Minutes of the A&S Faculty Council

April 5, 2016

The meeting was called to order at 4:10 p.m. by the Chair, Professor Tiffiny Tung. Present at the meeting were Dean Lauren Benton, Professors Robert Barsky, David Blackbourn, Laura Carpenter, Marshall Eakin, Eva Harth, Jane Landers, Letizia Modena, Dana Nelson, Lucius Outlaw, and Alexander Powell. Sending her regrets was Professor Colin Dayan. Senior Associate Dean Karen Campbell attended the meeting as a guest of Faculty Council, and Jonathan Bremer, from the A&S Dean’s Office staff, attended as the Executive Secretary of the Faculty.

1. Approval of the Minutes of the Faculty Council Meeting of March 1, 2016.

There were no comments or questions, and Council approved the Minutes.

2. Business from the Committee on Educational Programs (CEP).

**Proposed revision of the Asian Studies major and minors.** Professor Blackbourn, Council’s representative on the CEP, explained that the Asian Studies program had not been revised in some time and needed a good overhaul. He said that Professor Gerald Figal, Director of the Asian Studies program, thoroughly revised the program’s major and three minors and provided sensible responses to follow-up questions. The CEP thus approved the proposal at its meeting on March 15th. There were no further comments or questions, and Council approved the proposed revision of the Asian Studies major and minors.


**New and revised course descriptions.** Council approved the course changes and additions from the Curriculum Committee (the course descriptions will be attached to the Minutes of the April 2016 A&S Faculty Meeting).


There were no questions or comments, and Faculty Council approved the referendum ballot.

5. CASA Update from Senior Associate Dean Karen Campbell.

Dean Campbell stated that she discussed Council’s question regarding how the Consortium of Advanced Studies Abroad (CASA) approves study abroad programs with Vice Provost Cynthia Cyrus and Susan Barone, executive director of global learning and education. At present CASA’s approval procedure is that a member institution makes a presentation and provides a budget to CASA’s Board of Directors, after which the Board votes on the proposed program. Ms. Barone indicated that, at the most recent CASA
Board meeting, directors showed little interest in establishing study abroad programs in Europe, probably because there are already established programs there. The Board was more focused on starting programs in China and India and implementing a new program in South Korea, the latter sponsored by Dartmouth. Dean Campbell also explained that early joiners of CASA have priority, and, because Vanderbilt joined CASA relatively recently, a Vanderbilt-sponsored program would not likely be approved as one of CASA’s next study abroad programs. Vanderbilt faculty members who are interested in proposing a CASA study abroad program should talk with Dean Campbell and Ms. Barone.

6. Program in Career Development (PCD) Survey Results re Associate Professor Professional Development.

A PCD survey, composed by Professors Laura Carpenter, Katie Crawford, and Shane Hutson, was distributed in January to ascertain whether A&S associate professors were interested in career development programs. The results of the survey, which were distributed to Council members prior to the meeting, showed strong interest among tenured associate professors in learning about the promotion process to full professor, finding additional funding sources for research, and balancing administrative and service responsibilities. Council members agreed that the survey results indicated that expanding PCD programming to associate professors would be worthwhile. They also expressed appreciation to Professors Carpenter, Crawford, and Hutson for conducting the survey. Professor Carpenter noted that Professor Hutson, PCD director, has organized a session, *Perspectives on the Promotion-to-Full Process*, on April 11th.

7. Proposed Revision of the A&S Constitution re Composition of Faculty Council.

Professors Harth and Powell, representatives from the natural sciences, explained that Professor Ed Saff proposed to Council last semester that the composition of Faculty Council be modified such that three members would be elected from each academic division, instead of the present two members, and that three members be elected at large, instead of the present six. The proposed change would ensure a more equitable composition of Faculty Council in practice, they said, as few faculty members from the natural sciences are elected to Council at large. At the November 2015 meeting, Council members voted to approve this change to the *A&S Constitution* in principle. A written proposal, including an implementation schedule and a draft referendum ballot, was presented to Council at this meeting. Council members agreed to modify the proposal by replacing “represent the interests of” in the first sentence of the second paragraph with “are drawn from.” Council then approved the proposed revision of the *A&S Constitution* regarding the composition of Faculty Council and the referendum ballot as amended and agreed that the proposal be presented to the A&S faculty at the September 2016 A&S Faculty Meeting. Council members agreed to wait until September in order to avoid holding a referendum after spring semester classes have ended.
8. **Teaching Evaluation Criteria.**

Professor Tung explained that, at the March A&S Faculty Meeting, Professor Larry Zwiebel urged the College of Arts and Science to more thoroughly evaluate the teaching of A&S faculty members. Course evaluations are not sufficient, he said, other criteria are also needed, such as course grade distributions and peer reviews. Peabody College, for instance, uses an expansive list of criteria to evaluate its faculty members’ teaching. Several faculty members at the Faculty Meeting supported Professor Zwiebel’s position and explained that the existing course evaluation form is not useful or indicative of teaching quality. It appears to measure popularity, instead of teaching excellence, and has not been revised in over twenty years. Professor Tung noted that other criteria are collected for A&S tenure and promotion files—including a faculty member’s teaching philosophy and objectives, course syllabi, reading lists, and exams—and asked Council members whether A&S should be regularly using these criteria to evaluate teaching.

Dean Campbell stated that the course evaluation form is being revised and that the new form will be used starting next fall. She explained that a provostial-level committee worked on this issue in 2013 and its report was available in 2014. Since then, smaller committees have been working to implement the report’s recommendations, including the recommendation to change the culture at Vanderbilt regarding course evaluations. This includes encouraging and providing incentives to students to complete the online surveys, setting aside some class time for students to take the surveys, with instructors out of the room, and emphasizing to students that the surveys are important and that the survey results are not ignored.

Council members agreed to form a subcommittee during the next academic year to study this matter. Part of the committee’s charge would be to collect best practices in this regard.

9. **New Business and Concerns.**

**Guest/visiting faculty housing.** Professor Harth, following up a point that she raised at the September Council meeting, expressed concern that Vanderbilt has few housing options for visiting faculty members or for prospective graduate students and faculty candidates. Nashville hotels are often too expensive for these purposes. Council members recognized the importance of this problem, but agreed that it is not easy to solve—partly because of occupancy problems and partly because one type of housing would not be appropriate for all purposes. Perhaps Finance could conduct a cost-benefit analysis or use Concur data to ascertain whether some alternative to present practice would be financially feasible. Others suggested that this question could be included in Vanderbilt’s broader study of graduate student housing, its master land use plan, or Vice Provost Raghavan’s research agenda. The Faculty Senate or The Commons could also consider it.

**Style of Faculty Council minutes.** Council members discussed whether to adopt a broad-brushed summary style of writing Faculty Council minutes. This style would
facilitate more open discussions at meetings by not attributing statements to particular faculty members. The proposed style would report actions and be less fine grained regarding who said what than the existing style. Several others expressed support for the existing style of detailed minutes. Some detail is important for explanatory and historical reasons, and, in some situations, it is important to note the speaker. The A&S Constitution also specifies that the Faculty Council minutes should explicate the perspectives expressed at meetings. Council members agreed that a hybrid style of writing minutes would be best: Detailed explanations of matters before Council, noting different perspectives on an issue, and attribution of statements when necessary, but not usually in general discussions.


No issues were raised.

11. Adjournment.

Council voted to adjourn at 5:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura M. Carpenter
Secretary of the Faculty Council