

FACULTY COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT, 2009-2010

Members: Don Baumer, John Brady, Patricia DiBartolo (Chair), Howard Gold, and Michael Thurston

Work for the 2009-2010 Faculty Council began last summer when three of our members (John Brady, Howard Gold, and Patty DiBartolo) participated in Provost Schuster's working group, charged with fostering curricular innovation based on the college's strategic plan as well as the Arts & Sciences recommendations. In order to engage faculty in conversation about initiatives emerging from this work, Council redeployed its traditional Leadership Seminars to create a new series centered on curricular innovation. Two such 'Curriculum in Context' seminars, held in the fall, were co-sponsored by Council, the Provost's office, and the Sherrerd Center for Teaching and Learning.

BUDGET REDUCTION IMPLEMENTATION

Throughout the academic year, Council members served as representatives to the major planning committees on campus with Don Baumer serving on CAP, Howard Gold on CFCD, John Brady and Michael Thurston on CMP, and all Councilors serving on ACRA. In order to foster full communication between Council and important campus planning groups on issues related to implementing the budget reduction plan, Council hosted luncheons for faculty on elected committees in the fall and for faculty members on CAP in the spring. Council also communicated regularly with the elected Coordinating Chair of this year's Chairs and Directors and hosted a series of open lunch meetings for all faculty in order to gather broad feedback on the important issues facing the college.

Despite some positive fiscal news this year (e.g., the proposed faculty salary freeze for 2010-2011 was not implemented), there were a number of areas in which the college had to continue the difficult process of implementing the budget reduction strategies outlined in the spring 2009 plan. In each instance, Council worked hard to advocate for faculty concerns and provide its best advice about how to achieve savings without undercutting our morale or excellence. Throughout the year, we shared our perspectives with relevant planning committees and the college's administration as well as the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees, with whom we met during their campus visits. For example, Council voiced a number of faculty concerns related to benefits cuts, including tuition benefits and the elimination of the couples' health insurance subsidy. Council advocated strongly for reconsideration of the additional reductions to college tuition benefits and employee subsidies for pre-school and elementary school education announced by the President this year, arguing against the timing of the planned reductions as well as the data used to support it. Although the President decided to reinstate the full tuition subsidy for the Center for Early Childhood Education and agreed to reconsider the tuition structure for the Smith College Campus School, we remain concerned about the potential long-term negative impact of the benefit reductions announced this year on faculty morale because such reductions will result in a system of unequal benefits that particularly disadvantages our junior faculty.

Council also provided its best advice to CAP and the Provost about their process for identifying where faculty cuts would occur. As is often Council's role, we championed the position that this process should be transparent and participatory, with multiple opportunities for faculty feedback. CAP's diligent work led to a set of recommendations for the cuts that were supported by the Provost and approved by the President. Successful implementation of this plan, however, requires attention to a number of crucial issues, including policies surrounding course releases, course enrollments, and faculty workload as well as lingering concerns regarding whether the plan clearly articulates an overarching vision for the college's curricular plan.

Council devoted significant attention this year to a study of the plethora of considerations that face faculty members as they face retirement. We proposed that instituting a multifaceted retirement plan might help even out the ranks of our professoriate while benefiting senior faculty who are contemplating making the transition to retirement. The full report summarizing our findings and recommendations is available at our website (<http://www.smith.edu/facultycouncil/> with username: council and password: faculty). Our

FACULTY COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT, 2009-2010

report endorsed the implementation of a phased retirement plan and we provided feedback to the Provost about her new plan, now available to senior faculty members interested in setting a date certain for retirement. In order to help improve advocacy for and communication with emeriti, Council secured the approval of the faculty to create a permanent Emeriti Advisory Committee and we are working with the Provost to designate a point person at Human Resources for questions regarding retiree health insurance options. Within the context of CMP's space planning, we also advocated to protect space for emeriti labs and offices. Next year's Council will continue to push for attention to the additional recommendations outlined in the report.

FACULTY GOVERNANCE AND ELECTIONS

Council took up a number of items related to our responsibility for overseeing faculty governance and elections. We shepherded through Faculty Code amendment votes that changed the membership for the College Council on Community Policy (CCCP) and created a new Emeriti Advisory Committee. Over the course of the year, we provided advice to the President and Provost about faculty appointments to 3 search committees and over 10 new or ad hoc appointed committees. Council also recruited 5 replacements for standing committees with vacancies (e.g., due to sabbatical leaves).

Council oversaw the fall elections of the alternate to the Committee on Tenure and Promotion. At a meeting of Chairs and Directors, Council also oversaw the election of the Coordinating Chair who served as the faculty liaison between that group and the Provost. As always, Council oversaw spring elections, continuing our work to create a fully paperless system for faculty elections. This year, ballot tallies, nomination forms, election correspondence, and announcements of committee openings were paperless. Joe O'Rourke automated the Hare tallying system this spring and plans to institute on-line voting for our elections next year in his continuing role as Chair of the Ballot Committee.

Council continued its work to increase our own transparency and improve the ways in which we expect faculty to contribute to the governance of the college. We again made all our meeting agendas and minutes as well as important memos and reports available at our website. We also worked this year with the President and Provost to improve the format of our faculty meetings (e.g., timed slots for each item; issuing our report in written form in advance of the meeting) and to craft monthly agendas that ensured greater opportunity for faculty dialogue.

Lastly, Council participated in the fall and spring planning retreats for major planning committees and senior staff as well as sent a representative (John Brady) to the annual Seven Sisters' meeting.

LOOKING AHEAD

As a faculty, we need to consider how to, among other things, protect the integrity of the curriculum, make interdisciplinary hires across departments and programs, and foster collaborations both within the college and across the Five Colleges that will help to strengthen our curriculum while protecting our unique strengths and identities. One of Council's agenda items for next year is to examine how best to deploy our resources toward faculty governance. For example, there were a significant number of ad hoc committees appointed this year, each charged with an important area of strategic planning (e.g., educational technology, the Ada Comstock program, Five College collaboration). We believe that this practice needs some thought, especially at a time when we are shrinking the size of our faculty and simultaneously increasing the number of appointed committee slots required at the college (e.g., the new advisory committees for the four centers).

Next year's Faculty Council will be co-chaired by Don Baumer and Howard Gold. Don will also serve as Council's representative to CAP. Michael Thurston continues his term as a Councilor and will serve on CFCD. Alex Keller and James Lowenthal are new to Council and will serve on CMP.