GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY
MINUTES OF THE FACULTY SENATE MEETING
February 8, 2023
Electronic Meeting, 3:00-4:15 p.m.

Number of attendees: 130 (List of names)

I. Call to Order: Chair Melissa Broeckelman-Post (MBP) called the meeting to order at 3:00pm.

II. Opening Remarks

• Minutes from the January 25, 2023 meeting will be reviewed along with the minutes from this meeting at the next Senate meeting on March 1.
• The General Faculty Meeting, called by President Washington, will be held on February 22. It will be in-person and on Zoom—please attend in person if possible. The meeting will feature a panel on ChatGPT and AI with 5 faculty experts and opportunity for discussion.

III. Special Orders

• Rector Blackman addressed the Faculty Senate
  o Excited to join the Senate meeting again—enjoyed the vigorous discussion last time and looks forward to questions again today.
  o Where are we this year?
    ▪ Major initiatives rolling out around modernizing the campus, new investments such as Mason Square (Arlington Campus)
    ▪ Enrollments and graduations are all high—had our largest enrolling class
    ▪ Five new deans hired, feedback has been positive
    ▪ Breaking news: President Washington has been elected to National Academy of Engineering—first faculty member of Mason to receive this honor, in his role as a professor. Would love to see more faculty elected to their fields’ National Academies.
  o Questions
    ▪ Congratulations to President Washington—not an easy accomplishment. I am concerned about the New College deal in Florida. How worried should we be about something like that happening here?
      ▪ I have not heard anything about this from our administration and I think it would be an infringement on faculty's ability to do their job.
      ▪ Our successes are based on the work faculty has been doing and I don't see anything broken in the way you do your job that needs to be changed. Mason has been incredibly
fortunate to have the kind of faculty we do—you are the backbone of the university. We have Nobel Prize winners. I look forward to having more accomplishments like this.

- I have no plans as part of what the Board is doing to introduce any measures that would adversely impact what faculty are doing.

- Not sure if you’re the right person to ask, but is there any plan to build graduate student dorms on the Fairfax campus? We have had lots of inquiries about this.
  - This is an interesting and timely question. I can’t give a full answer because there are some plans afoot but I can’t talk about them yet—they are in the very early stages.
  - Housing in general (for undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty) is being discussed and you’re going to hear more about this over the next 6 months or so.
  - There are active, serious preliminary plans related to the Campus Master Plan over the next 10 years that would significantly expand housing stock and infrastructure, but I can’t give specific timing yet.

- A recent report from Stanford University claimed that a chat bot “attended” a business school class and got a B. Could courses be taught by ChatGPT? What are your views on this?
  - In my professional role I have been thinking about this a lot, and my profession has a meeting on Friday about it. There’s also a report of ChatGPT passing the bar exam. It also writes (terrible!) code.
  - These cases do show that next-gen AI is doing some interesting things, but these are still one-off cases. We’re nowhere close to having a real discussion about it teaching a class. It can’t even write code for basic .NET/HTML yet.
  - Is it possible? I think there is still a long way to go until it can even replace someone who’s still learning to write code, let alone teaching a class.

- MBP: Thank you for all the Board is doing and your advocacy in Richmond.

IV. Committee Reports

Senate Standing Committees
- Executive Committee – no report.
- Academic Policies
  - Academic calendar change
    - As discussed in the last Senate meeting, the dates for AY 2023-24 had to be modified to start on the third Monday of August rather than the
fourth to ensure staff and 12-month faculty get a 2-week break between the Fall and Spring semesters.

- A new rule is proposed that will govern the calendar going forward:
  - First day of Fall classes will be the fourth Monday of August unless August 1 falls on a Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday. If that is the case, the first day of class will be the third Monday of August.
  - The Spring calendar will also be adjusted so that when the Fall semester starts earlier, Spring classes in the same calendar year will begin on the Tuesday after Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.

- The Academic Policies committee moves to adopt this updated rule to govern the calendar going forward [no second needed—from committee].
  - Discussion
    - Clarification: so will the first day of Fall always be roughly between August 21 and 25?
      - Doug McKenna (Registrar): The earliest start date would be August 19 (in 2024).
  - Motion unanimously passed by acclamation.

