COMMITTEE ON FACULTY WELFARE & ACADEMIC FREEDOM (FWAF)

Wednesday, November 15, 2023
3:30pm – 5:00pm
ADMIN 345
MINUTES OF MEETING

Pursuant to call, the Committee on Faculty Welfare and Academic Freedom met at 3:30pm on November 15, 2023. Chair Jayson Beaster-Jones presiding.

I.   **Chair's Report – Jayson Beaster-Jones**
     A. UCFW Updates (October 13)
       The University of California is working to reduce the time to graduation for graduate students. Some conversations are considering 3-year PhD programs. Reducing the time to graduation would not only reduce the time to a degree but would also reduce student costs. There seems to be robust faculty dissent around the idea, especially from faculty in the science disciplines.

       UC Berkeley and UC Davis are about to begin using the Oracle financial system and have expressed concerns based on the feedback from other campuses.

       Chair Beaster-Jones is the UCFW lead reviewer for the systemwide review of Amendments to Senate Bylaw 55.

     B. Meeting with EDI Chair Garcia-Ojeda (October 31)
       Chair Beaster-Jones met with EDI Chair Marcos Garcia-Ojeda to discuss issues with Oracle and the impact those issues are having on faculty. Specifically, troubles with the financial system are affecting faculty's ability to purchase items which is in turn affecting their ability to conduct research. The Chairs of both committees agreed to draft a joint memo to the Senate and Administrative leadership addressing the impacts of the financial system and the disproportionate effect it has on junior and/or minority faculty.

       A task force has been assembled to address the financial system issues. The task force has met twice already with a goal to meet weekly. Additionally, the task force plans to send weekly updates to campus regarding its progress.

       Members discussed issues with the financial system and topics to be included in the joint FWAF/EDI memo to leadership. It was noted that perhaps it is not the financial system itself that is the problem, but rather the management of the system that needs to be addressed. Management should ask end users what they need, determine what the issues are, and then outline a process to address the end users' needs. It was also noted that there should be trainings to instruct personnel on the processes. Furthermore, management should communicate to the campus on how issues have been resolved. It was additionally noted that end users would like to be able to access financial reports, even the most basic reports of their accounts.

Action: Chair Beaster-Jones will circulate a draft memo for the committee's review and input. FWAF and EDI will send a joint memo to the Senate and Administrative leadership.

C. CRE Ruling regarding the Addition of Teaching Professors on CAP
Ruling:
2023.10.A Interpretation of Senate Bylaw II. III. 2. A. (Committee on Academic Personnel) The UCM Bylaw referenced above states that the membership of the Committee on Academic Personnel (CAP) consists of full professors ("[…] Members will be full professors." The Bylaw does not explicitly state that full Teaching Professors are not eligible to serve on CAP. CRE interprets "full professors" as including "full Teaching Professors". Without explicit Bylaw language regarding the membership of CAP, it is implicit that full Teaching Professors should be eligible to serve on CAP.

The new ruling allows Full Teaching Professors to serve on CAP. This is not unprecedented as it is already being done on some other UC campuses.

II.   **Consent Calendar**
A. Today's agenda
B. October 18 draft Meeting Minutes

Action: Today's agenda and the October 18 Meeting Minutes were approved as presented. The FWAF analyst will update the Senate website accordingly.

III.   **Review of FWAF AY 23-24 Priorities – All**
FWAF's AY 22-23 priorities are available here.

On October 24 a memo was distributed to all Department Chairs requesting their top three FWAF-related priorities. A summary of their feedback was sent to FWAF members on November 3rd and can also be found here.

Members reviewed the Department Chairs' comments and discussed the most common issues noted by the departments. They agreed that issues with Oracle were commonly documented.

Another commonly documented issue among departments was staffing and how staff duties are being divested onto faculty in a multitude of ways. It was noted that staff are being lost to UCOP for better pay, flexibility in duties, and fully remote schedules. The administration is aware of this issue. In conjunction with the university being understaffed, another concern is the misallocation of positions. Members discussed the lack of transparency from leadership and desired to know how the institution's money is being spent.

