University of Idaho  
FACULTY COUNCIL MINUTES  
2001-2002 Meeting #14, Tuesday, February 05, 2002

Present:  Smelser (chair), Bitterwolf (vice-chair), Butts-Matheson, Chandler, Dickinson, Haggart (w/o vote), Kraut, Lillard, McClure, Meier, Murray, Netzer, Nielsen, Pikowsky, Pitcher (w/o vote), Thompson, Wagner  Absent: Chun, Fairchild, Goodwin, Guenthner, Hong, McCaffrey, Nelson, Olson  Observers: 3

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 January 29, 2002, meeting as distributed.

Chair’s Report. Chair Smelser reported to the council on the following items:
• contrary to what was announced last week, the Faculty Affairs Committee will have a report on faculty evaluation, tenure review, and faculty development handbook changes ready for presentation after spring break – documents related to that discussion are available for viewing on the web at http://www.its.uidaho.edu/fac
• the student, staff, and faculty rally for higher education held at the Idaho Commons on Monday was a success
• the appointment of a Faculty Council ad hoc committee, charged with the evaluation of the Faculty Secretary, under guidelines provided by the provost, was solicited and finalized – committee members are Smelser, Bitterwolf, Meier, and Lillard

Scholarship Definition Task Force. Recommendations were presented of faculty members (including council volunteers – Pikowsky, Bitterwolf) to be members of the new Scholarship Task Force [see the minutes of the last council meeting]. It was felt that representation was still needed from the areas of natural resources, engineering, and the administration. A final listing of the task force will be announced at the next meeting. The charge to the task force is to “look at how the statements of scholarship in departments and colleges have changed and how those changes are then reflected in the tenure and promotion packages coming forward to promotion and tenure review committees and to the provost.”

At the suggestion of the provost, the council asked that the current University-Wide Promotion Committee be polled by the provost concerning its “fresh” and “first hand” observations (from reading 45 professional portfolios) a propos the materials being presented by faculty members seeking promotion. The provost and council leadership will develop a set of questions for the members of the promotion committee to answer. Those responses will then be used by the task force in its review of the use of the current definition of scholarship by faculty, administrators, and review committees.

Provost’s Report. Provost Brian Pitcher reported to the council the following items:
• a week from Friday (February 15th) a public forum will be held concerning the evolution of the new core curriculum – emphasizing that this forum was an important “check-point” in the development of the new core courses and core structure – Professor Voxman will preside at the early afternoon forum – Voxman will report to the council on March 5th
• Sandra E. Elman, Executive Director of NASC, will be on the campus February 14th to update the university community on the standards and process of the next accreditation team visit in the fall of 2004
• on the legislative front – higher education budget figures nearing approval by the legislature will closely match those requested by the governor – the economic climate is still fairly volatile
• UCC construction plans are still being made – the governor will probably announce in April whether construction funds will be released or held until the fall – the U of Idaho is ready to begin construction and will assign classrooms in other buildings – flexibility will be the key in the scheduling of classrooms for the fall semester

Associated Students of the University of Idaho (ASUI) Advising Resolution. ASUI President, Kasey Cole Swisher provided the council with background information on the ASUI Senate resolution calling for changes in academic advising. He emphasized that the ASUI believes from its study of advising that 1) there needs to be a central office established that is a clearing house for advising information (“structure and flow of information”), 2) freshmen and sophomore students don’t seem to know who their advisors are, and 3) too many faculty members have an “I can’t be bothered” attitude when it comes to advising students.

The consensus of the council and the students was that there were simply too many inconsistencies between academic areas involving the quality of all types of advising – course work, requirements for majors, and needed preparation for application and acceptance at graduate schools. An Advising Task Force, made up of faculty, students, and administrators, is currently looking into all of the advising issues. The ASUI felt that it needed to say something in a “public” way about its findings, thus its resolution.
In response to a councilor’s question, Swisher said that a lot of public and private universities have adopted a “professional” approach to undergraduate advising. Some universities have even adopted web based systems, but most people believe that “face-to-face” advising works best. Councilor Kraut responded that she is more comfortable with the thought that advising is being done by people in an academic department, people familiar with the field of study. Swisher said that the ASUI request for “professional” advisors has been removed from consideration because of the current and future budget situation.