- Budget and Resources
  - Delton Daigle will be the new co-chair of this committee. Thanks to him for stepping in.

- Faculty Matters
  - Update on university-level surveys
    - The Faculty Evaluation of Administrators survey should be released around April and will now be combined with the Gallup Quality of Life (Q12) survey.
    - This change in the survey administration takes the faculty out of the position of being referees of the data, so the results are hopefully more trustworthy and useful to the administration.
    - We are hoping for a high response rate and will keep making announcements about it to raise awareness.
    - This survey is also intended to complement the COACHE data. This is summative; COACHE is formative.
    - It also speaks to the staff experience, which gives us another useful dimension.
  - Report of the Faculty Evaluation Working Group
    - This report, which will be discussed later in the meeting, is a key issue for the Faculty Matters committee
    - We believe that faculty committees should be intermediaries between the chair and dean in this process, which is not currently in the recommendations of the working group. Some departments in CHSS do this and it seems to work well.
We are not bringing a motion about this, just sharing the views of the Faculty Matters committee. We have some concerns about the department chair being the sole evaluator of faculty members.

- Response from Kim Eby (KE) for the Working Group
  - We've spent a lot of time thinking about this issue—each school and college had a representative on the working group.
  - Ultimately the report suggests each LAU goes back and looks at its own procedures. Schools and colleges across the institution are organized very differently—we need to consider the bylaws and standing rules of each unit. Sometimes what works well in one college can't be implemented as easily in another college.

- Response from Solon Simmons (SS) for the committee: Not all departments even have bylaws, and every time the chair changes the process changes. Some faculty say they never hear feedback from the chair. What is the recourse for them? It would be a bold move to take it to the grievance committee. It would be easier if there were some kind of governance from the Faculty Handbook on this issue.

- Questions
  - An issue was brought to the Faculty Matters committee last year about how chair renewal is covered in the Faculty Handbook—what has been done about that?
    - SS: It has not been a centerpiece of our conversation, except around how chairs are evaluated. There is some promise in our relationship with Gallup in that we may learn more about chair engagement and burnout and could bring this to the conversation, although it won't be as robust as the information we have about deans, provost, president etc.
    - The challenge is that the survey gets longer and response rates fall. Professional organizations like Gallup set limits on survey length and we are already beyond what they recommend.
    - Our committee agenda is very stacked (as is the Faculty Handbook Committee's) but this is important. If you can imagine specific changes to the Handbook language you could bring it to that committee.

- Nominations
  - We have reached out to colleges and schools to get the nomination process going for the Grading Task Force. We anticipate hearing back soon and constituting the group later in the semester.
  - We are starting preparations for Senate and University standing committees for late spring/summer elections.

- Organization and Operations
Second reading of the revised Bylaws

- There has been discussion within the Executive Committee about some of the changes proposed in the previous meeting, so we may need to do one more reading of these if more changes are added.
- Summary of additional changes (marked-up copy available online)
  - It was brought to our attention that “President” of the Senate is more appropriate than “Chair” per Robert’s Rules.
  - We changed “schools and colleges” to “independent academic units” to align with recent updates to the university Charter.
  - We propose that for in-person meetings, those who are not voting shall sit in a delineated area, and for online meetings the President and Sergeants-at-Arms will determine the means of participating.
  - Question: Did we consider whether to delete the term “voice vote” so that we could also use reaction buttons etc.?
    ✓ Doug Eyman (DE) for the committee: We interpreted “voice vote” as the opposite of a secret ballot. It could be audible or visual.
    ✓ Should we include a definition of “voice vote”?
  - Question: Is there still a mechanism to request a secret ballot if the voice vote is inconclusive?
    ✓ Yes. This is covered in a different section.
  - Question: Do we have a way to exclude non-voting members on Zoom now?
    ✓ No.
  - Keith Renshaw: A voice vote is a specific call for the “ayes” and “nays.” The question is whether we have a secret ballot vs. a public vote. We could just change “voice vote” to “vote,” which would still allow for things like a show of hands, voice vote, etc. as long as we still allow for a secret ballot should be called. Just saying “vote” everywhere else should give us flexibility.
    Propose a motion to strike the word “voice” if it precedes “vote” and make any necessary grammatical corrections.
    ✓ Discussion on the motion
    - In Article IV.7.a removing the word “voice” could create issues—we don’t want to take away the possibility of having a quick vote by acclamation.
      Motion to amend the amendment to account for language in Article IV.7.a.
Discussion on the amended motion

