

REPORT OF THE UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC INITIATIVES

Spring 2021

Membership: Peggy Brouse (Director, Cyber Security Engineering, Systems Engineering and Operations Research), Molly Davis (Committee Chairperson, Associate Professor, Social Work), Tony Falsetti (Associate Professor, Forensic Science Program, College of Science), Janette Muir (exofficio, provost office), Danielle Rudes (Associate Professor, Criminology, Law and Society, CHSS and Center for Advancing Correctional Excellence in the Schar School), Rebecca Sutter (Associate Professor of Nursing), Ashley K McClelland (Associate Professor)

Solon Simmons (Former Committee Chair and Associate Professor School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution).

The academic year began with Solon Simmons appointed as Chair of the Academic Initiatives Committee. The committee was only able to be convened one time during the Fall. In December, Molly Davis was given authorization to convene the committee at which time she was elected as Chairperson. After reviewing the report from the committee Chair for the previous year and noting his recommendations (stated below), the committee decided to follow his guidance in working this year to assess the committee and needed changes.

Former Chair Recommendations

Recommendation from the Chair of the committee:

The Faculty Senate of George Mason University should engage a process to revisit the charge of the Academic Initiatives Committee to address the problems of: 1) the excess specificity and dated nature of the committee's charge and 2) the ambiguity of its span of duties with respect to the overall committee structure of the Faculty Senate. This revision process should take place over the 2020-2021 academic year, and the committee should be reconstituted (assuming there is a decision to continue it) based on the decision of the Senate by the end of that year.

It was determined by the Committee that special time and attention should be directed toward reviewing the charge of the committee, its history, accomplishments, and functional relationships within the university community. Using the recommendations of the former Chair as a guide, we developed a workplan to determine how best to enable this committee to serve a valuable function within the university community. To that end, we met with Senate Chair Shannon Davis, and consulted frequently with our ex officio committee member Janette Muir, Associate Provost to receive updates on current issues being explored through the Provost's Office. With a new President, Acting Provost, and other changes in leadership, it was viewed as an opportune time to review whether changes should be recommended to the Senate regarding this committee in preparation for the following academic year.

Committee Charge

Academic Initiatives Committee Motion for a University Standing Committee to Review Curriculum and Faculty Matters in Current and Future Campuses, Academic Programs and Activities of George Mason University approved by the Faculty Senate - April 1, 2009. Charge was amended and approved by the Faculty Senate – October 7, 2009 and March 2, 2011.

Charge: A. To fulfill faculty responsibilities for curriculum oversight within the University:

- 1) Gather accurate information from the Provost's Office to review a) Initial, current and projected course and program enrollment; b) Any Memorandum of Understanding or similar governing document or contract specifying arrangements between George Mason University and the host government, state, or responsible organization; c) Reports presented to any created governance structure such as a Board of Governors between George Mason University and any host government, state, or responsible organization; d) Vetting and approval processes for faculty hiring and course offerings e) Information about resources, pay scales and other financial information relevant to faculty support, faculty and staff hiring, and curriculum development. 2) Provide a regular report to the Faculty Senate every semester.
- 2) Function as a faculty liaison from initial planning through implementation and continuing operations on major global education projects (involving multiple academic units or emanating from the central administration) and participate in discussions of major additional projects. C. Create sub-committees as necessary within the Committee to ensure adequate attention is paid to the variety of satellite campus locations and opportunities. D. Committee representation of faculty from no less than five different academic units to serve staggered two-year terms. The Vice President for Global and International Strategies (or the functional equivalent in the Provost's Office) will serve on this Committee as a non-voting member and will provide regular reports and updates on ongoing activities.

Shannon Davis, Chair of the Faculty Senate met with the committee as she has an extensive understanding of the genesis of this committee. Janette Muir of the Provost office also significantly contributed to our understanding of the original purpose of this committee. The creation of the committee was based largely on making sure that faculty have input regarding new academic initiatives. The exploration of how we can continue this effectively or how we may be integrated into the planning/decision making process for new academic initiatives was a key part of our deliberation over several meetings.

The committee's review process concludes the following:

- a. We believe that faculty voice is important in the creation and implementation of new academic initiatives. We further understand at this juncture we are not aware of all the academic initiatives as there is no central mechanism for identifying these initiatives across the university.
- b. It is important to identify the point at which faculty input is relevant and important to new initiatives. Because we believe faculty input is critical, we think early involvement of faculty is worthwhile.

- c. Consideration of an operational definition of new academic initiatives is critical for the university. There are multiple strategic initiatives across the university community however in defining the purview of this committee, guidelines are important.
- d. Since the committee is a small representative group and there are many academic initiatives, it is not clear how do we define our role in the selection of initiatives that require the participation of faculty and faculty input. How are the selection of an academic initiatives chosen as a focus for the committee?
- e. As a faculty senate committee, what is our relationship to the Senate? What are the Senate expectations of this committee?
- f. It is important that the new academic initiatives committee create structural relationships and connection with university entities that have wide exposure to new academic initiatives. We believe that the Provost Office and the Faculty Senate can and should assist in vetting and identifying initiatives for targeting and referral to the new academic initiatives committee each academic year.
- g. We see this committee as valuable as a **conduit to connect academic entities** that create, approve, and implement new academic initiatives to a mechanism that will be able to facilitate the inclusion of faculty voice in the consideration of new academic initiatives. We believe the academic initiative committee is that mechanism and should be continued under a new charge.

Recommendation

1. The provost office and Faculty Senate representatives will meet prior to the beginning of the Fall semester to share a list of identified academic initiatives for the coming year. From that list, one to three projects will be referred to the academic initiatives committee for focused targeted efforts to provide input from faculty and explore implications within the university. These are issues that should be identified as needing targeted efforts to ensure faculty voice and participation.
2. The academic initiative committee serves an important liaison role and as such can connect to various university entities in their work to understand the implications for new academic initiatives. The committee members should continue to forge connections between academic units in reviewing new initiatives.
3. The Associate Provost will continue to serve as a member of the committee and as liaison between the committee and the provost. One Senate representative will serve as a liaison to the Senate.
4. We would like to propose a new charge to the **Academic Initiatives University Committee**.

Recommended Charge

The Academic Initiatives Committee has a primary charge to assure faculty input into the creation and implementation of new academic initiatives, early in the process, to assure that inclusion of faculty voice is represented through review and consideration of new academic initiatives.

- a. To fulfill faculty responsibilities to ensure that faculty input is included in consideration of new academic initiatives.**
- b. To collaborate with the Provost Office and Faculty Senate in identifying academic initiatives for targeted review consideration.**
- c. To work to facilitate better communication and information sharing between the faculty and university entities that consider implementing new academic initiatives.**
- d. To create sub-committees as necessary within the Committee to assist in the review of targeted new academic initiatives referred from the Provost Office and the Faculty Senate.**
- e. Members of the committee should represent no less than seven different academic units to serve staggered two-year terms.**
- f. The committee will create a report to the Provost Office and Faculty Senate at agreed upon times or at the end of the academic year.**