Minutes
Faculty Affairs Meeting
February 5, 2003

Members present: Glenn Abney, Barb Carroll, Joan Carson, Gayle Christian, Pauline Clance, Bonnie Fritz, Katherine Johnston, Charles Marvin, Marian Meyers, Jean E. Miller, Jim Senn and Marta White


The meeting was called to order at 1:05 by Bonnie Fritz. Pauline Clance moved to approve the minutes of the previous meeting. Joan Carson seconded the motion, and the group approved the minutes.

Old Business
The group requested that when Katherine Johnston is unable to attend, that she send a representative who is familiar with all areas of her division. Since Katherine does not have a single back-up to her position, she felt that any of her four Assistant Vice Presidents were capable of addressing Finance and Administration issues. Pauline Clance suggested that Barb Carroll fill in for Katherine, but that other Assistant Directors might be added to the meeting if an issue on the agenda required specific expertise. The group agreed.

On-line Evaluation
Glenn Abney distributed a write-up on the faculty survey as well as two appendices. Since there was not a quorum at yesterday’s subcommittee meeting, the write-up is not a formal document.

The committee received 394 completed questionnaires in response to the faculty survey (out of approximately 1100 distributed, or 35.8%). 55 percent indicated having used on-line, 33 percent in-class, 6 percent both, and 6% reported no teaching in the Fall. Glenn had heard from several faculty members that they appreciated being asked for their opinions. When initially proposed, the faculty seemed to favor on-line evaluations. Following Fall’s experience, however, 34 percent of the faculty who used on-line in Fall will switch to in-class for Spring. 16 percent of those using in-class plan to switch to on-line. 205 faculty members will switch to in-class for the future, versus 174 who will use on-line. Of those choosing in-class, 77 percent indicated a strong preference for their choice compared to 43 percent choosing on-line.

The primary concern of the faculty is the response rate. A response rate of 45.16 percent (after withdrawals) was reported. Although hard data is difficult to find, the feeling among the faculty is that in-class evaluation yielded a response rate of at least 70 percent. After three years using on-line evaluations, GA Tech is still experiencing response rates in the mid forty percent. In addition, GA Tech has been using incentives in an effort to raise response rates. Research on the subject explains the lower response rate for on-line evaluations as resulting from student unwillingness to use their personal time to complete the evaluations. There was a general feeling among the group that an approximately 66 percent on-line response rate would be desirable. The literature suggests this also, but there is no hard data on an acceptable response
Another concern of the faculty is that the results of on-line evaluation are not reflecting a representative sample of student opinion. Faculty believe that a low response rate leads to lower scores, the supposition being that students who dislike the faculty will be more likely to complete the evaluation. Glenn feels that, through the data gathered from Fall, it will be possible to investigate this hypothesis. Even if the disgruntled students are not the ones who are responding, a higher response rate is clearly needed. Joan Carson wondered if the responses received on on-line evaluations were consistent with those received from in-class evaluations. If they were, response rate might not be as important as is thought. Pauline brought up the confounding variables of different year and different faculty.

The group discussed incentive use to raise response rates. Various methods were used this year for reaching response rate goals, such as: raising the grades by 1%, making last day of class a review session, emailing student grades early, and buying pizza. The group felt that such incentives were not a good idea and should be discouraged. It was suggested that students must complete an evaluation in order to receive their grades, but the deans did not like this idea.

Glenn went on to discuss the pros and cons of in-class and on-line evaluations. Minuses of in-class evaluations are: student absenteeism, completion of evaluation in ink instead of pencil, classes held off campus in which evaluations need to be mailed, and the fact that some PTI’s do not understand that they must administer the evaluations. On the plus side, on-line evaluations offer timely response, reduced administration time, and legible comments.

The group felt strongly that faculty who received on-line evaluation ratings below the departmental figures from Fall 2001 need to be held harmless. Pauline Clance suggested that if the response rate cannot be raised (as the literature implies), that perhaps we need to look at the use of the evaluations. Specifically, should evaluations be used as evaluative tools for promotion and tenure, or should they be used as developmental tools, offering feedback to the faculty?

Glenn offered his suggestions:
- Move to using only one system for faculty evaluation
- Perhaps use optional on-line evaluations halfway through the term to get feedback
- Do not use on-line evaluations until we are sure that we can get a response rate reflective of the total class
- Possibly simplify the evaluation

In summary, there was concern for protecting the people who used on-line evaluations from negative impact on promotion and tenure, a need for more analysis on both on-line data and in-class data, and we need to know what our options are regarding an ongoing plan for future evaluations. Bonnie suggested that the Provost be invited to our next meeting to discuss the methods to be used for future evaluations. In addition, she recommended that the Faculty Affairs Committee send an interim report to the Executive Committee prior to their next meeting on February 13th containing (a) a cleaned up version of the data gathered to date by Glenn and his subcommittee, (b) the concerns voiced by this group, and a game plan for completing data collection, analysis, and committee approval; solicitation of input through additional consultation with other concerned parties including Provost to be invited to the next meeting: and (c)
recommendation to the Senate by its April meeting. Bonnie stressed that we must strongly recommend to the Executive Committee that people who used on-line evaluations be protected from negative impact on promotion and tenure.

Hugh Hudson was absent, and there were no subcommittee reports on Evaluation of Administrators, Final Exam Policy, or Non-Tenure Track. Jim Senn had no report on the Bookstore. Cherian Thachenkary was not present to discuss Benefits. Bonnie Fritz announced that the Faculty Affairs subcommittee on Disruptive Students will be working with a similar committee from the Dean of Students area. There were no additional subcommittee reports.

Pauline Clance thanked everyone for their help with Senate passage of Advancement of Women.

Glenn mentioned that at its Jan. 22nd meeting, TRS approved new option factors for all active members retiring on or after Feb. 1, 2003. These option factors are used to calculate the monthly benefit payment for retiring members who chose a survivorship option (Plan B). In all cases, the new option factors benefit a retiring member selecting a survivorship option.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:28.