- If we just change this article to “voting upon a call for the ayes and nays” that allows for audible, visual, etc and preserves the ability to call for a secret ballot.
- Do we need to specify that it should be by any public method?
- Could we just add a footnote that “vote” refers to any public method of voting, to include digital voting?

The motion to amend the amendment to account for Article IV.7.a carried.

Further discussion on the original motion

- This should go back to the committee—we are in a period of technological change and don’t have enough information to decide on how to vote on non-controversial issues.
- The motion to amend “voice vote” carried (non-unanimous voice vote).
- Zachary Schrag: motion to refer this back to committee to research what tools are available to us.

- Motion seconded and carried.

Lisa Billingham: We will bring all revisions back to the Senate next time. Thank you for the vibrant conversation.

Next time we may also be proposing a new committee from the Task Force on Reimagining Faculty Roles and Rewards.

Question to current and past Senate chairs: Would you prefer the term “President” or “Chair”?

- MBP: No preference, but Robert’s Rules clearly recommends the term “president” for someone who runs a body all the time, whereas “chair” refers to a temporary position i.e. the person currently running a meeting.
Note: During the following discussion a motion was approved to extend the meeting by 15 minutes to 4:30pm.

Other Committees/Faculty Representatives

- Faculty Annual Evaluation Workgroup (Kim Eby & Lisa Billingham, co-chairs)
  - Final report of the Workgroup is now available
  - Background
    ▪ The Workgroup was charged by MBP and the Provost and had representation from all schools and colleges.
    ▪ We are a maturing institution and our organizational structures continue to evolve. Sometimes our processes and governing structures haven’t kept pace, and we hear the earlier comments and questions about this. The goal of the work group was to propose practices and policies that provide the kind of feedback faculty want in a less haphazard way. The examples shared earlier highlights the need for this work.
    ▪ We were guided by our values—consistent, equitable, transparent, fair. Important to have confidence in tying merit increases to annual evaluations, as well as maintaining flexibility at the LAU level.
  - Process
    ▪ We operated on a very accelerated timeframe. We were charged in September, identified members by the end of September, and met weekly starting in early October to get the work done by the December 15 deadline.
    ▪ The work was supported by two project managers from the Provost’s Office.
    ▪ We thank Provost Ginsberg and MBP for advocating for representation from all colleges and schools, because what works in one place doesn’t necessarily work in others.
    ▪ We were charged with conducting both an internal and external review. There are two tables in the appendix of the report that shows what we found across different schools, colleges, and institutions. We used these to come up with our key findings and recommendations.
      - The external review was based on querying a listserv of others in vice-provost type roles, both in Virginia and elsewhere. We asked about how they provide feedback, use performance-based processes, and ensure transparency.
  - Findings [see report and attached presentation for full list]
    ▪ Our recommendations for annual evaluation practices are divided into the following categories:
      ▪ Required: best practices deemed necessary for strengthening our processes
      ▪ Recommended: items to review and strongly consider for broad implementation to enhance outcomes.
• Further exploration: Interesting ideas to think about, but that may not work across all units.

