

Faculty Senate-Research, Scholarship, Creative Activities and Engagement Committee

Faculty senate meeting notes:

March 14, 2017

Present: Fenfei Leng, Michael Gillespie, Jacek Kolasinski, Eric Wagner, Eric von Wettberg. By phone Allan Rosenbaum. Notes taken by Eric von Wettberg

Our conversation started informally, with a conversation about faculty retention. Von Wettberg brought up faculty retention because it is a growing issue in Biology. In Biology out of the past 8 years, we have lost at 10 assistant professors (2 denied tenure, 1 likely to be denied tenure to industry, 7 to other universities) plus have had one leave the tenure track for an instructor position and three leave the department for the administration. Although the new union contract may emphasize retention, it is clearly an issue in Biology. Given the demands of lab space and startup, losing at least 15 faculty is a huge cost.

We asked who has funds for retention, and what are the priorities for allocating those funds. We did not have a clear answer to this.

We discussed that some searches, particularly in public health, are failing because salary is low due to salaries of existing faculty being low, and not able to hire at market rate due to equity issues.

This concern was shared by the rest of the committee present, with losses in all departments/units present.

We then shifted to a discussion of faculty hiring. We discussed the control ORED has over this process, particularly in departments where laboratory space and startup are a key part of the hiring process. We also discussed how faculty lines are accumulated after retirements/departures, and not fully reallocated. In departments that are not pre-eminent or strategic investments, this will lead to a withering of the faculty. Furthermore, when coupled with increased instructor hiring, it is a part of the steady erosion of the tenure system itself. This issue with the tenure system was seen as a major challenge by those present, if not the greatest challenge we face in the academy. This is a silent assault on tenure- instructor lines are part of the erosion of tenure. Also, clearly instructors won't bring grants or have the scholarly impact of faculty with a research portfolio.

We also discussed a range of concerns and issues with pre-eminent system. A consistent concern is that it involves picking winners and losers, making many units and fields secondary.

As part of our discussion of a faculty with fewer tenured/tenure track members, we asked if that affects undergraduate retention. Are tenured faculty better at retaining students? Are they better at engaging students in research, interesting them in graduate school?

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We expressed the sentiment that we need a world class faculty, and that those faculty should be scholars as well as instructors. We saw hiring senior faculty who are about to retire as not fully consistent with this need, and questioned this strategy. Targeted “cluster” hires of faculty with transferable funding might have a short term benefit on the university’s funds, but will it build a dynamic faculty?

Michael used the term “Gypsy” scholars (and then asked if it is a microaggression?)- is that what we want? We want the passion of junior faculty.

We then asked what should our strategy as a committee should be?

Allan proposed asking the faculty senate to initiate a longer term study of tenure.

Michael advocated for creating a list of 4-5 questions, pointed, to be sent to the provost/Vice Provost, to ask for answers. In the subsequent discussion, we phrased these questions in the context of: “For us to do our job as faculty senators tasked with research, scholarly activities, engagement and creative activities, we need to know the following from the administration”

Drafts of these questions might include

- To what extent have faculty lines been lost in non-strategic areas?
- What is the proportion of resources to pre-eminent programs?
- How have resources been distributed to FIU Online
- Will we protect non-PhD terminal degrees?
- University commitment to development/advancement for humanities, arts, and other non-preeminent disciplines

In the discussion, we broached setting a meeting with Meredith Newman. Von Wettberg will ask to meet with her as a committee once the meeting minutes and strategy are approved.

We also discussed meeting with Suzanna Rose, who runs the faculty mentoring program and directs an NSF ADVANCE Grant that aims to increase the diversity of our faculty.

We also discussed a topic we have addressed before, postdocs. We have opportunities to create more postdoc lines creatively, perhaps instead of leaning so heavily on instructors. Postdocs as instructors can bring the energy of new faculty, retain a research interest, but also share some of the “cost savings” that come with instructors. We did not advocate for adjunct hiring.

Jacek brought up the topic of Museums. Museums are not counted in compass, in the matrix- but they could contribute research and scholarship, as well as funding streams.

Following this, we discussed school/college structure. In particular, the point was made that the Humanities at FIU were divided and conquered by being split among schools: CASE- SIPA- CARTA. The consequence of this is that there is no administrative advocate for the humanities.

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We also discussed inviting Kathleen Wilson to the proposed meetings with assistant provost Newman.

Another topic discussed was the revolving door in advancement at FIU. Staff turnover means they don't know the institution- and we lose people to UM, etc. On the topic of advancement, we noted a lack of statistics. We also noted that some fundraising that is not run through ORED is not counting towards unit performance. ORED should find a way to count this- or the matrix counting should. This led into a discussion of wanting more freedom for faculty to lobby or fundraise directly with the BOG. The aim of this is looking for board members to work on pushing the university to not starve humanities and arts programs.

Jacek proposed a Dean of museums to provide an administrative voice for the arts.

Another topic broached was our connection with Alex Acosta, secretary of labor.

We also mentioned parts of FIU with automatic state funding- Center for Children and Families, etc, and how these might fare in the coming years.

Another loose end as our conversation became less structured was the president's pre-occupation with the Fairgrounds. No action was proposed.

A complaint was raised about graduates/ students in New York and California not being counted in the metrics. And not tracking students who go into self-employed fields- ie, artists.

Some notable alums in the arts were discussed, who might be put into a panel or otherwise contacted for profile raising and fundraising. This would be an arts roundtable of sorts.

Richard Flor? "creative communities"; Asking Jorge Perez to come speak at FIU.

Theresa Fernandez? Obama administration, culture and hispanidad? MacArthur genius award
Dani Pino; Richard Blanco; Puig? (Univision media)