University of Idaho  
FACULTY COUNCIL MINUTES  
2001-2002 Meeting #11, Tuesday, December 04, 2001

Present: Smelser (chair), Chandler, Chun, Dickinson, Fairchild, Goodwin, Guenthner, Haggart (w/o vote), Hong, Kraut, Lillard, McCaffrey, McClure, Meier, Murray, Nelson, Nielsen, Norby, Olson, Pikowsky, Pitcher (w/o vote), Wagner

Absent: Bitterwolf, Thompson

Observers: 7

Call to Order. A quorum being present, Faculty Council Chair, Professor Ronald Smelser, called the meeting to order at 3:35 p.m. in the Brink Hall Faculty Lounge.

Minutes. The council accepted the minutes of the November 27, 2001, meeting as distributed.

Announcement. Councilor Amanda Norby asked councilors to remind their colleagues to turn in their textbook orders to the University Book Store as early as possible. The exchange, buy-back, and resale of used text books are driven by knowledge of their impending use for the Spring semester.

Chair’s Report. Chair Smelser announced that community transit will be the subject of meetings to be held in Moscow and on campus this week. Valerie Steffen from the firm Strategic Intelligence will meet with interested students, staff, and faculty on December 7th from 3:30 to 5:00 p.m. at the Facilities Services Complex. Councilors were urged to invite their constituents to that meeting.

Smelser noted that an executive summary of a survey completed by members of the classes of 1996 and 1997 was available and would be emailed to all members of the council. The survey measures graduate’s perceptions of the impact of the U of Idaho undergraduate degree programs and curricula on their lives. The survey had a 53% return rate and 98% of the respondents reported that they were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their educational experiences at the U of Idaho.

Chair Smelser notified the council that a faculty member had asked the council to consider acting as an advocate with the legislature in addressing higher education budget issues. Smelser and Provost Pitcher agreed that it would be appropriate for the faculty council/senate leaders at all state institutions to organize efforts to inform legislators about budget issues. However, these efforts should be organized outside of the university framework to be in compliance with lobbying restrictions. Lobbying efforts were very successful last year in obtaining significant raises for the faculty.

Smelser reported on faculty concerns over inclusion in the budget planning process. It had been reported to him that faculty members were being excluded from the decision making process in some colleges and departments. Provost Pitcher said that all academic unit administrators and cluster group conveners have been told that they must include faculty members in budget planning discussions. If any faculty member still feels that they are being shut out of these discussions they should take their concerns to the next highest administrative authority. In response to a question from Professor Phil Deutchman, Smelser noted that there are eleven faculty members on the Fiscal Emergency Committee which will hear and respond to all of the budget recommendations before they go to the university president. That committee will meet from 7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. next Monday and Tuesday in the SUB Gold Room. All meetings are open to the public. In response to a councillor’s question, Provost Pitcher explained that the responsibility for the make-up of the various “cluster groups,” in terms of areas and representation, was done by the president and the provost based on discussions that have taken place over the past two years.

Provost’s Report. Provost Brian Pitcher reminded the council that Fall Commencement ceremonies would take place on December 14th and 15th and asked council members to encourage their colleagues to attend the commencement events. Pitcher also noted that the Idaho House Education Committee would be on the campus to look at Teacher Education Programs offered by the U of Idaho.

University Curriculum Committee (UCC) Report. UCC Chair, Professor Jeffrey Harkins, provided background information and answered questions concerning the items forwarded to the council by the curriculum committee as seconded motions.
FC-02-013 – Proposed Minor in Fire Ecology and Management. After a brief discussion, the proposal was adopted by unanimous voice vote.

FC-02-014 – Proposed B.S. Degree in Materials Science and Engineering. There was a brief discussion concerning whether, in the current budget climate, there would be enough fiscal resources available to deliver this degree program. It was noted that this proposal, as well as all of the others, did not require new funding. The proposal was adopted by a majority voice vote.

FC-02-015 – Proposed Discontinuance of the Major and Minor in Botany. Professor Harkins was joined in the discussion of this item, as well as the following proposal, by the Chair of the Department of Biological Sciences, Professor Larry Forney. Harkins provided background on the extended UCC discussion of this proposal and Professor Forney answered questions concerning the proposal’s particulars. It was noted that the department had discussed the dropping of this major and minor (as well as the ones in zoology); plus the impact of that decision on courses to be offered, with every academic area that would be affected by the proposed changes. Councilor McCaffrey expressed some serious concerns over this proposal, as well as the zoology proposal (next item). He felt that dropping the majors in botany and zoology would make it too easy for the department to drop courses that were important to other academic areas. There followed an informative exchange of viewpoints between Professors Forney and McCaffrey concerning the importance of botany (and zoology) to many areas of teaching and research in agriculture. Professor Forney assured the council that these areas would not be short-changed. These changes are part of a departmental restructuring that will allow biological sciences to do a better job in delivering course materials in all of the academic areas under its responsibility. Students will still have access to courses in both botany and zoology and the changes will have no effect on the graduate programs offered by the department. The proposal was adopted by a majority voice vote.

