



Northeastern University

Office of the Faculty Senate

TO: FACULTY SENATE
FROM: Secretary, Faculty Senate
SUBJECT: Minutes, February 19, 2020

REVISED

Present: Dennerlein, Ergun, Erdogmus, Goluch, Gonyeau, Hayward, Kevoe Feldman, Laboy, Lerner, McNabb, Mountain, Mylott, Powers-Lee, Shapiro, Shefelbine, Spencer, Stephens, Vollmer, Wahl, Wertheim, Wood

Administrators: Bean, Echambadi, Hackney, Hudson, Loeffelholz, Sceppa,

Absent: (Professors) Caracoglia, Desnoyers, Dyal-Chand, Musselman, Stowell
(Administrators) Ziemer

CALL TO ORDER: 11:45 a.m.

The minutes of 1.15.20 Faculty Senate meeting were approved.

I. SAC REPORT

Prof. Powers-Lee reported that since the last Faculty Senate meeting SAC has met four times with one meeting including the Provost and one meeting including the recently-expanded and recently-renamed Presidential Cabinet. Topics included benefits, handbook revisions and effective communication between faculty and administrators.

II. PROVOST'S REPORT

The Provost reported that he has been spending a lot of time reading tenure and promotion dossiers.

The previous week, he met with leadership from various institutions in Maine. The Northeastern announcement has caused a lot of excitement and anxiety in Maine. These institutions realize this is an opportunity, but the key to this will be our attitude. Northeastern is being very collaborative, including a large joint research opportunity bringing together University of Maine and Northeastern faculty. We will also be considering a number of 3+2 programs, where a student might do the first three years at Thomas College or University of Maine and then, with adequate performance, transition into a MA program with the Roux Institute. These other institutions are excited, because they can use the Roux Institute to attract freshmen from out of state to their undergraduate programs. Our primary goal with the Roux Institute is economic development in Maine and to make Portland, Maine a tech hub along with Boston, Seattle, and San Francisco over time.

The Provost indicated that Northeastern purchased the Horticultural Hall, noting it is on ground that is owned by the Christian Science Church. The building is all leased out but as those leases expire, Northeastern programming will be moved into the office space there.

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

There were no questions.

III. NEW BUSINESS

- A. Prof. Vollmer read the following and Prof. Erdogmus seconded.

BE IT RESOLVED That the University establish the Bachelor of Science in Environmental and Sustainability Science in the College of Science as approved by the University Undergraduate Curriculum Committee on 22 January 2020 (15-0-0).

Prof. Vollmer recognized Prof. Nelson who explained the motivation behind this program and noted that this was the result of 18 months of work.

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

Prof. Lerner asked if there is an existing combined majors template that this could change as well? Prof. Nelson responded that Environmental Science is currently in combined majors with 4 other programs. He asked the Registrar's Office what happens to name changes in combined majors and the Registrar's Office said they don't know yet.

Prof. Stephens asked if this is replacing the Environmental Science and Environmental Studies existing majors? Prof. Nelson said Environmental Studies has not changed. The intention here is to replace the old environmental science program.

The vote was taken. The resolution to approve the Bachelor of Science in Environmental and Sustainability Science in the College of Science PASSED: 32-0-0.

- B. Prof. Gonyeau read the following and Prof. Hayward and Prof. Mylott seconded.

BE IT RESOLVED That the University establish the Master of Science in Applied Psychology in the Bouvé College of Health Sciences as approved by the Graduate Council on 22 January 2020 (12-0-0).

Prof. Hayward explained the motivation and details for the proposed program.

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

There were no questions.

The vote was taken. The resolution to approve the Master of Science in Applied Psychology in the Bouvé College of Health Sciences PASSED: 33-0-0.

- C. Prof. McOwen presented the Part 1 of the report of the Academic Policy Committee. The report can be found on the Faculty Senate website.

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

Prof. Vollmer asked what is the burden on students to do the TRACE evaluation? Prof. McOwen said they get frequent reminders and they can decline (in Fall 2018 and Spring 2019 both 1% declined). Prof. McOwen said in classes faculty can encourage them to fill out TRACE and in particular let them know that it is relevant, and their responses are taken into consideration by faculty and administration.