- Required practices
  - All faculty receive an annual evaluation, with the details of the process to be determined by the LAU
  - No fewer than 3 categories of evaluation, including unsatisfactory (which is already part of the Faculty Handbook language)
  - LAUs must establish written procedures and criteria, developed with faculty input and approved by the LAU faculty
  - Faculty should be evaluated on the work they are actually asked to do. Procedures should include rubrics, percentages, assignments etc. so that faculty understand how they are being evaluated.
  - Evaluations must include a faculty self-assessment and a written response provided by the evaluator as specified by LAU bylaws
  - Written LAU guidance must clarify what constitutes performance at various levels
  - Faculty Handbook should clarify the role of the annual evaluation in RPT process, namely that a favorable rating in the annual evaluation doesn’t guarantee tenure
  - LAU should provide detailed guidance on the roles of participants and evaluators
  - Administrative work and leadership roles must be accounted for. We spent a long time discussing this, because some people are struggling to achieve full professor rank because they are serving in program director roles, etc.
  - Student evaluations shouldn’t be used as the sole basis for evaluation of teaching. They can form part of a comprehensive set of evidence to determine teaching effectiveness, in line with the Faculty Handbook.

- Recommended practices
  - We note that the committee spent several weeks debating what should be required vs. recommended
  - The Provost’s Office, as well as the school/college and LAU leadership, should provide additional guidance for evaluators and mentors, e.g. training, resources, development of annual evaluation processes
  - Consider using annual feedback process for career development and performance management
  - Mentoring support should be implemented broadly

- Processes for dissemination
• LAUs should review required and recommended practices and write a summary of how local practices will align with them
• Summaries should be submitted to and reviewed by the Dean, and forwarded to the Provost by the end of Spring 2023

- Potential impacts for Faculty Handbook Committee
  • Proposed change in timing of annual evaluation cycle—spring instead of fall
  • Inclusion of required self-assessment
  • Inclusion of no fewer than 3 categories of evaluation
  • Expansion to review all job components that are part of the assigned workload, not just research and scholarship
  • New language explaining the distinct functions of the annual evaluation and RPT processes

- Discussion
  • A number of chairs and directors have concerns about how to count administration and leadership vs. service, and the change in timing
    • Moving the evaluation to spring doesn’t match faculty work cycles and creates issues for evaluating new faculty who start in the fall. It doesn’t align with the RPT cycle.
    • In the past it has worked well to just tie merit raises to the most recent annual evaluation, even if it is a little old by then. There’s no perfect system, but most people I’m hearing from would prefer to keep the cycle as it is.
  • The rolling cycle is challenging during years when there are no raises—the Faculty Matters committee has discussed this. Another issue is the distinction between service, administration, and leadership—e.g. an associate chair is an administrative role, but someone serving as a Senate committee chair is doing work at a similar level but this is often not evaluated.
  • Also echo concerns about changing the timeline. Nothing in the recommended or required practices speaks to this issue. It seems to be a separate issue and we should vote on it separately.
    • MBP: Clarification—we won’t actually vote on any of this until the Faculty Handbook committee brings back proposed changes.
  • I have also heard pushback on all of these issues. Another concern is around the self-assessment. It is in place in some colleges, but we don’t have a lot of information about how well it is working or how much time it takes. People see it as yet another task they have to complete and don’t know how much time they would need to spend on it.
  • Also echo concerns about the self-assessment. It sounds good in theory but can be a big burden, especially if it is not clear what is expected. People are already putting in long hours trying to give their
best, but if they don’t know what that looks like in terms of self-assessment the more diligent people might do more work than they need to to get a better evaluation.

- Question about categories for evaluation—the requirement is for 3, but one has to be unsatisfactory. Do these pertain to types of work (e.g. research, teaching, service) or is it a rating level?
  - Response from KE for the work group: It refers to the performance evaluation itself. The Faculty Handbook language is “satisfactory” or “unsatisfactory.” To more transparently tie it to merit raises we need some way to distinguish satisfactory from “high-performing,” “exemplary” etc.

- The Teaching Excellence Committee is in favor of the self-evaluations. They are not too burdensome if you work on them throughout the year with guidance. Do we want to explicitly say in the report that fairness will be applied across types of faculty, e.g. term, tenure-track, research etc? There is an issue of consistency—the “required” category is a good start to help us get there, but perhaps more can be done.

