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Activities of the Senate: 2009-2010

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Activities of the 2009-2010 Senate

Stephen W. McKnight, Secretary

The Secretary of the Faculty Senate is charged by the Faculty Handbook to make a report on the Senate's activities to Northeastern University faculty. Below is a summary of the most important issues considered this past year by the Faculty Senate. Detailed minutes of each Senate meeting and charges and reports of the standing and ad-hoc Senate committees can be found on the Faculty Senate website at: http://www.facultysenate.neu.edu/

At its first meeting on September 23, the Senate received a report on the disposition of resolutions passed by the 2008-2009 Senate. The President has delegated his authority to approve Senate resolutions to the Provost who also serves as the presiding officer of the Faculty Senate. Four sections of the Faculty Handbook approved by the Senate in 2005 (dealing with the preamble sections, performance, and sabbatical and professional leaves) and an amendment on the tenure appeals process passed by the Senate in 2009 were approved by the Provost and the Board of Trustees. The Handbook situation remains unresolved with selected sections of the 2005 Handbook approved by the Board of Trustees and the 2000-2001 Handbook remaining in effect for other sections that remain unapproved. Eleven new degree programs or name changes passed by the 2008-2009 Senate were approved by the Provost and the Board of Trustees. The Provost also approved the policy passed by the Senate allowing for flexibility by the colleges in faculty compensation above the base contract for summer teaching instead of a fixed 1/6 of academic year salary.

Also at the September 23 meeting, the Provost reported on a number of University initiatives being implemented by the administration, including the decentralized "hybrid" financial management system, the four-year/two-Co-op undergraduate option, and the new Office of Research Administration and Finance (RAF) which has replaced the Division of Sponsored Programs Administration (DSPA).

The most significant change in the college structure of the University in decades, the restructuring of the College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Criminal Justice into three new colleges, was considered at the Senate meeting of October 7. After vigorous debate, primarily related to the whether appropriate process was followed in considering the motions passed by the College of Arts and Sciences Assembly calling for a vote on the plan by Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences, the restructuring proposal with additional resolutions on faculty input in the implementation of the plan was passed 30 for, 3 against, with no abstentions. Searches for the deans of the three new colleges – the College of Science, the College of Social Sciences and Humanities, and the College of Art, Media and Design – were initiated promptly with search committees selected collaboratively by the Provost and the Senate Agenda Committee.

Resolutions to implement significant changes to the administrator evaluation process as recommended by the 2008-2009 Ad hoc Administer Evaluation Reform Committee (AERC) were considered in October, modified, and reconsidered and passed at the Senate meeting on December 2. The change from the previous process, as recommended by the AERC, was that the evaluation of academic administrators (chairs, program heads, and deans) is to be initiated and directed by the Provost or Provost's designee no later than the third year of their initial term and no less frequently than every fifth year thereafter. In conjunction with the Provost's evaluation, a 2- or 3-person faculty committee selected by the Administrator Evaluation Oversight Committee (AEOC) will survey the faculty of the unit and prepare a report on "the administrator's leadership in matters of concern to the faculty." The AEOC-organized report will become part of the evaluation prepared by the Provost or Provost's designee. Only the AEOC-organized report will be available for inspection by faculty within the administrator's unit in the Faculty Senate Office. The Senate Agenda Committee would reserve the discretion to ask the AEOC to evaluate academic or nonacademic administrators independent of any Provost-organized evaluation, and the Provost will be evaluated on three-year cycles under the oversight of the AEOC. The new Administrator Evaluation Process is on the web at:

http://www.facultysenate.neu.edu/about_faculty/documents/documents/AEOCAdministrator_ _Evals_Procedure_2009_rev.pdf

In December the Senate considered a resolution from the Financial Affairs Committee regarding the "targeted raises" that had been implemented outside of the usual merit and equity processes during the 2009-2010 academic year. The resolution in its entirety read:

WHEREAS the academic units have long-standing merit and equity processes that are overseen by the deans and the Provost's Office and that reward faculty differentially based on performance.

BE IT RESOLVED that the processes for the distribution of merit and equity outlined in the University Faculty Handbook be followed until such time as an evaluation of the merits and faults can be undertaken by the faculty and administration and a new process agreed to.