Prof. Hayward asked if students can get a benefit for responding? Prof. McOwen and Prof. Bourns responded that to increase participation at Harvard students who complete the survey are allowed to see their grades earlier. Prof. Powers-Lee added that the Senate

previously considered that, but advisors asked we not to do that because there is such a short turn-around time for them to advise students who are having difficulty.

Prof. Dau suggested that perhaps faculty could ensure a higher response rate by conditioning student access to their grades to their response to TRACE. He said he felt the responsibility should not be on faculty to get students to do TRACE evaluations.

Prof. Wertheim asked Prof. McOwen to comment on the reliability of these SETs and the reliability and validity of peer visits. Prof. McOwen said they didn't see anything about the validity of peer visits. They did see some comprehensive studies about the reliability of SETS. Provost Bean added there was a conversation about this at the last Colonial Provost meeting. None of them ever remember seeing a negative peer review report so such assessments may be equally useless if they are not informative.

Noting that the School of Nursing has a number of online programs, Prof. Mylott wondered if some students think certain TRACE questions don't apply to them. Prof. McOwen responded that observation was more relevant to the FDC report.

Prof. Spencer asked if the committee was advocating abolishing the use of the mean because you would lose a lot of granularity. Prof. McOwen said it is very tempting to pick the mean and rely on a single number. If we will use a single number, he prefers the median over mean. But both would also be fine.

Noting these teaching evaluations go into faculty merit reviews, Prof. Kevoe Feldman asked in regard to mid-semester evaluations, would faculty be provided something from CATLTR and how would we use that in conjunction with the final semester TRACE evaluations to maybe get a better report. Is there a way to combine these term-based evaluations to better evaluate teaching? Prof. Kevoe-Feldman also asked what did the committee find about reducing racial and gender bias in evaluations?

Prof. McOwen said CATLTR does have resources for mid-course evaluation – paper ones. The committee used a modification of the form and decided to make it available to faculty members so if they want to do a mid-term evaluation on paper, they can do it and then compare with end of term results.

In regard to gender bias, Prof. McOwen said the committee could not state a general rule that applies to all courses/disciplines. The committee felt the balance between student and learning based questions was the best way to go.

Prof. Hayward added the one reason for a midterm evaluation is to get quick feedback and adjust a course within the term. She added students like seeing affirmation that you heard their concerns.

Provost Bean said in regard to promotion and tenure, they don't look at a single number but a whole time series of numbers over all the courses faculty have taught. If a faculty person is having challenges, did they do a midterm evaluation? Did they go to CATLTR to get help or did they just say 'I'm not good at that' which indicates not caring. He said we care about the attitude and effort in the long run.

Prof. Laboy asked if the committee analyzed by course type or content? For example, a seminar or reading group style versus quantitative versus qualitative.

Provost Bean said when see these numbers generally they are shown relative to a department average on that course. Looking at courses relative to how people in general are teaching that course with its structure is more real information than just looking at an absolute number.

Prof. Stephens asked if the committee discussed making peer review mandatory? Prof. McOwen said the committee did not put that as a resolution item, but it is the last item in our recommendation list, and we should encourage that.

Prof. Wood said many departments do peer evaluation of junior faculty. He asked Prof. McOwen if the committee thought of scaling this process so that every faculty member is evaluated once a semester. Prof. Hayward added that Bouvé does this once a year.

Giving some high scale feedback, Provost Bean said people here generally teach very well at Northeastern and the scores reflect that. It is not like students give high scores to everyone. In tenure cases you see that junior faculty may be struggling at the beginning but over time they are stabilizing in the vicinity of the Northeastern average. The Provost said it is great that we are looking at these instruments and trying to improve them. These tools are actually having a long-term benefit and impact on our teaching quality.

- D. Prof. Maheswaran presented the Faculty Development Committee report. The complete report along with recommendations can be found on the Faculty Senate website.

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

Prof. Wertheim said in the past the Student Evaluation was a Student Government endeavor and asked if that had been changed. Prof. Powers-Lee said it started it started as a student initiative, and initially the faculty did not use it in any way. In 1986 the Faculty Senate endorsed use of the Student Government questionnaire. In 1994 there were several resolutions about using TRACE but at the time one resolution was that it should always be accompanied by at least one more form of assessment for teaching. When we totally redid the old TCEP, the committee worked with students and faculty for 2 years. This committee has gotten input from our students.

