Minutes of the Arts and Science Faculty Council

September 3, 2013

The meeting was called to order at 4:11 p.m. by the Chair, Professor Lucius Outlaw, Jr. Present at the meeting were Dean Carolyn Dever, Professors Akram Aldroubi, Laura Carpenter, Katherine Crawford, Marshall Eakin, Jennifer Fay, Doug Hardin, Holly McCammon, Carmelo Rizzo, Ruth Rogaski, and Tony Stewart. Sending his regrets was Professor Kip Viscusi. Senior Associate Dean Karen Campbell attended as a guest of Faculty Council, and Jonathan Bremer, from the Arts and Science Dean’s Office staff, attended as the Executive Secretary of the Faculty.


Professor Outlaw put forward the Council rules of 2012-2013 for discussion. In response to a question, Mr. Bremer stated that the Council rules have changed little over the past ten years; the only changes have been to add the word “affirmative” in rule #5 in order to clarify it and to add the word “Executive” in two places in rule #10 in order to shift the responsibility for keeping record of these rules from the Secretary of Faculty Council to the Executive Secretary of the Faculty. Council then approved the rules of September 4, 2012 as the procedure by which Council meetings will be conducted in 2013-2014.

2. Approval of the Minutes of the Faculty Council Meeting of April 30, 2013.

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

3. Formation of two ad-hoc faculty subcommittees.

Dean Dever requested that two ad-hoc faculty subcommittees be formed in order for her to receive faculty input. The first subcommittee would review and update the Arts and Science guidelines for the appropriate use of research funds by faculty members. In spring 2009, she continued, a subcommittee chaired by Professor Bonnie Dow developed a policy document for the appropriate use of research funds that has been very helpful for department chairs and program directors. Dean Dever stated that, since the creation of the guidelines, there have been some changes to the tax code and five years have passed. Consequently, it would be a good time to revisit the policy. In response to a question, Dean Dever explained that final decisions regarding the use of research funds rest with her and department chairs; these guidelines provide some parameters for what is acceptable. She also noted that several faculty members have complained that research funds cannot be used for expenses related to cell phones.

The second subcommittee, Dean Dever explained, would explore the possibility of establishing a mentoring and career development support service for tenured faculty members. Associate professors are often in need of helpful career advice, promotion guidance, and access to resources, just as junior faculty members are, yet Arts and Science does not have a counterpart to the Program for Career Development (PCD) for
senior faculty members. Professor Carpenter, Director of PCD, volunteered to serve on this committee and stated that she has collected resources from other institutions regarding career development for tenured faculty members.

Dean Dever sought volunteers to serve on these committees and asked Council members to discuss with their colleagues whether a career development program for senior faculty members is appealing and would be worthwhile. Professor Outlaw recommended that Council revisit these issues at the next meeting.

4. Revised procedures for the Curriculum Committee and the Committee on Educational Programs (CEP).

Dean Campbell explained that new procedures for the Curriculum Committee and the CEP have been established this year. Many Council members have stated over the years that too much time has been spent in meetings copy editing course descriptions. Several copy editors are being interviewed, she continued, one of whom will be hired to copy edit proposed course descriptions, according to the revised course description rules that Council approved last year, before the course descriptions are reviewed by the Curriculum Committee. The Curriculum Committee would then focus on the substantive clarity of the description, whether the proposed course duplicates another course in the curriculum, whether the prerequisites are appropriate, and whether the proposed AXLE distribution category for the course is reasonable. Council would then review the proposed course description holistically and not spend time copy editing it. Moreover, a tenured faculty member has been appointed Chair of the Curriculum Committee and Associate Dean Yollette Jones has been appointed as an ex officio member.

Dean Campbell further explained that the CEP has set a regular schedule of meetings for this year and will encourage departments and programs to submit proposed revisions of their academic requirements early. In this way, a regular and manageable flow of proposals will proceed from the CEP to Faculty Council instead of being concentrated in the late spring meetings.

Council members applauded these changes, especially those related to the approval of course descriptions; there will be more time to discuss other topics. Some Council members suggested that it would be worthwhile to discuss the role of Faculty Council in approving courses and to discuss the tension between the faculty’s responsibility to establish the curriculum and an individual faculty member’s academic freedom.