- I’m curious about the emphasis on detaching the evaluation process from the RPT process. Can the committee given background on that conversation? Is a goal to preserve the possibility of the “blindside” of tenure denial?
  - Response from KE for the work group: This was a fascinating and animated conversation, and our law school colleagues provided a lot of insight. It was partly centered around the fact that an annual evaluation describes the activities engaged in across different types of work, but what’s being evaluated in the RPT process is the impact of that work—the scientific merit of the contributions and how it impacts the discipline or field of study. Because those two review practices happen for different reasons—acknowledgment of the work vs. impact of the work—we made that distinction.
  - When faculty evaluate each other in the RPT process we look at it in very different ways. E.g. in the arts, there’s a big difference between “they had 3 new films premiere” vs. “this film told the story in a new way or made a big impact.”
  - But we do want to ensure that the language of both processes are aligned as much as possible.

- I didn’t see any reference to research in the slides (in terms of the categories of “research/teaching/service”)
  - Response from KE for the work group: We did mention the categories in the report but also wanted to acknowledge that different schools have different definitions.
  - What we learned is that some units only look at research. The annual evaluation needs to be inclusive of
research/scholarship/creative work, but we also want to ensure it includes teaching and service too.

- I would like some guidance on the timing issue. The main issue is to evaluate faculty on the work they’ve actually done, and if you do work over the summer you won’t get evaluated for that on this cycle. Doesn’t it make sense to evaluate people at the end of the school year?
  - Response: There is a desire to have the I/R faculty cycle match the A/P and staff cycles.
  - Some people are supportive of changing it because it divorces the workloads of RPT and other cycles. Right now it all happens at the same time and the workload is extensive.
  - Provost Ginsberg: We are trying to pair evaluations with salary increases. You may have seen that the House and Senate have approved average 7% raises for state employees, and some of that is merit-based. Another issue is that under the previous system people were having to prepare their evaluations while off-contract. This would change the process so that we could do that while on-contract.
    - MBP: A related motivation was the workload of the peer evaluation committees in departments that do that. Those committees were not only doing their own evaluations off-contract but reviewing others as well.

- Are there any thoughts on implementation? In my case I’m asked to provide a list of courses, grants, amount of money etc., but this information must already be in a system somewhere. It would be helpful for us to not have to repeat this information that our administrators already have access to. Is there any software that could be used to simplify the process?
  - KE for the work group: We have adopted Interfolio for RPT and have also contracted with them for an online system that does exactly this. We will be starting to work on implementation of that system over the course of the next calendar year—more to come. Our goal at the end of this cycle is to do exactly what you described.

- In large departments, doing evaluations over the summer is the only way to get this work done, otherwise it spills into semester time (especially when term faculty are evaluating other term faculty and also teaching 4 classes). Another complication is evaluating people who change roles between academic years, e.g. promotion from assistant to associate.
  - KE for the work group: We’ll be in a better place if we actually have metrics to evaluate people at different ranks.
V. **Announcements**

- The first day of the Fall 2023 semester will be August 21.
- Senate lunches and discussion (open to the entire Mason Community) in the Mason Club at 12pm on February 6, March 2, and April 10.
- General Faculty Meeting: February 22, 2023 in Merten 1204 and via Zoom.

VI. **Remarks for the Good of the General Faculty**: None.

VII. **Adjournment**: The meeting was adjourned at 4:34pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Charlotte Gill
Faculty Senate Secretary
APPENDIX A
OTHER COMMITTEES

Faculty Annual Evaluation Workgroup

Presentation on Final Report

FAE Work Group

Charge

• Review current Mason and national best practices for FAE guidelines
• Propose guidance for practices and policies that include summative evaluation and formative feedback
• Propose a process for disseminating annual review guidance
• Draft associated language changes for the Faculty Handbook

Rationale

• Concerns surrounding varying practices within the Mason Local Academic Units (LAUs) for FAEs
• Desire for consistent, transparent, fair and equitable process across all LAUs
• Ability to confidently tie evaluations to merit salary increases
Our Aim

Provide high-level guidance that creates greater consistency, transparency, and equity across Mason, while maintaining flexibility on the details and criteria at the local level.