Healthcare was another commonly documented issue among departments. This appears to be a systemwide issue as there was a UC wide petition on the increase in healthcare costs. Furthermore, the increase in healthcare plan prices was not publicized until open enrollment began. Memos from UCFW and the Council of University of California Retiree Associations

(CUCRA) have already been sent expressing displeasure with this. In addition to the increase in costs, there are many challenges locally when trying to use the UC healthcare plans. There is a lack of providers that accept the plans, third party providers that make the use of health coverage even more convoluted and challenging, and only one local hospital which is faith based and does not accept the healthcare coverage for all needs.

Action: Chair Beaster-Jones will bring this up at the next UCFW meeting and ask who makes the UC healthcare plan decisions and who negotiates with the healthcare providers.

After their discussion, members identified the following top three priorities:
1. Issues with the financial system
2. Staffing issues and budget allocations
3. Health care costs and access

Action: Members to draft a memo to DivCo, EVC/Provost, and the Chancellor outlining three top priorities in addition to a request for information and transparency regarding the priorities. FWAF to determine who will lead the drafting of the memo.

IV.   **MCS Instructional Budget Memo – All**
The Management of Complex Systems (MCS) Department sent a memo to Senate leadership regarding challenges with the implementation of the new instructional budget model.
Both FWAF and CAPRA have been asked to review the memo and respond. This memo and feedback from FWAF and CAPRA will be discussed at the November 30 DivCo meeting.

Faculty at UC Merced with administrative appointments are expected to either not teach their courses or the departments are required to provide the resources for the individual to take on an administrative role. This puts all of the pressure on the departments to figure out when individuals can take on administrative positions. Because no funding is provided to cover the courses, either other faculty are asked to cover the courses or the courses are not offered. Moreover, senior faculty are overstretched in service and their teaching is not being replaced by budget allocations from the administration. Additionally, the memo noted that departments do not feel well positioned when making TA assignments. It was noted that this is tied to another issue currently being discussed in DivCo, which is the lack of replacing of empty lines. Departments do not recover the costs of the lines that are unfilled, so they are unable to hire individuals to teach unassigned courses.

Overall, members agreed with the comments outlined in the memo. However, there were some reservations about comments made in the School of Engineering Executive Committee support memo. Specifically, the comments regarding the instructional budget being modified for new programs.

Action: Members to decide on a course of action after CAPRA issues its response.
FWAF analyst will reach out to CAPRA to inquire about the status of their response and report back to the committee.

V. **Discussion: Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) – Sean Malloy, Professor, History, Critical Race and Ethnic Studies**
A letter from the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the Brandeis Center has been sent to the presidents of nearly 200 colleges and universities in response to the increase of antisemitic incidents on campus in the aftermath of the Hamas massacre of Israeli civilians.

Letters were distributed on October 25, 2023. It was not confirmed that UC Merced received such a letter, however it was noted as a possibility. Letters contain language stating that any pro-Palestinian speech is being labeled as hate speech, and the call is to censor any language that may be perceived as antisemitism. Recently, Columbia University and the University of Pennsylvania were sued for civil rights violations, and more recently, SJP chapters have been banned all over the nation. There is a possibility that this may become an academic freedom issue on campus.

On October 16, 2023, the UC Ethnic Studies Faculty Council sent a letter to the Chancellors, President, and Regents critiquing their statements regarding the issue as being one sided and failing to value Palestinian lives. In response, a UCM faculty personally received a letter from UC Regent Jay Sures suggesting that the UC Ethnic Studies Faculty Council was a surrogate and supporter of Hamas. The Regent's letter was subsequently published in the LA Times.

Some members discussed possible unease with the UC Ethnic Studies Faculty Council sending the letter on a UC letterhead. It was noted that the letter may give the impression that the statement was the opinion of the entire UC faculty body as it was written on a UC letterhead. Others noted that if the Council met and agreed on that opinion, there should be no issue with the use of the letterhead.

Action: Members to search for comparable cases in order to be prepared for a future response, should one be required.

VI. **Other Business**

Members would like to know if there is a health care liaison/consultant on campus.

Action: FWAF analyst will check and report back to the committee.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:00pm.