Minutes  
Faculty Affairs Meeting  
October 7, 2004  

Members present:  Glen Abney, Pam Barr, Harry Dangel, Nancy Floyd, Shelby Frost, Gerald Gay, Cecelia Grindel, Emanuela Guano, Hugh Hudson, Ralph LaRossa, Dick Miller, Dave Pavesic, Beth Jones for Jerry Rackliffe, Jim Senn, Tammy Sugarman, Cherian Thachenkary, and Marta White  

Members absent:  Peggy Albers, Ben Baez, Cathy Brack, Conrad Ciccotello, Valerie Fennell, Amy Helling, Ron Henry, Charlotte Petrek, Charles Marvin, Mona Matthews, Linda Nelson, Wayne Reed, Armenia Williams  

The minutes of the September meeting were approved by the group.  

Dick Miller explained how he decided on the dates and times of the meetings for this academic year.  

Nancy Floyd spoke for her subcommittee, which is charged with reviewing the ASUR report on Legal Affairs, Office of the Ombudsperson, and Opportunity Development/Diversity Education Planning (formerly Affirmative Action).  There had been concern that the procedures of these three functional units might be in conflict.  Also, there was concern about ODEP conducting informal questioning, which could possibly be unfair.  Specifically, Nancy’s subcommittee was to seek clarification regarding the functions of each area, to examine the need for a statement on the procedure for an informal complaint, and to look into the recommendation to restructure these departments.  

Nancy has discovered that all three departments are meeting with a committee headed by Joan Carson, which seeks to sort out all of the various types of grievances that can be filed.  Joan’s subcommittee will prepare a report for Faculty Affairs.  Nancy recommends that, once the report is received, it should be reviewed by her group, and a committee needs to be established to rewrite the policy for grievance and harassment utilizing terminology that is less confusing.  

Hugh Hudson voiced concern about “secret” investigations.  His fear is that investigations are being conducted before charges have been brought.  The Office of the Ombudsperson stresses that all matters brought before it are confidential.  There is a privacy concern here, because despite the warning of confidentiality, anything you say can be used against you.  It needs to be made clear to faculty and staff that Legal Affairs represents the interests of the University, and not its employees.  

Jim Senn’s subcommittee has not convened, since the budget reduction seems to be under control.  The governor has called for a 7.3 million dollar budget cut from Georgia State University.  The BOR is meeting on Oct. 12th to discuss a possible tuition increase of 10%.  If this were to pass, the tuition increase would take care of about half of the 7.3 million dollar cut.  A
1% holdback has been imposed on all operating units, with the balance being dealt with out of central operations with measures such as postponing moves and renovations. It is expected that legislators will, in the upcoming legislature, attempt wrest control of tuition and fees from the BOR. It appears that there has been a distinct shift in the philosophy of education in Georgia from viewing education as serving the public good, to making the users of education pay for it. Unfortunately for education, the budget cuts are not being made fairly across the board, and USG cuts have amounted to 38%. Since we now get only 35 to 37% of our funds from the state, it is more accurate to say that Georgia State University is state-assisted, not publicly funded.

Jim asked the group if, as representatives of the faculty, the group wished to take a public position on the matter of the budget cuts by drafting a letter to the governor, legislators, etc. Dick voiced the need to be certain that our facts are correct. Jim suggested using Dr. Patton’s talking points as facts. Dick suggested addressing our concerns to legislators, as Governor Perdue is clearly not a friend of education. Cherian suggested that we check with Legal Affairs to be certain that we can, in effect, lobby the legislature. Cherian also suggested possibly taking a unified position with Tech and UGA. Although the sales tax revenue has been improving, corporate taxes have dropped about 40%, making the need for more cuts possible. Dick suggested that the letter stress the consequences of cuts so far and point to future consequences. Hugh suggested that the letter be sent to metro Atlanta legislators and higher education committee members. Nancy moved to send the letter, and Ralph seconded the motion, which the group unanimously approved.

Gerald Gay suggested telling the legislators what we expect of them. The USG bears a disproportionate amount of cuts. We would be willing to take our fair share of cuts, but we need to point out to the state what can be expected from such cuts, stressing the long-term implications. Hugh agreed to review the letter from a BOR perspective. Glen Abney suggested stressing that investing in education is good for Georgia. Emphasizing the positive was viewed as important. Jim and his subcommittee will draft a letter and distribute it to the group. Dick will sign the letter for Faculty Affairs. The question of whether or not we wish to make our letter public was tabled until we see the letter and get guidance from Legal Affairs.

Cherian reported for the Benefits Subcommittee. Despite the news that there would be new 100% employee-paid benefit plans added this year, no new plans materialized from the BOR. Almost all benefit plan premiums will rise effective the second half of the fiscal year. Open Enrollment begins Oct. 12th. Our Benefits department was working on a long-term care plan, but tabled the work when it heard that the USG was also working on such a plan. It is hoped that Georgia State University will continue to look into offering such a plan. The BOR Dental Plan will be open again this year during open enrollment. Dr. Patton took the Domestic Partner request to the BOR, which failed to respond. The group moved to urge the Benefits Committee to ask Dr. Patton to continue to pursue this issue with the BOR.

There are equity issues between TRS and ORP. Changes in TRS impact on ORP. For example, TRS
will credit accrued sick pay toward retirement, but there is not a similar provision on ORP, because ORP is a different type of benefit plan.

HR will be creating a separate like for ORP on its website, and this link will be live next week.

The Staff Council is working on a shared leave policy, and has asked for feedback from the benefits subcommittee. The subcommittee thought that the plan, which is in effect at UGA, is a good one, but it had some reservations about its impact on retirement and whether or not there might be a taxation issue (gift in kind).

The benefits subcommittee did a great deal of work last year on the issue of faculty and staff having to pay to use the rec center. Some faculty and staff felt that use of the rec center should be free, as it was a free benefit before the new rec center was built. Last year a brainstorming was held, and several suggestions were put forward. The full list of suggestions was put before the Provost, and he selected three options that might be feasible:
1. Charge a sliding fee tied to salary (must be revenue neutral)
2. Offer a MARTA-like subsidy for monthly passes (must be revenue neutral)
3. The rec center consider:
   - a $10 fee for new members
   - a free trial period
   - offering a $1 day for faculty/staff
   - offering a significant discount for early/late hour use

The group, with two opposed and one abstaining, agreed to pursue these suggestions further. Beth Jones will figure out how the sliding scale would work, and she will look into the subsidy.

Glen asked that the benefits subcommittee look into a flex plan for medical costs for retirees. Cherian agreed to follow-up with Dorothy Roberts in Benefits.

Harry presented a proposal for a change in the GSU Faculty Handbook regarding student evaluation of faculty. Harry will review the proposal’s wording to be certain that is represents the procedure in effect currently, and he will bring it back to the next meeting.

Regarding new business, Jim asked for a report on whether or not the glitch in the student evaluation process that allowed students to fill out just one evaluation to have access to all of his/her grades has been fixed. Jim also felt that the group should again look at the student online evaluation of faculty process. Jim believes that the online evaluation process has serious validity issues. Two different conditions are created when students are allowed to complete the survey either before or after the final exam, and this could cause the promotion and tenure process to be challenged. Glen said that the analysis that his group did showed that the scores did drop among students who completed the survey after the final, but the drop was not significant. Hugh suggested that we look at the data again, using a reasonable sample of undergraduate students in all colleges, and compare the ratings of students who completed the survey before finals week and those who completed the survey after finals week.