Minutes of the Arts & Science Faculty Council

October 30, 2007

The meeting was called to order at 4:17 p.m. by the Chair, Professor Michael Bess. Present at the meeting were Dean Richard McCarty, Professors Brooke Ackerly, Michael Aurbach, Clint Carter, Monica Casper, Beth Conklin, Senta Victoria Greene, Kassian Kovalcheck, Jane Landers, Elizabeth Lunbeck, and Lynn Ramey. Professor David Wood was unable to attend. Associate Dean John Sloop and Jonathan Bremer, from the A&S Dean’s Office staff, attended as guests of the Faculty Council.

1. Approval of the Minutes of the Faculty Council meeting of October 2, 2007.

There were no comments or questions, and Council unanimously approved the Minutes.

2. Topic of discussion: Constitutional amendment to create the position of Executive Secretary of the Faculty.

Professor Bess stated that the purpose of a Constitutional amendment to create the position of Executive Secretary would be to codify or institutionalize the role that Mr. Bremer now plays in the operations of Faculty Council and A&S Faculty meetings. If Council members find the idea of this position attractive, he continued, then an ad hoc committee would be formed to draft the wording of a proposed amendment. Before Mr. Bremer took his current position in the A&S Dean’s Office, Dean McCarty added, it was difficult to find a willing faculty member to serve as Faculty Council Secretary or Secretary of the Faculty. Even when such a person could be found, he said, the duties of taking notes during meetings greatly restricted the ability of that person to freely participate in discussion and debate. The hiring of Mr. Bremer has allowed all faculty members to participate in meetings and has provided—and the position of Executive Secretary would provide—continuity on matters of Faculty governance from month to month and year to year. Dean McCarty further explained that the duties of executive secretary are part of Mr. Bremer’s job description, but the role of Executive Secretary should be clearly outlined in the Constitution. The Faculty Senate has a formal Executive Secretary position, and it has worked very well.

Professor Aurbach asked if Mr. Bremer is a faculty member. Dean McCarty replied that Mr. Bremer is a faculty member, a Lecturer in the Department of Philosophy, but his primary duties are as a staff person in the A&S Dean’s Office. The Executive Secretary need not be a faculty member, however. Would the Executive Secretary, Professor Kovalcheck asked, serve at the pleasure of the Faculty Council, the Faculty, or the Dean? Dean McCarty responded that it would be difficult for the Executive Secretary to report to the entire A&S Faculty, so perhaps the Executive Secretary would report to the Dean and the Chair of Faculty Council. This is an issue that could be worked out by the ad hoc committee, if it is approved. Dean Sloop asked if the position of Faculty Council Secretary and Secretary of the Faculty would be retained. Dean McCarty replied that they would be retained; it is essential to have an elected faculty member ultimately
responsible for the preparation of meeting minutes and the procedure of faculty elections. Professor Aurbach was concerned that the Executive Secretary, if he or she is a faculty member who has voting rights, might be placed in a conflict of interest situation when his or her personal position on an issue is different from the Dean’s. **Council approved the formation of an ad hoc committee to draft the wording of an amendment to the A&S Constitution which would create the position of Executive Secretary.**

3. **Topic of discussion: Teaching track for NTT faculty.**

Professor Bess explained that Dean McCarty would like Council to discuss again the possibility of creating a parallel track for non-tenure-track faculty (NTTF). Most non-tenure-track faculty members in A&S are either Lecturers or Senior Lecturers, and the primary differences between the two are experience in teaching at the post-secondary education level and length of contract (Lecturers are usually appointed to one-year terms, while Senior Lecturers are appointed to three-year terms). Dean McCarty also has the authority (according to the Faculty Manual) and has in fact appointed non-tenure-track Assistant and Associate Professors. Senior Lecturers, Professor Bess continued, do not have the opportunity to advance to a higher position, no matter how well they have been fulfilling their teaching and service duties and no matter how critical a role they play in the teaching functions of A&S. There should be a way, he stated, to recognize and reward those Senior Lecturers who do excellent work by appointing them to a higher rank. This issue was extensively discussed by Council in 2003-2004, after which Council approved the report from the ad hoc committee. The report, however, recommended new NTT titles (e.g. Vanderbilt Lecturer) that would not have been approved by the other Vanderbilt undergraduate colleges or the Faculty Senate. Dean McCarty explained that he needs, from the faculty, guidelines for appointments to non-tenure-track positions, because the existing policy and available titles are insufficient. He suggested that A&S could adopt a “professor in the teaching of” track, similar to the “professor in the practice of” track used by Peabody College, for example. Without guidelines or policy on NTTF appointments, however, Dean McCarty stated that he is appointing persons to NTTF positions on an ad hoc basis. The Faculty should adopt, he continued, a teaching track for non-tenure-track faculty, with a built-in incentive structure, that would not interfere with the tenure track schedule.

