Status of Diversity Council of the Faculty Senate

Meeting Date: February 3, 2014
Time: 12:00 – 1:30 PM
Location: Campus Center Room 804 - 808

Minutes

Present: Mzamo Mangaliso (Co-Chair), Ernie Washington (Co-Chair), Jeung Choi, Laura Lovett, Hoang Gia Phan, Marie-Christine Polizzi, Stefanie Robles, Anna Waltman, Ingrid Holm, Amilcar Shabazz

Apologies: Willie Hill, Sarah Hutton, Joel Martin, Ernie May, Annemarie Seifert, Nate Whitmal

Guest: Randy Phillis

Co-Chair Mzamo Mangaliso called the meeting to order at 12:00 pm, welcomed all present, and announced the apologies.

The minutes of the meeting of December 9, 2013 were reviewed; a motion to accept the minutes was seconded and approved with the addition that Joel Martin had highlighted the importance of diversity.

Reports by Ernie Washington

• Ernie talked about how the committee became interested in SRTI and why it is important to address. The SRTI has been used for a decade at UMass, but particularly for minority faculty, it is not a fair tool for assessing teaching. Also, since spring 2011 when the SRTI issues were brought to our committee’s attention, nothing much has been accomplished regarding SRTI until this time. The major impediment to change has been the MSP which has contractual rights to negotiated the conditions of teaching. There is much to be done to shift the campus from its over reliance upon the SRTI. One necessary step is a national conference to identify best practices in the assessment of teaching. It is also important to engage departmental and college personnel committees in the necessary shift away from the over reliance upon the SRTI. Currently all departments have adopted and used SRTI as a measure of success in faculty teaching. Items that focus upon specific behaviors such as, The instructor was well prepared or the instructor explained course materials wisely, are more useful in the evaluation process.

• There was a spirited discussion by Council members: Students unfairly evaluate linguistically different faculty; (for example, international faculty with accents are not fairly evaluated); SRTI items # 10, 11, and 12 are general questions asking students’ “perception” of faculty performance, which would be an important factor to be considered when evaluating and interpreting the SRTI results.

• Mzamo talked about two issues with SRTI: 1) what is the actual validity of SRTI and its impact on faculty and 2) what kinds of interventions have been done across campus.
• The Co-Chairs introduced MSP President Randy Phillis and thanked him for coming to the meeting. Randy was then offered an opportunity to address the meeting.

Guest Speaker: Randy Phillis, MSP President

1. Since the MSP committee first brought up the issue of teaching evaluation as a mandatory bargaining issue, progress has been very slow. But it has now become the first priority among the MSP bargaining items.

   Last fall, the MSP had sent out a memo to Joel Martin advising that SRTI items # 10, 11, and 12 offered a more generalized, impressionistic judgment of faculty performance, which reflects student bias, and asked him to distribute the memo to all DPCs. However, for some unknown reason the memo not sent out to DPCs. A copy of the memo was distributed to the Council members present.

2. Randy distributed a draft of the bargaining principles regarding the revision of the teaching evaluation process. Teaching evaluation cannot be done in one survey. He stated that although student bias cannot be completely eliminated, it must be minimized. It cannot be done by one survey. Although it cannot eliminate the reflection of student bias fully, it must minimize it. A single instrument cannot be appropriate for all kinds of teaching such as practicums, and evaluation must be flexible and involve multiple measures to account for the diversity of teaching and learning environments on campus. The focus is to improve students’ learning.

Discussion by Council Members:

• A question was raised about what a reasonable deadline would be. Randy responded that the process includes three stages: building a new evaluation system, a full assessment of the roll out of the new system, and the final teaching evaluation system which emerges from this process.

• The issue of a teaching portfolio was mentioned: that teaching evaluation typically involves different modes of assessment, not just the student evaluations (SRTI); that a teaching portfolio may work more effectively in evaluating teaching for tenure and promotion.

• Two philosophies on, or approaches to, teaching were discussed: the ‘student as a customer’ approach, and the ‘student as a patient’ approach. How these models play out depends on the instructor and the subject. But the approach taken invariably affects the instructor’s evaluations at the end of the semester.

• One member raised a question about whether an agreement existed across the campus that the SRTI evaluation process was problematic and that it needs to be fixed, emphasizing a shared agreement as necessary to speed up the process of transforming teaching evaluations.

• Another member emphasized the importance of graduate students involvement in the revision of teaching evaluations.

• One member addressed an equity model, but another member argued that the equity model would not be the best, and that the equity model was also a double-edged sword.
3. A motion by Hoang Gia, seconded by Amilcar Shabazz, was passed to request Joel Martin to send the MSP memo to all DPCs. Afterwards there was discussion indicating that there was no use to send the same memo again, and that we should give more specific instruction to DPCs.

4. Randy responded to the question (why is the process so slow?) that he promised to speed up the process. He also said he would ask administration to distribute the memo to DPCs.

Announcements

• A regular social gathering was being planned to take place at the University Club every Thursday from 4 to 6 PM. Council Members were asked to help create a new membership mailing list. All faculty and staff who are interested in diversity are welcome. Funding was to be sought from the MSP, or the University, etc.

• A Nelson Mandela Commemorative Tribute was being planned on campus for April 4th, 2014, which will be the same day that UMass will be hosting the Annual 5-College Africa Day. The Chancellor will make the opening remarks. The South African Ambassador to the US has been invited. There will also be panel discussions, music, traditional African drumming, dance, etc.

Other business

A suggestion was made by Laura Lovett that Council members should visit the University of California, San Diego website and look at their Course And Professor Evaluations (CAPE) as a possible benchmark evaluation tool.

The meeting adjourned at 1: 40 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeung Choi