Minutes of the Faculty  
College of Arts & Science  

April 16, 2013

Dean Carolyn Dever called the meeting to order at 4:10 p.m. in Wilson Hall 103. Approximately 60 faculty members were in attendance. Sending his regrets was Professor David Wasserstein.

1. Approval of the Minutes of the Faculty Meeting of March 19, 2013.

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

2. Review of the Minutes of the Faculty Council meeting of April 2, 2013.

There were no comments or questions.

3. Executive Motion Calendar.

From the Committee on Educational Programs (CEP):

   A. Proposed revision of the Jewish Studies minor. Professor Getz, Chair of Faculty Council, explained that the proposal would eliminate the foreign language requirement for the minor. There were no other comments or questions, and the faculty approved the revision of the Jewish Studies minor.

   B. Proposed revision of the Physics minor. Professor Getz explained that the proposal would integrate a parallel set of new courses into the minor. There were no other comments or questions, and the faculty approved the revision of the Physics minor.

   C. Proposed revision of the Sociology major and Honors program. Professor Getz explained that the proposal would restructure courses in the major to better reflect the expertise and offerings of the department. There were no other comments or questions, and the faculty approved the revision of the Sociology major and Honors program.

4. Update on Academic Analytics.

Dean Dever explained that she has met with Arts and Science department chairs to discuss an important new tool, Academic Analytics, with which departments can gather data about the research productivity of their faculty members. Academic Analytics is a company that was founded in 2005 by the then-Dean of the Graduate School at Stony Brook, who thought that there should be a better way of ranking doctoral programs than the one used by the National Research Council (NRC). The company has developed a program to measure faculty research productivity. The Provost’s Office has been
working with Academic Analytics for several years in order to ensure that the company has an accurate list of Vanderbilt’s tenured and tenure-track faculty members. Sufficient confidence has been reached in Academic Analytics that the Provost’s Office has asked Vanderbilt’s schools to engage more actively with it. She emphasized that the data will be based on and organized by departments, not on interdisciplinary programs, and not on individual faculty members, pre- or post-tenure. Moreover, Academic Analytics at present does not measure “creative expression,” and, consequently, the departments of Art and Theatre will not participate. In a separate project, Academic Analytics is starting to track graduate students over many years—the basic decisions they make, where they go after graduation, etc. Department chairs have completed the first step of this ongoing process, Dean Dever reported, by selecting appropriate criteria, attaching reasonable weights to these criteria, and choosing a small set of peer and aspirational departments in other universities with which to compare (data from 160 institutions are available through Academic Analytics). The use of data from Academic Analytics is very important, Dean Dever further explained, as a quantitative response to challenges of accountability to institutions of higher education. It is one small, but significant, way to inform people about the work that Vanderbilt does, and Academic Analytics is the most reputable company of its kind. She said that many other highly-ranked research universities have also recently decided to use and participate more actively in Academic Analytics. Dean Dever recognized that concerns have been expressed by faculty members about the use of Academic Analytics. The intent to use it is not sinister, she stated, but to gather data and to make wise investment decisions. If a department, for example, were to discover that it has a lower rate of NSF (National Science Foundation) funding than peer departments, then it can find the reasons for the disparity and work to increase the amount of external funding.

In response to questions and concerns, Dean Dever reassured the faculty that the data in Academic Analytics are not going to be broken down by individual faculty member. The data are going to be used to ascertain ways in which departments can improve and to reveal their strengths, though information cannot be extracted from Academic Analytics to rank departments or universities. Thus, the focus is on departments, not graduate programs or undergraduate programs, but departments as a whole. It is thus crucial for department chairs to select a reasonable comparison set of peer departments in other universities based on the department’s interests and to choose criteria and weights specific to the discipline. Departments are limited to the criteria that Academic Analytics offers, but new criteria could be added, such as journal editorships and research collaborations. Scholarly awards that are not already included in the program can also be added, she said, so please contact her if departments or faculty members know of such. An annual guide could be created, Dean Dever continued, that would provide definitions of the categories and clearly lay out the important guiding parameters of the program. Academic Analytics collects information about universities and their faculties whether they are a client or not; they gather data from public sources, such as granting agencies and citation indices. Thus, Vanderbilt does not provide information to Academic Analytics, although Vanderbilt has been working with the company, as she explained earlier, to validate the information that they have collected about Vanderbilt. During this process, Academic Analytics has been very responsive to concerns, she stated, and is
continually improving the program. They have added a scaling mechanism, for instance, that adjusts for the number of faculty members in a department.

