

10-5-2015

Faculty Senate Academic Committee Report

USM Faculty Senate

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Recommended Citation

USM Faculty Senate, "Faculty Senate Academic Committee Report" (2015). *Faculty Senate Reports*. 35.
https://aquila.usm.edu/faculty_senate_reports/35

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Faculty Senate – Academics Committee Report

September 2015

The contents of this report summarize activities of the Academics Committee of the Faculty Senate for the duration between the Senate retreat on August 14th and the Senate meeting on September 4th. These activities include a committee meeting held on the afternoon of August 31st and various e-mail communications amongst the committee members and Faculty Senate leaders.

1. Faculty teaching evaluations

- As per new requirements, instructional staff will be evaluated on an annual basis for instructional quality by a second form in addition to the standard student evaluations following the end of each semester. This second evaluation is most commonly accomplished by either submission of a teaching portfolio or a peer-based review.
- The Office of the Provost presently provides 2 documents regarding peer-based teaching evaluations (<http://www.usm.edu/provost/evaluation-teaching>): (i) Statement of Policy (September 2012) articulating that full-time instructional staff are to be evaluated as part of annual reviews and (ii) a template form for evaluation of instructional staff (e.g., adjuncts) not participating in the annual review process.
- Some departments and schools have already implemented a second form (type) of teaching evaluations. Fortunately, some members of the Academics Committee come from those units and provided to other committee members the blank forms used for their peer review. These peer-review forms are advocated by those members.
- Concerns → (1) Peer reviews of senior faculty by junior (pre-tenure) faculty & (2) fair and appropriate rotation of reviewers
- One department implements a full rotation of qualified instructional staff reviewers on a semester-by-semester basis.
- A handbook for peer review of teaching from IUPU-Ft. Wayne will be reviewed by the committee. It distinguishes formative and summative approaches to peer review as well as best practices. An additional external academic report (psychology) that includes a self-scoring checklist for teaching competency and references on the subject will be reviewed as well.
- Action item → ***Academics Committee will compile existing peer-based teaching evaluation forms, solicit suggestions from instructional staff, and compile a “best-practices” document for peer review of teaching.***

2. Faculty evaluations

- Other components of faculty evaluations in addition to teaching were discussed. Notably, the new policy for Tenure & Promotion dossiers to report either the journal impact factor (Google Scholar) or the rejection rate for peer-reviewed articles was considered.
- Faculty evaluations (annual and T&P) will continue to be discussed. For the short term, peer-based reviews of teaching (see above) will be emphasized by the Committee.

3. Teaching-Track Professor

- First, much work was done this summer by the Teaching Track Committee to craft prose for the proposed Teaching Professor track. Proposed changes will be considered by the Handbook Committee.
- The proposed revisions to the Handbook are presently available for Faculty Senators to review. These include designations for Assistant Teaching Professor, Associate Teaching Professor, and Teaching Professor. This track does not include tenure.
- Initial conversations range from support to opposition for the new track – both sides have viable arguments.
- Pros → (1) Gives high-quality Instructors an opportunity for advancement within the University; (2) Increases likelihood of recruiting and cultivating good Instructors; (3) Potentially frees tenure-track or tenured professors for course releases associated with research grants and related opportunities.
- Cons → (1) Potentially facilitates the conversion of vacant tenure-track lines to teaching-track lines and thereby diminish the research potential of those programs; (2) Terminology of titles (Assistant, Associate) normally reserved for tenure track; (3) Inclusion of 5-year contract contrasts with 1-year contracts mandated by IHL for tenure-track
- Committee report for teaching track is presently available for review. Other supportive documents include the AAUP Statement on contingent faculty, policies from other universities, and similar commentary about teaching tracks in various university systems. Importantly, the USM committee report proposes a target of 25% for contingent faculty within the Corps of Instruction, which is consistent with the AAUP statement. This would likely affect future hiring strategies.
- ***The Academics Committee strongly urges Faculty Senators to solicit comments from a fair representation of Instructors and tenured / tenure-track Professors within their colleges regarding the proposed teaching track.*** Documents are available for review. The President and Interim Provost hope to receive input from the faculty to facilitate policy decisions and eventual implementation.

4. Definition of Plagiarism

- Concerns have been communicated regarding the definition of plagiarism in the Student Handbook. ***The Academics Committee will thoroughly review different interpretations and gaps within the existing definition and propose revisions based on this review.***

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