Prof. Wood asked how does the student management team would work in recommendation item 5? Prof. Hayward responded that these management or feedback teams would consist of 3-5 students who sit in and observe a faculty member's instruction during the year. These students would use a structured format for providing feedback. They summarize the data and provide it to the faculty member.

Prof. Shefelbine noted that there seems to be a broad range of how TRACE is used across the University. She said it sounds like there are a lot of good examples of other ways to evaluate TRACE and wondered if those could be highlighted so we can point our departments to those practices.

Provost Bean said the Senate might want to put off that discussion until we have the CATLR people here.

Prof. Lerner said it would make sense to have FDC work with CATLR on current best practices and report back in the first Senate meeting of fall 2020.

Prof. Bormann said she wanted to clarify that in the committee they were very clear about the fact they cannot and should not change the TRACE questions, because we are not qualified to do that. The charge would be for the committee to work with CATLR to think more seriously about how to change TRACE as such. It should not be our task but CATLR's. We can provide a context within which this should be done.

The Provost added this was a good point and noted there are whole literatures about how you structure these questions to get information.

Prof. Bormann said she would like the Senate to think about the SGA input that we need questions on inclusivity in the classrooms and respectful learning environments. The committee took these suggestions seriously, but hesitated plugging in questions of that nature without any framework to prepare students and faculty to accommodate these questions somehow.

Prof. Bourns said TRACE is about students evaluating their own experiences. Question 8 in the example seems to be counter to that objective. She wondered if questions 7 and 8 could be merged. Provost Bean advised against wordsmithing at this point and suggested the Senate move on to the resolutions.

E. Prof. Hayward read the following and Prof. Gonyeau seconded.

BE IT RESOLVED that usage of TRACE in merit, tenure, and/or promotion considerations should involve (a) analysis of multiple TRACE queries and (b) utilization of median, mode or other score distributions rather than the average of all ratings.

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

Prof. Kevoe Feldman read from an email from a colleague. "I believe we are overly reliant on the TRACE teaching effectiveness (TE) score; however, in our department with a 4.6 average TE, mode and median for most will be 5. Is this the intention, to flatten out (possibly meaningless) distinctions for the majority of instructors?"

Prof. Powers-Lee responded that the current instructor report shows the median. The Provost said he thought the question was is the phrasing "rather than the average" is this stating in the motion that we will not provide the average.

Prof. Shapiro said it is a motion about use. It is about how we use the data we have. The Provost said so we can provide all the data and people can use it in a good chaotic way. Prof. Shapiro added that in his department/college, the TRACE score is used as the one and only measure and this motion is about how these measures are used.

Provost Bean said we need to understand what is being reported. Usually these are done with unbiased calculations. They take into account that these are highly skewed distributions and calculate the average not in the typical way. A number of senators responded that no, usually these are done with unbiased calculations. Provost Bean said that is not considered to be best practice.

Provost Bean said what he takes from the comments is that one of the concerns is that this is an instruction by the Faculty Senate to all Colleges to take a look at what they are doing

and change if not and if not robust enough. He added he didn't think they needed to determine these little details at this time. But the question is – is the Senate willing to tell every department they need to look at how they are doing this and perhaps do it better?

There was some discussion among the senators about whether “should” indicates a recommendation or a requirement. Following this discussion, the Provost indicated that his preference would be to form a small committee to take a look at this to wordsmith, and come to the senate with a recommendation.

To guide such a committee's effort, Prof. Powers-Lee suggested getting a sense of the senate to understand if we prefer the mandatory or recommended route.

The Provost called for a sense of the Senate and said there were three options: abstain, somehow word resolution as mandatory or somehow word resolution as suggested.

It was the sense of the senate that there was a substantial advantage to the mandatory option. The Provost suggested to the committee that it come back with revised wording.

Prof. Dennerlein moved to table the resolution and it was seconded by Prof. Powers-Lee.

The vote to table the resolution was taken and, PASSED: 31-0-0.

F. Prof. Gonyeau read the following and Prof. Hayward seconded.

BE IT RESOLVED that, effective by the Fall 2020 Semester, the current TRACE survey be revised to (a) include three diversity/inclusion queries (occurring as numbers 7-9 in the proposed instructor related questions, and (b) eliminate redundant sections of the survey, moving from thirty total queries to twenty-one total queries.)

