

FACULTY MEETING

February 5, 2010

Comments made by Professor John Brueggemann

A perennial challenge in the life of the College is how to make our governance work – both in a narrow sense of running elections, filling committees and generating legislation; and also in a broad sense of generally making wise decisions that will advance the mission of the College. We believe that our institutionalized system of governance is like the curriculum in that it must be regularly reevaluated and retooled so that new issues of the day are addressed by new generations of stakeholders in appropriate ways.

A quick glance into our history reveals that the Faculty Council, and later its successor Committee on Faculty Governance, have facilitated such reforms every few years for the last seven decades, up through 2004 when CFG became the Faculty Executive Committee. Three years into the era of the new governance system, FEC again began assessing the strength of our policies and practices.

We investigated lots of questions related to governance, both in the narrow and broad sense. This entailed examination of practices at other institutions, a survey of the faculty, and guidance from Susan Walzer about her research on faculty culture. Over a three-year period, we have consulted with Department Chairs and Program Directors, IPPC, several ex-CAPT members, all Chairs of major committees, numerous individual faculty members, the Dean of the Faculty, the Vice President of Academic Affairs, and the current members of CAPT. And we presented a preliminary report here last spring.

It will not surprise you to learn that, like our faculty in general, our findings are complicated. As a faculty, we are collectively ambivalent about service and governance.

We value shared governance, we know there are certain tasks only faculty can carry out, and we are passionately invested in various projects and operations at the College. But we yearn to be less involved, less beholden to the obligations of service and governance.

Many faculty have had frustrating experiences on committees but many have had fulfilling ones.

Many feel that growing pressures related to teaching and scholarship leave little time for committee work.

Some faculty feel working with the administration is difficult, some feel working with other faculty is difficult. And some think working with the administration and working with the faculty are both difficult!

As we tried to look behind all these patterns, we began to identify several problems that we thought we might be able to address, which are outlined in the culminating report from last year's FEC. I will reiterate three of those issues that inform today's actions.

1. We are regularly forced to hold elections for committees with insufficient candidates for a robust process or even just to fill the spots. This includes some that are central to the faculty's work and the mission of the College.

We have thought about formally enhancing the place of committee work in service relative to teaching and research. We also considered formally acknowledging that faculty have voted with their feet and committee work is not as important as it used to be. Both courses of action seemed unworkable, though. Dan will say more about what we do want to propose.

2. An overriding structural constraint has us all spread too thin. As we reported last year, there is now more than one committee spot for every available faculty member.

This problem is actually worse than we explained. The 264 FEC-eligible faculty includes some 69 full-time temporary colleagues, the vast majority of which have different pressures and incentives relative to committee work compared to tenured and tenure track faculty.

3. As significant as this structural issue is, we think the problems are also fundamentally cultural. They involve the values embedded in our decisions about lots of different questions. Whose job is this? When does this need to get done? Does our committee have the expertise it needs to make a good decision? Can we entrust this work to other stakeholders? Is this work valuable?

The reforms led by CFG in 2003 have improved our system. But we learned after that shift that eliminating certain committees was a mixed bag – as demonstrated by the proliferation of subcommittees and the ongoing concerns expressed by faculty.

We believe the faculty and other stakeholders need to think more seriously about not just formal policy but also informal practices, not just one set of rules versus another, but the different choices we might make within a given set of rules.

I'll conclude by conceding that we do not expect one motion and two resolutions to resolve all the problems we ourselves have identified. In light of incomplete and imperfect information – we, in fact, do not know everything – there will surely be unforeseen challenges if the faculty decides to adopt this legislation. But we think the status quo is untenable and these actions reflect our best effort to move forward.