5. Consideration of issues for Council to discuss this year.

Professor Carpenter suggested that Council discuss a more flexible reimbursement policy for travel; perhaps faculty members could be reimbursed for conference travel up to a set dollar amount per year instead of a set number of conferences per year. Or perhaps, as Professor Crawford added, faculty members could be reimbursed for a set number of conferences over a longer period, which would allow more flexibility for those who work on a project over several years and then present their ideas in a concentrated period.
Professor Carpenter also added that the present policy does not take into consideration whether a faculty member is an editor of an academic journal or an officer of an organization, both of which might require or encourage conference participation. Professor Stewart suggested that faculty members who receive outside funds might be able to help their colleagues in this respect by contributing their unused funds to a pool, from which colleagues could draw.

In response to a question from Professor Eakin, Deans Dever and Campbell explained that a committee appointed by the Provost’s Office is in the second year of reviewing Vanderbilt’s method of student course evaluations. Two subcommittees worked over the summer; one of which reviewed the process by which students evaluate courses, and the other reviewed the set of evaluation questions (the instrument). A report from the Provost’s committee is expected by the end of the fall semester.

Dean Campbell also noted that a task force has been charged with renumbering courses to four-digits, which is made possible by the new course registration software. The revised course numbering system is planned to take effect in spring 2015 for fall 2015 registration.

Professor Crawford suggested that Council discuss Internet use in classrooms. Providing Internet access in classrooms allows some students to disrupt the class to such an extent that it poses a serious pedagogical problem. Dean Dever responded that, if classrooms did not have WiFi, students would be able to access the Internet through other means. Professor Outlaw stated that the problem of inappropriate Internet use in the classroom is part of a broader issue of the nature of cultural life of undergraduates and institutional norms at Vanderbilt.

6. **Orientation session for new faculty members.**

Dean Campbell reported that an orientation session for new Arts and Science faculty members is planned to begin immediately after the September Arts and Science Faculty Meeting, which is scheduled for Tuesday, September 17, at 4:10 p.m. The orientation session will cover teaching, classrooms, deadlines, and faculty governance, among other topics. She stated that invitations have already been distributed, and she asked Council members to encourage new faculty members to attend. Professor Outlaw thanked Dean Campbell for organizing the orientation session, which is a responsibility mandated by the Arts and Science Constitution to the Chair of Faculty Council.

7. **New Business and Concerns.**

No issues were raised.

8. **Good of the Council.**

Dean Dever urged Council members and other faculty members to participate and contribute to Vanderbilt’s strategic planning initiative. Approximately 140 faculty
members are formally involved in this process, several of whom are Council members. This initiative will set the direction for Vanderbilt over the next ten to fifteen years. Recommendations developed over the next few months by the executive committee (co-chaired by Professors John Geer and Susan Wente) and the four steering committees (Trans-Institutional Programs, Undergraduate Residential Experience, Educational Technologies, and Healthcare Solutions) will be presented to the Board of Trust next summer. These recommendations will form the basis for the next Vanderbilt capital campaign. Professor Outlaw also encouraged faculty members to participate in this planning initiative; faculty participation is crucial and effective—during the last planning initiative, a strong second effort by Arts and Science faculty members produced substantive results.

Dean Dever requested that faculty members be sensitive to staff members during this stressful period. She explained that a recently announced revision to Vanderbilt’s paid time off policy, to be implemented next year, will mean that many long-term staff members lose a significant number of paid days off per year. Moreover, some staff members in the Medical Center will be laid off in September, and a completely new Vanderbilt travel reservation and booking system is being implemented.

Dean Dever announced that Ellen Fanning, Stevenson Professor of Biological Sciences and a professor of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, passed away on September 1. Professor Fanning was a gifted mentor and scientist, she continued, and her death is a great loss. After such losses Professor Crawford suggested that Vanderbilt follow a practice similar to that of the University of Chicago in which a plaque is placed at a prominent place on campus in recognition of the person.

Professor Outlaw suggested that Council members meet socially in order to become better acquainted with each other, and he offered to host such a gathering. He asked Council members to consider his offer a standing invitation.

9. **Adjournment**.

Council voted to adjourn at 5:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer M. Fay
Secretary of the Faculty Council