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

Prof. Keove Feldman shared a statement from a colleague. He said research indicates students do not generally know what teaching effectiveness means. They usually interpret it as whether a student likes the instructor. He recommended specific prose rather than buzzwords. Prof. Bormann said to accommodate this concern, the committee thought it was very important to have a narrative at the beginning of the TRACE evaluation.

Prof. Wertheim. asked if the new questions come from reliability and validity studies done elsewhere?

Prof. Bormann said the answer is CATLR and students – the SGA.

Prof. Lerner asked how much did the Senate want to wordsmith or react to specific questions now?

Provost Bean said the first level of discussion was do we like this idea that the survey is shorter and includes the inclusivity questions. Is that a direction the Senate is comfortable going and if it is, then we can start with the next level of detail.

Prof. Powers-Lee said this is not intended to be a recraft. It is intended to be a shortening of what was perceived to be redundant.

Prof. Mylott said spoke on behalf of six faculty who teach in the online nursing area. These questions are exclusive of other diverse learning approaches such as the online learning environment. There is reference to the word class. It may not apply to the students as they read this.

Prof. Laboy asked wasn't it referenced in the presentation that there would be different surveys for different types of classes?

Provost Bean announced that there was a resolution that addressed this kind of that was dropped off the agenda. It will be brought back. Prof. Laboy asked if it would be brought back in the context of this?

Prof. Powers-Lee conveyed her apologies. The missing resolution is to form a working group with all sorts of appropriate constituents to develop customized ones as well. This one is for class delivery.

Prof. Goluch asked when making recommendations for changes to multiple surveys, who is in charge of implementation and telling us what is and isn't possible?

The Provost recognized Sr. Vice Provost Deb Franko who said the Registrar's Office oversees TRACE and they work with an outside vendor and our IT. This question of whether we can do specific types of questions for specific types of coursework will have to be worked out. She added this is an ongoing conversation.

Prof. Stephens suggested that the inclusivity questions don't all have to focus on the instructor. They could be about the learning environment and the engagement of the class.

In the interest of time, the Provost suggested deleting the word "three" and remove the parentheticals "7-9". Adding the other main point of the resolution was eliminating redundancies, the Provost asked if the Senate would recommend those two things to the working group to work with CATLR to get well formed questions on the various teaching models.

Prof. Dennerlein noted this resolution was intended for Fall 2020. The Provost that timeframe was not now going to work. The Provost said he was thrilled that the Senate was getting into this as it hasn't been updated in a long time. The Provost said if people consider it a friendly amendment if resolution now reads:

BE IT RESOLVED that the current TRACE survey be revised to (a) include diversity/inclusion queries, and (b) eliminate redundant sections of the survey, moving from thirty total queries to less.

This would be used as an instruction for the working group. The Provost asked if this were consistent with Prof. Gonyeau's motion. Prof. Gonyeau agreed and Prof. Hayward who seconded the motion also agreed.

Any faculty members who had feedback on the motion were instructed to forward them to Prof. Sue Powers-Lee. There was no further discussion.

The vote was taken. The resolution PASSED: 31-0-0.

G. Prof. Hayward read the following and Prof. Dennerlein seconded.

BE IT RESOLVED that the proposed module entitled “Tenure” replace the current module entitled “Tenure”.

DISCUSSION/QUESTIONS

Prof. Hayward explained the primary changes in the proposed module included a change to match the tenure timeline to the promotion timeline, the addition of a new pre-tenure review appeal option and the elimination of a second tenure consideration if the early tenure decision is negative.

Prof. Cisewski said her COS colleagues had concerns about the early tenure change and added early tenure is an important mechanism to retain rising stars.

The Provost responded that he had strong feelings about this. He said early tenure should be a rare occurrence used not just for a rising star but a nova. He added this is consistent with what’s done at other AAU places. The Provost also said the process is a lot of work to put someone through the tenure process, and it is a big tax on the system.

Prof. Wood asked how frequently does this happen?

The Provost responded that it occurred less than once per year.

Prof. Dennerlein wanted to clarify that this is not about promotion to full professor. The Provost said that this is specifically about tenure. Promotion is a separate module.

Prof. Lerner inquired about joint appointments. The Provost recognized Sr. Vice Provost Deb Franko who said there is a separate module about joint appointments called Jointly Appointed Faculty.

The vote was taken. The resolution to replace the current Tenure Module with the proposed resolution PASSED: 29-2-0.

The meeting adjourned at 1:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by,

Deniz Erdogmus
Senate Secretary