

## Faculty Matters Committee Annual Progress Report (2020-2021)

Prepared by the Faculty Matters Committee, a Standing Committee of the GMU Faculty Senate: Solon Simmons (Chair), Victoria Grady, Keith Renshaw, Benjamin Steger. Note that Bethany Letiecq was co-chair of the committee in the Fall Term of 2020-2021.

The Faculty Matters Committee of the George Mason University Senate completed the following items:

- 1) Implemented new FEA protocol for Fall 2020 that included extensive thematically coded verbatim qualitative data from the faculty.

It has been a long-standing practice of the Faculty Matters Committee to oversee, implement, and disseminate a survey known as the Faculty Evaluation of Administrators survey (FEA). This form of the survey has varied over the years, but in line with recent practice, the survey asked questions in standard quantitative format coupled with open ended sections to assess the administrator's areas of strength and success, areas for improvement, and any other comments. What made the survey different this year was that the committee not only divided up the task of providing thematic qualitative analysis of the various appropriate deans (administrators are only reviewed if they have been in office for a year, which was not true for President Washington or Provost Ginsberg), but we also presented the data in a richer form, one that captured the flavor of the faculty member's feedback. This was decided because qualitative feedback in the survey is rich, specific, and nuanced, providing essential information needed for informed and more accurate administrative evaluation and, perhaps more importantly, providing administrators the constructive feedback necessary for growth and job performance improvement. The result is a much-improved deliverable that provides deans with both quantitative and qualitative concrete feedback on which they can take immediate action. This is important because it has been a long-standing administrative complaint that while the FEA provided a sense of faculty mood, it suggested nothing concrete about how to improve conditions with the school, college or university. The members of the committee found this new version of the survey results to be a substantial improvement, and recommend that the Faculty Matters Committee continue with this innovation in the future.

### [2020 Faculty Evaluation of Administrators Final Report](#)

- 2) Developed guidelines for addressing faculty evaluation and RPT during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Anyone familiar with the 2020-2021 academic year will be very well aware that it was disrupted by the global pandemic, COVID-19. Early on in the reaction to the pandemic, Provost Ginsberg recommended that we, as a community, think about ways to support faculty in these difficult times, much as we had done with students in considering alternative grading policies and other accommodations. An early proposal was to extend the tenure clock for junior faculty. One obvious problem with this accommodation was that it only affected a

subset of our faculty colleagues, doing little for those faculty who were more senior and on the tenure track series or who were not on the tenure track series at all (the term faculty). Moreover, because the effects of COVID will not be temporary, accommodations for evaluation should apply to annual evaluations and to promotion considerations. Senator Letiecq led the drafting of a document in Fall that the Faculty Matters Committee subsequently refined and introduced to the broader community in Spring. The document was intended to be catalytic on the community, provoking a conversation among department chairs, deans, and the provost office about how to rethink the evaluation of faculty under COVID. In this effort, we had extensive support for the Faculty Affairs and Development staff, in particular, Associate Provost Kim Eby. After several months of deliberation, we produced the final document, "Faculty Evaluation Recommendations during the Novel Coronavirus COVID -19 Pandemic." Prior to being considered by the Faculty Senate, the document was presented to the university-level department chairs meeting and to the dean's council. In both cases, Provost Ginsberg was in attendance as was Associate provost Kim Eby. This document was presented to the Faculty Senate in the March 3 meeting for feedback, and a revised version was approved in the March 31 meeting.

- 3) Worked with CHHS on an analysis of how their proposed workload guidelines fit with the Faculty Handbook, and facilitated discussions with faculty and Dean's Office personnel on addressing possible inconsistencies.

As part of our charge to engage on "the formulation and interpretation of University-wide standards and policies on faculty matters," an ad hoc discussion group was established so that the committee could develop a sense of where challenges were developing in the College of Health and Human Services (CHHS). Senator Renshaw spearheaded this effort and engaged in several discussions with members and leadership of CHHS.

- 4) Collaborated with the Faculty Handbook Committee to shepherd improvements in term faculty contracts across the university.

The academic year 2020-2021 was an important one for the implementation of the recommendations of the Term Faculty Task Force that Provost Wu had charged in 2015. The goal of the task force and the committee that resulted from it was to implement changes in the quality of contracts for term faculty, a large and growing workforce at the university. Because these issues touch so centrally on faculty matters, Senator Simmons, co-chair and chair of the Faculty Matters Committee, was elected to serve on the Handbook Committee this year. Faculty Matters members provided a useful sounding board for proposed changes and useful feedback on what changes committee members considered to be in the interests of the faculty as a whole.

- 5) Provided advice and support to the COACHE leadership team

Among the most salient initiatives undertaken by the university to address the well-being of faculty was the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) Faculty

Satisfaction Survey. This survey was conducted in 2019, and received a very high response rate of 63% of Mason full-time instructional/research faculty. Because of the high quality of the data and the obvious relevance for faculty matters, Senator Simmons, also a member of the COACHE leadership team, provided feedback and support to the team from the perspective of the Faculty Matters Committee.

6) Collaborated with the Effective Teaching Committee

One of the most important areas of faculty concern is how they can be supportive of their students' learning. A critical part of that involves receiving high quality feedback on teaching effectiveness. The challenge of providing student evaluation of teaching is all the more pointed in times of COVID. Therefore, the Faculty Matters Committee began discussions about how to improve the evaluation process.

7) Discussed Other Issues

Over the course of the academic year, a number of other items of business were discussed by the committee, including: university use of recorded teaching materials and intellectual property, equity issues in teaching loads, status of the business of the Term Faculty Committee, relationship of the Faculty Matters Committee to the Faculty Senate Academic Success Initiative, inclusion of LAUs governed by the provost in Faculty Senate representation, governance rights on the George Mason University Korea campus, relationship between the committee and the work of the local AAUP chapter, general workload issues, various violations of the Faculty Handbook, and COVID related safety concerns.