 10. The cttee. met twice to discuss the completely revamped proposal, once with Lou Romano as guest, once with Darin Ellis. Main concerns were the lack of clarity about the changes to the math requirement, similar problems surrounding the proposed WE/ WF courses, the collapse of DEI & GL, and the addition of CL, as well as the viability of implementing the new program by Fall 2018. After a third, concluding meeting/discussion, the cttee. produced a preliminary report expressing and explaining its concerns. The report was presented at the general Academic Senate discussion of the proposal in Fall 2017. The rest is history.

One item on the “old business” list that the cttee. addressed again this AY, were the problems with **IRB**, especially the unacceptably long processing times, including the so-called exempts, and the increasingly complicated and unworkable nature of the forms. The cttee. invited Phil Cunningham to discuss the problems. This turned into a very productive conversation in which Phil clarified the “revamping” of the office to address staffing issues, and explained what relief and benefits the introduction of online processing would entail. A FAC member volunteered to re-do an existing protocol to test and use the electronic system. About six months later, members expressed satisfaction with the improved processing of IRBs.

Another piece of unfinished business picked up from last year was the introduction of **STAX/o-books** into the library system. FAC invited Veronica Bielat, Mike Priehs, and student representative Abdul-Rahman Suleiman to one of its Winter meetings. The discussion was largely informative but gave rise to various concerns among the cttee. members, especially with regard to academic integrity and the “customizability” of e-resources. There are no concrete data about current use of o-books by faculty, nor about what products are actually being used, even if it is clear that they are not for everybody and are not available to all types of courses (mainly gen. ed.). The bookstore provides printing and binding services and it turns out that a substantial number of students prefer the latter over the exclusively online version of the books. Faculty input and support are necessary to monitor the adoption of e-/o-books. The costs for the university are relatively modest and it is to be expected that new generations of students will increasingly be used to the system before they come to WSU.

The concerns about **SET** have by no means abated and FAC hence again devoted time and energy to this issue. Rita Casey was invited to clarify the problems and to provide an update on the activities of the SET evaluation review cttee. that was formed in 2011, but that has been dormant for some time. A big problem is the use of the three so-called *beauty contest* items that

are exceedingly subject to bias (gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity, age, etc. but also discipline, difficulty, level, and so on). The averaging of these items renders them even more distorting. The SET cttee. is working on guidelines about how these items should be used, guidelines that will be intended for salary cttees., chairs, university cttees. Complementing SET with additional forms of assessment, such as peer evaluation, was included in the collective bargaining agreement but this has not become common practice. FAC expressed objection to peer review at an earlier point. Still, diagnostic items on the current SET form are more reliable compared to, e.g., asking students how much they learned. FAC recommends that the increasing body of literature explaining how and why SET scores are extremely vulnerable to bias will be taken into account by the SET cttee. moving forward. Another aspect that the SET cttee. should take into account is the ubiquitous problem of grade inflation. The SET cttee. has, in any case, been reactivated as a result of this discussion.

The **Mentoring Survey** initiated by FAC in collaboration with the Provost's Office was the last major item that the cttee. has continued to work on this year. A preliminary presentation of findings was shared with the cttee. during the last meeting of the AY. In addition, partly as a result of the efforts of the FAC members executing the survey, the Provost's Office has set up university membership for the National Center on Faculty Development and Diversity, a professional development and mentoring organization that offers access to a variety of on-demand mentoring tools and support for faculty to be successful in the academy. Through WSU's institutional membership, all faculty and graduate students/post-docs now have access to this resource. Among the recommendations of the researchers executing the Mentoring Survey are the need for training for administrators in the following overall directions: how to actually support and/or mentor faculty, graduate students, and post-docs; how to operate in order to achieve best outcomes in conflict resolution; how to improve/enhance interpersonal skills; how to use the AAUP contract in relation to mentoring tasks; develop a mid-career focus for faculty in terms of resources, grants, mentoring, and long-term planning.

RCM, finally, has been a topic of discussion a number of times throughout the year, with members serving on the various sub- and/or steering cttees. reporting. This item will return to the FAC agenda in Fall 2018.

As a proposed piece of new business, the FAC will address the question of **in-state vs. out-of-state graduate tuition** at WSU in relation to other four-year colleges in Michigan in the coming AY.

Respectfully submitted,
renée c. hoogland, Chair