Professor Aurbach asked about the review process for non-tenure-track faculty. Dean McCarty explained that experience and effectiveness in teaching and university service are the two principal criteria for NTTF. Research publications and activities in addition to teaching and service would be an added plus, but are not expected.

Professor Lunbeck stated that she is in favor of a step system of advancement for NTTF, and she strongly supports Vanderbilt’s policy and record of spousal hiring, but she would prefer non-overlapping terminology between NTTF and TTF. She is uncomfortable with the use of the titles Assistant Professor or Associate Professor for non-tenure-track faculty members, partly because of the confusion they create and partly because they might be included by outside bodies in the calculation of faculty publication productivity. Dean McCarty replied that the issue of non-overlapping terminology might not be a
problem, because students do not care about or understand the differences between non-tenure-track and tenure-track titles, but it is an issue that we should examine.

Several Council members, including Professors Lunbeck, Greene, and Casper, were concerned that research activity conducted by NTTF was not sufficiently recognized and encouraged in the current or proposed scheme to create a NTTF teaching track. Academic research is an important aspect of the work and is critical to the well-being of several non-tenure-track faculty members in their departments or programs. Professor Ackerly suggested that these concerns could be addressed by rewarding NTTF a reduced teaching load for productive research projects.

Many Council members discussed the relevance and importance of the position taken in the recent newsletter published by the AAUP regarding the status of contingent faculty in American post-secondary educational institutions. Most agreed that the abuse of contingent faculty cited in the newsletter does not take place at Vanderbilt—the rapid rise in the proportion of contingent faculty to tenure-track faculty, the transformation of full-time teaching positions to many part-time teaching positions, and the dismissal of non-tenure-track faculty for speaking on political issues—but A&S should at least consider the guidelines proposed by AAUP on contingent faculty appointments. Council members also agreed that AAUP is more concerned with the full-time/part-time distinction than the tenure-track/non-tenure-track distinction.

Dean Sloop and Professor Landers stated that many of these issues were addressed by the 2004 ad hoc committee, and its report should be essential reading for any new committee studying the proposal to create a teaching track. The 2004 committee discussed the title issue, the meaning of the various ranks or levels in the teaching track, the benchmarks for advancement in rank, and incentives for NTTF to conduct research, to feel more enfranchised in the University, and to advance in rank.

Dean McCarty reiterated his position that he needs guidance on the appointment of non-tenure-track faculty. Faculty members are often concerned about their professional autonomy, but faculty have ceded their role in this area to the Dean’s Office. He stated that he is asking, without any pressure, for a solution to the problem of recognizing and rewarding excellent NTTF with appropriate titles. The only way to acknowledge excellent NTTF with the current system is by annual salary increases.

Council approved the formation of an ad hoc committee to study the possible creation of a teaching track in A&S for NTTF. In its deliberations, the committee should consider all of the issues discussed in this meeting and the report produced by the 2004 ad hoc committee.

4. Follow-up to Dean Wcislo’s update on the implementation of College Halls and The Commons.

Professor Bess proposed that Council approve the following motion in support of The Commons: “The Faculty of the College of Arts and Science note that The Commons, the
first stage of Vanderbilt’s plan to transform its undergraduate student residences into College Halls, will open to the Class of 2012 on August 16, 2008. The Arts and Science Faculty believe that The Commons will offer tremendous opportunities for faculty and their students to engage each other in new and exciting ways, both as scholars and more broadly as citizens of our university community. The faculty of the College of Arts and Science enthusiastically support this path-breaking initiative under the leadership of Frank Wcislo, Dean of The Commons, and look forward to active participation in Commons activities as scholars, teachers, and mentors of undergraduates. It is the policy of the College of Arts and Science to encourage and facilitate strong engagement by its faculty in the many events, courses, and ongoing projects undertaken under the auspices of The Commons in coming years.”