The information in Academic Analytics, Senior Associate Dean Sloop added, will provide depth to conversations with department chairs about initiatives to improve programs and about ways in which the Dean’s Office can help in this effort. With the aid of Academic Analytics, strategic decisions can be made about a department. If a department, for example, were to have fewer books published per faculty member than peer departments, then the Dean’s Office can help find ways to respond. Or, perhaps, in another situation, depending on how a particular department is developing, a new faculty hire would be helpful. Dean Dever emphasized that Academic Analytics is one approach—one tool—to ascertain the strengths and weaknesses of a program. Yet, it does not include information about teaching, and one cannot evaluate research productivity by itself without taking into consideration the quality of teaching, she said. Information about teaching at Vanderbilt has been collected by Roberta Bell, of VIRG, and Dean Dever stated that this information is rich and revealing. She urged faculty members to review it. Moreover, Dean Dever acknowledged that Academic Analytics can be readily misused, by, for example, using the data in Academic Analytics to make qualitative judgments or evaluations about departments or to rank them. Also, departments could become preoccupied with how they appear in Academic Analytics or with the criteria, weights, and numbers in Academic Analytics. External reviews are another approach to improving a department, she continued, although they generally do not provide good and useful information. One aspect of external reviews, though, that can complement Academic Analytics is the departmental self study. The two approaches can help inform a thorough discussion in every department about who they are and where they are going. Therefore, a combination of approaches—Academic Analytics, expert consultants, teaching data—is needed to move forward department by department.

Dean Dever explained that she would like to be able to state, given that a large portion of Vanderbilt’s budget is dedicated to faculty and staff salaries, that the faculties in these departments are extraordinary by all measures, including by the data from Academic Analytics. It is crucial for Vanderbilt, in the age of Federal budget sequestration and reasonable caps on tuition increases, to provide quantitative data that help explain the purpose of departments. Vanderbilt needs data, she emphasized. As part of this effort, departments should take ownership of who they are and the value of what they do in order for Vanderbilt to get out in front of valid questions about its practices and investments. She said that if Vanderbilt does not collect and organize this kind of information, others will do so, and, if they do, Vanderbilt would not have control over their methods or even be able to verify the information input into the system. If Academic Analytics turns out to be not useful or helpful, then Vanderbilt will try something else. Dean Dever stated that Deans Campbell, Greene, and Sloop are working with her on this project, and any one of the four would be happy to explain it at a departmental faculty meeting.
5. **Original Motion Calendar.**

No issues were raised.

6. **Good of the College.**

Dean Dever reported that Professor Kate Daniels and Professor Jane Landers have recently been awarded 2013 Guggenheim Fellowships. Both of them were congratulated by the faculty.

Dean Dever also reported that ten Arts and Science graduate students have received NSF fellowships for next year.

Dean Dever announced that a celebration in honor of Associate Dean Fräncille Bergquist on her retirement will be held on Tuesday, April 23, at 4:00 p.m., in Ballroom A of the Student Life Center. She encouraged everyone to attend. A website for Dean Bergquist has been created by Rob Fuller with photographs and testimonials: [http://as.vanderbilt.edu/deanb/](http://as.vanderbilt.edu/deanb/).

7. **Adjournment.**

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

Written by
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Executive Secretary of the Faculty

Reviewed by
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