The resolution was debated at length and passed without amendment by 31 in favor, 0 opposed, and 0 abstentions. The Financial Affairs Committee recommendations that a merit raise pool of 3% and an additional 1% for equity adjustments be established for faculty in the FY2011 budget and that the University update the Faculty Matchmate Salary Study were also approved.

In the March 17 meeting, the Senate considered modifications of the Faculty Handbook language on tenure proposed by the Provost's Office to obviate the need to collect annual signed contracts from tenured faculty members. Considerable concern was expressed about a change in fundamental language related to tenure with uncertain ramifications on the rights of faculty.

In the debate, it was pointed out that the Board of Trustees-approved Handbook section that was being proposed for amendment had been modified from the draft new Handbook approved by the Senate in 2005. In the section on tenure, the draft new Handbook quotes directly from the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) 1940 Statement on Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure, a foundational document in the concept of tenure at American universities. The AAUP statement says "Tenure is a means to certain ends; specifically: (1) freedom of teaching and research and of extramural

activities, and (2) a sufficient degree of economic security to make the profession attractive to men and women of ability. Freedom and economic security, hence, tenure, are indispensable to the success of an institution in fulfilling its obligations to its students and to society." The points (1) and (2) were contained in nearly the same words in the 2005 draft Handbook approved by the Faculty Senate. The BOT-approved document, however, contains (1) but has no mention of "economic security." Steve Morrison, the chair of SAC, explained at the March 31 Faculty Senate meeting:

"...the proposed Handbook section on tenure included language on economic security which is not explicitly included in the current 2000-01 Handbook. The Provost stated that he could not recommend Board of Trustees approval with that language. Accordingly, last year's SAC agreed to delete that language from the proposed FHB section on tenure and it was approved by the Board last May. It is that section that has been in debate. As noted, the 2000-01 Handbook does not contain language on "economic security" but does state that the University subscribes to the 1940 AAUP statement and then lists essential features of that statement while omitting any explicit reference to the concept of economic [security]."

With the discrepancy between the Senate-passed and the Board of Trustees-approved Handbook on the issue of "economic security" and the uncertainty about the implications to tenure of the proposed change, it was moved to remand the motion to the Senate Agenda Committee for further consideration and review by an employment specialist attorney. The motion to remand to SAC failed 16-17-2 with the Provost, as Chair of the Faculty Senate, voting to break a tie. With the meeting time nearly over, however, the Senate voted to adjourn without voting on the motion. At the meeting of March 31 Vice Provost Loeffelholz, the original mover of the motion on modifying the Handbook language on tenure, moved to withdraw the motion. The motion to withdraw passed with 21 in favor, 9 opposed, with 4 abstentions.

Question Time at the meeting of March 31 was dominated by discussion of the just-issued memorandum from Human Resources reducing the maximum compensation for summer salary from 40% to 33% of academic year salary. In questions from the floor, faculty pointed out that this changed the long-standing agreement that faculty could charge up to 3.2 months of summer salary to research contracts. The Provost stated that the HRM memo was a result of a miscommunication and that a new memorandum will be issued where current faculty will remain on eight-month appointments while new faculty will be hired on nine-month appointments, which are more standard at universities nationwide.

Senators and faculty members recognized from the floor strongly objected to this change, both on substantive and procedural grounds. Substantively, it was that pointed out that, on the Northeastern Co-op calendar, a faculty member could be under contract for summer teaching simultaneously with one month of his or her new nine-month contract. The reduction in summer salary from 3.2 to 3 months imposed a financial penalty on the most active research faculty members. The suggestion of a tiered system with nine-month contracts for new faculty and eight-month contracts for continuing faculty was regarded as problematic. Procedurally, the change of such a fundamental condition of employment with no discussion, input, or feedback from the Faculty Senate or any of its committees was regarded as inappropriate and contrary to any notion of shared governance.