Professor Kovalcheck asked for the purpose of the motion and if such a motion transgressed the prerogatives of the Dean in setting policy for A&S. Professor Bess responded that the motion takes a position, to ourselves and to the world, that A&S endorses The Commons. Dean McCarty concurred; it would be good for A&S to show support for The Commons. Several Council members suggested that the motion should be toned down somewhat, and Professor Bess agreed to revise the statement of support for The Commons accordingly.

5. Business from the Committee on Educational Programs (CEP).

Study Abroad proposals:
A. A new study abroad program in Paris, France.
B. A revision to the study abroad program in St. Petersburg, Russia.
C. A new study abroad program in Shanghai, China.
D. The termination of study abroad programs in Nanjing, China and Taipei, Taiwan.
E. A new study abroad program in Cairo, Egypt.

There was no discussion, and Council approved the five study abroad proposals recommended by the CEP.

6. Business from the Committee on Graduate Education (CGE).

A. New and revised courses. Council approved the course changes and additions from the Committee on Graduate Education as corrected (the course descriptions will be attached to the Minutes of the November 2007 Faculty Meeting).

B. Proposed Parental Leave for Graduate Students policy. The proposed policy is as follows:

“Following childbirth or adoption of an infant, the primary caregiver (whether mother or father) will be allowed to take six weeks of parental leave with full stipend and continued health insurance coverage and tuition waiver. The student’s enrollment will be continued during this period as well. If both parents are Vanderbilt graduate students, only one may take parental leave. The student should request a parental leave from his or her departmental chair at least three months prior to the beginning of the anticipated leave.
(In the case of adoption, the request should be made at least three months prior to the anticipated leave or as soon as the adoption is confirmed.) The request should be made in writing. The student should also provide her or his departmental chair with (a) a birth certificate or (b) written certification of child adoption from the adoption agency in the case of adoption. Graduate students eligible for parental leave are those currently enrolled and supported by College of Arts and Science assistantships or fellowships. (Those supported by fellowships or grants from external funding sources must adhere to the rules of the granting agency regarding leaves.) This policy establishes minimum standards for parental leave for graduate students. Departments may offer greater accommodations as are warranted by the individual circumstances of the student. Students should make appropriate arrangements as needed with their course instructors to make up any missed coursework during their leaves.”

Professor Ramey suggested that a semester-length leave might be better or more appropriate than a six-week leave since it would be less disruptive to the undergraduate experience. Dean McCarty responded that this issue has been resolved. If there are any problems of this kind, he stated, A&S will take care of them on a case by case basis. Not all graduate students teach, he said, and most parental leaves can be planned in advance, so he does not anticipate many difficulties. Professor Greene noted that the proposed policy was modeled on the NIH policy, which has been successful. **Council then approved the Parental Leave for Graduate Students policy.**

7. FYI: Future topic of discussion: Grade inflation.

Professor Bess announced that grade inflation will be a topic of discussion for the next Faculty Council meeting.

8. New business and concerns.

Professor Kovalcheck, acting on a suggestion from Professor Getz, recommended that Council, and the A&S Faculty, should congratulate Gary Gibson, the University Registrar, for creating the online grading system. He moved that “Whereas the University Registrar’s office led the effort to provide a utility for submitting grades online, engaged faculty in planning, prototyping, and testing the new service, and has created a convenient, well-designed, and effective tool; Be It Resolved that the Faculty of the College of Arts and Science congratulates Gary Gibson and the capable staff of the University Registrar’s Office and at Management Information Systems for a job well done.” There was no discussion of the motion, and **Council unanimously approved the motion commending Gary Gibson and his staff for their work implementing the online grade submission program.**


No issues were raised.
10. **Adjournment.**

Council voted to adjourn at 5:26 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Senta Victoria Greene
Secretary of the Faculty Council