FC-02-016 – Proposed Discontinuance of the Major and Minor in Zoology. Professors Harkins and Forney provided background information and answered questions concerning this change. The department was praised by Harkins for its ability to streamline its program and still meet the course needs of other academic areas. In response to a councilor’s question, it was noted that majors in the current degree programs could continue in those programs and receive degrees reflecting majors in botany and zoology. After more discussion (points noted above) the proposal was adopted by a majority voice vote.

FC-02-017 – Proposed Discontinuance of the Majors in Journalism/Mass Communication, Public Communication, and Visual Communication and the Minor in Interpersonal Communication AND the Proposed New Major (B.A. and B.S. Degree) in Communication with Options in Advertising, Communication Studies, Journalism, Public Relations, Visual Communication and the Proposed New Minor in Communication Studies. Professor Harkins indicated that the central goal of this proposal was simply the case of the school wanting to change its course offerings and restructure its degrees to provide a cleaner program for its majors. Another goal of the restructuring of the School of Communication academic program is applying for and earning national accreditation. Following a brief discussion, the proposal was adopted by unanimous voice vote.

FC-02-018. Proposed Final Examination Schedule for Fall and Spring 2002-2003. The Office of the Registrar submitted for council approval the schedule for final examinations for the Fall and Spring 2002-2003. It was noted by the chair that these schedules are presented to the council each year and that the registrar is following the scheduling rotation system approved by the council several years ago. After a brief discussion, the proposed examination schedule was adopted by unanimous voice vote.

Report from Human Resource Services (HRS). Chair Smelser introduced Pat Sturko, the Interim Assistant Vice President for Human Resource Services. Also present at the meeting were Deborah Manning and April Preston from HRS. VP Sturko presented the council with a PowerPoint© assisted overview of the ongoing review and assessment of the service being provided by her department. That review, she noted, should lead to the “unlocking of the potential of human resources at the University of Idaho.”

Some of the keys necessary include: the challenge of becoming an “employer of choice” (choosing to work at the U of Idaho over another institution), attracting and retaining faculty and staff; and providing a positive and supportive work environment. In order to meet those goals she indicated that HRS would need to restructure how it handled: employment (recruitment, hiring, job classifications); benefits (compensation, health, life and disability insurance, retirement benefits, family medical leave, other benefit programs); and human resource development (training, organizational design, professional development, performance management).
Sturko reviewed for the council the beginnings of the transformation that is going on in Human Resource Services. She indicated that the basis for a meaningful change involved leadership (the leadership within the department and also new reporting lines), the facilitating of open communications (inside and outside the department), and customer service. All of these areas are being studied by the Human Resources Steering Committee.

Questions and Comments. Questions and comments from councilors, followed by responses by Sturko and Pitcher in italics.

The central question on all councilors’ minds was the effect of the recent policy change eliminating the retirement medical benefits for people hired after January 1, 2002. Councilor McCaffrey asked why that benefit shouldn’t be reinstated.

Most institutions and states offer the ability to “buy in” to an established institutional medical plan at retirement. They do not offer free medical coverage. The U of Idaho is the only educational institution in Idaho and the Northwest to offer such a retirement benefit. Medical costs for retirees are growing at a rapid pace and are currently well over a million dollars a year. There is no way to pay these costs except by increasing medical insurance premiums for current employees and continuing the practice of using what can only be described as “unfunded liability” from the university to cover the premiums for retirees. There is no appropriation for this retirement medical benefit.

The university administration has decided to change that policy with regard to employees who may be laid off during the current budget crisis and then re-hired at a later date. It has been recommended that exceptions be granted from the new policy in those cases. The “window of opportunity” for the reinstatement of benefits has yet to be determined.

Councilor Kraut noted that one of the major concerns was trying to understand the process by which this medical benefit decision was made.

Human Resource Services takes full responsibility for not handling that process correctly. The Faculty Council and Staff Affairs Committee should have been consulted during those discussions and before a final decision was made. The administration also takes its share of responsibility in not communicating these policy changes in a timely manner to the university community. Apologies were offered by Human Resource Services and the Provost.

Councilors Nielsen and Kraut expressed concern that the removal of the medical benefits for people hired after January 1, 2001, might be retroactively imposed on current employees hired after a certain date or even on retirees currently covered by the benefit. Nielsen recalled an earlier administrative proposal that would have eliminated that benefit except for those employees that were within a couple of years of retirement.