The council and representatives of the ASUI Senate engaged in a lengthy and thought provoking discussion about the methods used in reaching the conclusions offered in the resolution concerning the perceived poor quality of advising, and the pitfalls of the current advising system. However, agreement was easily found in the notion that there are problems with the current system and it certainly would not hurt to examine current practices and recommend changes to the Advising Task Force.

Councilors raised the question amongst themselves of the value given to advising by departmental administrators. Unless advising is given some real weight in a faculty member’s performance evaluation, it will probably not be as important to the faculty member as teaching and scholarship. However, it was pointed out that some faculty members do, in fact, take their advising roles seriously, even if it is not a major factor in their evaluation. Council members offered the ASUI the names of several excellent resource people, as well as information about documents on the subject of advising.

Provost Pitcher noted that there is a lot of constructive dialogue taking place concerning advising. He commended the students for their determination to bring this issue to the forefront. He said that the central proposition coming out of all of the discussion was the goal of having quality advising happening in every academic department.

ASUI President Swisher asked the Faculty Council for help in two matters of immediate concern:

- the establishment of a U.S. Postal Service mail drop at the Idaho Commons – a more central campus location for daily pickup of outgoing off-campus mail – please add your support to this ASUI request
- allegations of budget cut misinformation and scare tactics that are reportedly being used by instructors in the School of Communication in their classes – Swisher claims 20 phone calls and 40 emails have come to his office from communication students worried about their degree program, losing accreditation, and having faculty positions drastically cut – no budget cutting decisions have been made yet – gathering student support is good, but these tactics may do harm – the provost has been contacted by the governor’s office concerning this matter, and the college dean and school director are looking into these allegations

Student Honor Code. ASUI Senator Isaac Myhrum provided the council with documents from the University of Virginia concerning their Honor Committee. He suggested that the U of Idaho investigate the establishment of a Student Honor Code. He thought that this would be a valuable recruiting tool and is the “mark” of a “quality” university. Provost Pitcher pointed out that this suggestion has surfaced many times during the past decade and perhaps now is the time to fully investigate the matter. The Faculty Council already had the Honor Code as an agenda item for its February 19th meeting and has invited Bruce Pitman to that meeting. The ASUI was invited to also have representatives at that meeting so they too can join in the discussion.

On-Line Course Evaluation Report. Councilor Mark Nielsen reported to the council that the on-line course evaluation testing was done with a small group last fall and is being done with a much larger group of courses this spring. He said that there are no major problems and that the reporting procedures are working well. The area that still needs programming work is the instructor question selection process. A fully functional on-line evaluation should be ready to go for the Fall 2002 semester. The questions and form will come up for approval at the May General Faculty meeting.

“Rule of 80” Benefits Changes for New Hires. Councilor Steve Chandler provided the council with background material on additional changes made to the previously reported modification in the “Rule of 80” which eliminates university paid retirement medical coverage for employees hired after January 1, 2002. The new wording adds a definition of what does not constitute a “break in service” – “A break in service does not include any category of leave, paid or unpaid; sabbatical leave; military leave; or lay-off status.” There was a considerable amount of discussion regarding several aspects of medical benefits for retirees. In response to a councilor’s question, the Faculty Secretary said that employees contemplating taking advantage of the U of Idaho’s voluntary retirement plan would still qualify for U of Idaho retiree medical benefits. The plan specifically states that retirement medical coverage will be provided. Retirement health care is a significant benefit to retirees, saving them approximately $400 a month in medical insurance expenses. It was noted by several councilors and the provost that the Health Insurance Advisory Committee needs to explore some alternatives and find ways to help new employees prepare for the expense of health care upon retirement.

Adjournment. It was moved and seconded (Lillard, Murray) to adjourn. The motion was adopted and Chair Smelser adjourned the meeting at 5:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Peter A. Haggart, Secretary of the Faculty Council