Work Group Findings

Key Takeaways from Internal Review

- Several LAUs use a detailed quantitative approach to summative ratings, while other LAUs use a qualitative process involving a summary of accomplishments.
- Many LAUs have adopted evaluation categories beyond the baseline “satisfactory” and “unsatisfactory” required by the Faculty Handbook.
- Several LAUs employ faculty self-assessments or reflections in their processes, although the criteria and guidance vary.
- Few LAUs address formative evaluation practices in their documentation.
- Stated dependence on student evaluations for teaching assessment varies across LAUs.
Work Group Review

Examples External to Mason

• Consulted with colleagues at peer institutions, reviewed publicly available documentation, and interviewed colleagues engaged in similar work.
• Included seven institutions:
  - Cornell University, James Madison University, Loyola University of Chicago, Texas A&M University, University of Kentucky, University of North Carolina, Virginia Tech
• Considered their approaches to transparency and formative evaluation practices, as well as how they employed a performance-based process.

Required Practices
Deemed necessary, as these best practices will aid those LAUs needing to strengthen their current processes.

Recommended Practices
Suggest these practices be reviewed and strongly considered by Mason leadership and LAUs for broad implementation in order to enhance outcomes.

Practices for Further Exploration
Encourage additional discussion and exploration as conversations about faculty annual evaluation continue.
Required Practices

- All faculty shall receive an annual evaluation each year; the details of this process are determined by the LAU.
- There should be no fewer than three categories of evaluation and the rating of “unsatisfactory” must be included.
- Each LAU must establish written procedures and criteria that are developed with faculty input and approved by the LAU faculty.
- Faculty should be evaluated on the work they are asked to do. Specification of workload rubrics, percentages and/or assignments used for evaluation should be included in written procedures.
- All FAEs must include a faculty self-assessment and a written response provided by the evaluator(s) as specified in the LAU bylaws and/or standing rules.

Required Practices (cont’d)

- Written LAU guidance must clarify what constitutes performance at various levels.
- The Faculty Handbook should clarify the role and purpose of the FAE in the LAU RPT process, including an explicit disclaimer that a favorable rating on the FAE does not indicate success in the RPT process.
- Each LAU should provide detailed guidance on the roles of the participants and evaluators.
- Administrative work and leadership roles must be accounted for in the FAE.
- Student evaluations of teaching should not be used as the sole basis for FAE; rather, student evaluations are part of a comprehensive set of evidence to determine teaching effectiveness.
Recommended Practices

- The Office of the Provost, along with College/School and LAU leadership, should provide additional guidance for evaluators and mentors, including training opportunities and resources.
- The Office of the Provost should provide examples to LAUs for developing their FAE processes.
- LAUs should consider using the annual feedback process for career development and performance management.
- LAUs should consider how they are providing mentoring and support for all faculty. Mentoring support is recommended to be implemented broadly.

Process for Dissemination

Note Proposed Shift to Spring for FAE Cycles

- LAUs should
  - Review the required and recommended practices outlined.
  - Write a brief summary about how their practices will align with the required practices and include a plan to address any current gaps.
  - Review recommended practices and adopt, if applicable.
- LAU administrators should submit their summary to the Dean.
- Deans should review the summary(ies), assure that it/they comply with the required practices, and forward all materials to the Office of the Provost by the end of the spring 2023 semester.
Faculty Handbook Impacts

- Change in the timing of the FAE cycle to be completed in the spring semester.
- Inclusion of a required self-assessment for faculty as part of the FAE.
- Inclusion of no fewer than three categories of annual performance evaluation, keeping the rating of “unsatisfactory.”
- An expansion to review all job components that are a part of a faculty member's assigned workload instead of just research and scholarly activities.
- New language explaining that FAE and RPT processes have distinct functions.

Thank you

Questions and Discussion?

Please see the Faculty Senate website for a full version of the FAE Work Group Final Report.
February 8, 2023

LIST OF ATTENDEES

125 Total Listed Attendees (47 Senators and 78 Visitors)

5 Additional Visitors attended who chose not to be listed


