

2022-2023 Report from the Faculty Affairs Committee

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Report prepared by Elizabeth Stoycheff (chair).

The Faculty Affairs Committee had a successful academic year. We met from representatives from across the university and drafted several initiatives for Policy to consider and move forward.

In the fall, FAC met with Amber Neher and Cheryl Kollin of the Adult Learner Team to discuss how to Wayne State recruits and creates/expands appropriate programs for adult learners. They discussed how the University Advising Center sponsors programs like Warrior Way Back, Phoenix Reentry Program, and Returning Warrior. The committee strategized ways to incorporate adult learners while still maintaining high academic standards.

The committee briefly reviewed the Senate bylaws, considering in particular whether chairs and deans should be able to attend regular Academic Senate meetings. The committee unanimously decided administrators should attend only on an invite-only basis.

In November, we met with GEARS lead Krista Brumley to discuss initial findings from the project. They were that women feel like they do more work than men, particularly women at the rank of Associate Professor. Members of the committee commented that there still seems to be a heteronormative bias in the GEARS project toward couples with families and needs to better reflect the needs of all faculty. Brumley also mentioned that even though women are reporting more demands on their time, there is an expectation that everyone continues to do more and more work; not recognizing faculty burnout without asking faculty to take on even more responsibilities.

This inspired the committee to discuss what the role of faculty are within the university and our responsibilities for recruitment and retention. Chris Collins drafted a memo that sought to define faculty's role in recruitment as primarily conducting their creative and scholarly activity in a way that demonstrates the university's vision. Faculty endeavors should be celebrated and shared as the face of the university, providing fuel for the basis to entice prospective students by helping define and value the WSU experience. However, this needs to be situated within a larger wholistic recruitment plan for the university, which would include modern techniques that have a track record of success at peer and aspirational institutions, an understanding of enrollment decline, both across the university and within specific departments, and a comparison of Wayne State's unique enrollment challenges in comparison to competing institutions. In sum, faculty can and should be involved in the recruitment process, but that process needs to have a coherent vision and staffing to assist faculty with its execution.

In February, renee hoogland assembled a subcommittee of the FAC (Patricia McCormick and Elizabeth Stoycheff) to outline a proposal for a university-wide required course on Reading,

Writing, and Critical Thinking, which was outlined and submitted to Policy. The proposal suggested the new requirement would be offered with multiple sections every semester, be taught in person via a lecture-lab by full-time faculty from across the university. It would have a shared syllabi that faculty could tailor to the needs of their own disciplines.

The focus of our spring (March/April) meetings was to discuss faculty mental health, burnout, and morale.

Based on FAC's consultation with their own departments, faculty and staff mental health across the university are not faring well, and morale is low. The sentiment from FAC is that students' mental health is "in crisis" and this is tremendously affecting faculty and staff mental health. As a result, faculty and staff are approaching crisis themselves. We unanimously agreed that there is not an easy fix for this problem. It needs a multipronged approach that focuses on **primary prevention**: working to reduce stress and workloads across the university. This means providing more resources for faculty and staff to do their jobs, along with adequate working conditions. As positions across the university are eliminated and searches are "chilled," we would like to see deans and chairs reprioritize workloads to reflect the shrinking personnel. This should include consolidating and eliminating duties, rather than shifting them onto already burdened faculty and staff.

In addition to this herculean task, the FAC recommends that the newly implemented Fall Break and existing Spring Break also apply to faculty and staff, providing paid time off to recharge mid-semester. Faculty and staff would also value regular encouragement from senior administration to take time off, including summer months for faculty on 9-month contracts, and PTO for those on 12-month contracts. These groups do not often hear the message that they deserve to take time off; and that needs to be a strong and persistent message as the university moves forward.

In April, we met with Laura Woodward and the 2N Committee to discuss low response rates to student evaluations of teaching (SET). Before the shift to online SETs in Fall 2019, a pilot test was conducted that showed similar online and paper response rates. However, WSU has not seen parity in the semester since and response rates for SETs across the university are around 35-38%. Response rates do improve if faculty encourage students to take the SET, explain how SETs can and will be used, communicate in advance when SET will be available, reassure SETs are anonymous to the instructor, and dedicate class time for students to take them. There are no changes planned for altering the online SET approach.

At the end of spring semester, FAC endorsed Policy's memorandum to the provost that aims to repeal the current administrative policy to withhold release of academic transcripts for required coursework/degrees when a student has an outstanding balance.