The Provost indicated that the issue had been discussed at several Deans' Meetings, that alignment with aspirational institutions is necessary, and that many current faculty have refused to attend graduation because it falls outside their eight-month commitment with the University. Senators asked why this change was not discussed by the Senate Research Policy Oversight Committee or other Senate committees. In response to a question, Professor. Morrison, the Chair of the Senate Agenda Committee indicated that SAC had only become aware of the policy change the previous day and had called some of the issues to the attention of the Provost who instructed HRM to issue the new memorandum. Senators expressed that it is imperative to include the Senate in policy decisions that affect faculty because the administration may not perceive all the implications.

Following the March 31 Senate meeting, SAC reviewed a semester conversion resolution passed by the Senate on April 22, 2002, and approved by the Board of Trustees, defining the academic year as running from one week before fall classes begin until the end of spring commencement. This resolution was called to the attention of the Provost, who instructed HRM to withdraw the nine-month contract policy.

At the next Senate meeting of April 21, Professor Morrison announced that SAC was forming an ad hoc committee to review the existing 2000-2001 and 2005 draft Faculty Handbooks to: 1) determine which sections of each are currently in effect, 2) engage in discussions with the administration about impediments to implementation of the full 2005 draft Handbook, 3) survey Handbook resolutions passed by the Senate and approved by the Board of Trustees that have not been incorporated in any Handbook draft, 4) review the deletion of the language on the "economic security" purposes of tenure, and 5) study and propose mutually acceptable language on tenure that would allow the University to dispense with the collection of annual contracts from faculty with tenure.

Also at the April 21 meeting, Professor Karma invoked a rarely-used provision of the Faculty Senate Bylaws to move the addition of a new item to the agenda of the next Senate meeting: a resolution for reinstatement of the AAUP "economic security" language in the definition of tenure in the Faculty Handbook. The addition of this item of business to the agenda of the April 28 Senate meeting was approved by the Senate with 34 in favor, 0 opposed, and 0 abstentions.

At the beginning of the April 28 meeting, Professor Morrison explained to the Senate that SAC agreed to remove the "economic security" language in the 2005 Draft Faculty Handbook at the April 28, 2009, SAC meeting at which eight members were present, that is, both the 2008-09 and the 2009-10 SAC members. At the time, no member viewed it as a significant change although SAC has subsequently realized it had erred. On behalf of all eight SAC members, Professor Morrison apologized to the Senate for agreeing to the change without bringing the matter to the full Senate.

Professor Karma introduced his motion by distributing the definition of tenure from the University of Southern California faculty handbook which explicitly includes the AAUP language on economic security. Professor Karma reported that he had found the AAUP statement on tenure with both purposes of tenure quoted in faculty handbooks at many universities; he was unable to find a single handbook that quoted the first point (academic freedom) without the second (economic security). Members of the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 Senate Agenda Committees indicated that they were unaware that the language being changed was from the 1940 AAUP statement, and that it was not SAC's impression at the time that the proposed language was to be submitted to the Board of Trustees for

approval. It was pointed out that the AAUP language on economic security is a joint standard with AACU (Association of American Colleges & Universities) and has been approved by both bodies on many occasions. Professor Karma's motion with AACU added to AAUP was passed unanimously with 34 in favor, 0 opposed, and 0 abstentions.

The 2009-2010 Faculty Senate approved six new or modified degree programs, approved the elimination of the summer Monday Activities Hour, and adopted revised GPA requirements for cum laude, summa cum laude, and magma cum laude honors. The Senate Agenda Committee staffed six dean and chair search committees, and the Senate heard reports from President Joseph Aoun on the state of the University, from Provost Stephen Director on the implementation of the academic plan, from Provost Director and Vice President for Administration and Finance Jack McCarthy on the financial state of the University, from Vice President for Enrollment Philomena Mantella on the status and trends in enrollment and admissions, from Director of Athletics Peter Roby on the status of the athletic program and the decision to discontinue the football program, from Vice Provost Susan Powers-Lee on Insights from the National Survey of Student Engagement, and from Professor Sara Wadia-Fascetti on the ADVANCE grant.

The Senate Agenda Committee for 2010-2011 was elected at a special meeting of the new Senate on April 28. The Chair for 2010-2011 will be Professor Louis Kruger, the Secretary will be Professor Stephen McKnight, and the other members of SAC will be Professor Sharon Bruns, Professor George Adams, Professor James Fox, and Professor John Portz.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen McKnight Secretary of the Faculty Senate