It would be unethical, immoral, and illegal to make such a decision. We have contractual obligations to uphold and a responsibility to see that benefits awarded are not taken away from any current employee or qualified retiree. Every effort will be made in the future to have all of our deliberations as transparent as possible. We need to be totally open in all of these decision making processes. Everyone needs to know not only the benefits, but also the costs associated with any benefit package, so that collectively we can make difficult and yet good decisions about future benefits packages.

Professor Deutchman noted that HRS and the administration needed to take another look at the faculty/staff morale study that was completed last year. One of the consistent themes in this study is that department heads and deans need training in how to deal with people and people related issues. Professor Tom Trotter (University Ombudsman) would be an excellent resource for training programs.

We are making some progress in this area. Training and workshops are now offered for all new and continuing department heads. But there is still a lot of room for improvement. We will keep working on it! We could also use a strong dean and department head mentoring program that would team new people with experienced administrators who have proven to have good people skills.

Councilor Dickinson pointed out that one of the best training tools applicable to all unit administrators was training in “conflict management.” Professor McKeever pointed out that another useful tool to use is the exit interview. Councilor Meier noted that there are current university employees who could provide the leadership in designing those interviews.

The problem with the exit interview is meeting all the logistical problems and constructing meaningful questions – questions that will provide information on which change can be based.
Councilor Nelson said that the hiring process that he has experienced has taught him that often job applicants do not know the right questions to ask during the on-site interview process, such as asking the right questions about benefit programs. Equally important is getting an honest response from the university about what it will and will not do for the potential employee. All potential employees need to be provided with identical and complete information on benefits. It should never be a “buyer beware” situation.

Councilor Meier asked if HRS could arrange for budget numbers to appear on pay information given to employees. Some employees are paid from several different budgets and that information would prove useful in tracking expenses.

*HRS will work on finding a way to allow the budget numbers to appear on payroll slips.*

Councilor Chandler pointed out that new policy ideas are difficult to totally implement. Some mechanism is needed to see that middle or lower level managers are actually carrying out the letter and the spirit of these policies. Some kind of oversight is needed to make sure policies are actually being carried out. There are too many examples of administrators not being properly informed about policies and not using policies in ways that help solve employee problems.

*This is an excellent point and something that we need to pay more attention to – it is similar to trying to get the institutional goals implemented at the lowest level of the university and make them meaningful. We will figure out a way to audit this process.*

Councilor McClure noted the need for better timing when HRS brings in outside experts and specialists to the campus. HRS needs to take into account the times that faculty members are really busy – such as at times like this, at the end of a semester.

**Faculty Affairs Committee Report.** Professor Kerry McKeever, chair of the Faculty Affairs Committee (FAC) provided the council with an update on the work of that committee concerning post-tenure review and development. She noted that the FAC was making considerable progress on wrapping up the changes in these areas that were held over from last year. McKeever was confident that the complete package would be ready for council action in March 2002. She said that she wanted to “do it well and do it right.” McKeever said that the committee has been working with the administration with the expressed purpose of bringing the council a document that already has been considered and agreed upon by the provost and legal counsel. Also, any changes need to take into account the changing nature of the university in the current financial climate. The policies in this area should be simple and straightforward.

**Standardization of Teaching Loads.** In response to a councilor’s question about rumors concerning the “standardization” of teaching loads across the campus, the provost responded that the university must seek to be equitable in these matters. However, he pointed out that “equity” did not mean that teaching loads would be the same across the campus. Teaching loads should be equitable among comparable academic units and every attempt should be made to see that work assignments and guidelines are both rationale and consistent within an academic area. The provost has asked the academic deans to take a close look at their guidelines for work assignments.

**Appointment to the Health Insurance Advisory Group.** It was moved and seconded (Kraut, Meier) to confirm Chair Smelser’s appointment of Professor Steve Chandler to the Health Insurance Advisory Group. The motion was adopted by unanimous voice vote.

**Legislative Luncheon.** Chair Smelser reminded the council that he needs about ten faculty members to attend the annual Legislative Luncheon in Boise on January 9, 2002. Councilors were asked to let him know if they or a colleague will attend the luncheon.

**Thank You.** The chair and the council formally thanked and applauded Councilor Amanda Norby for her service on the Faculty Council this past year. A new undergraduate student representative will join the council next semester.

**Next Meeting.** The next meeting of the council is scheduled for **January 15, 2002.**

**Adjournment.** It was moved and seconded (Norby, McClure) to adjourn. The motion was adopted by unanimous voice vote and Chair Smelser adjourned the meeting at 5:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Peter A. Haggart
Secretary of the Faculty Council