

Natural Sciences and Mathematics Council
Draft Minutes for April 19th, 2011
Call to order at 3:30
Present:

Jon Bossenbroek, Rupali Chandar, Fan Dong, Hans Gottgens, Edith Kippenhan substituting for Sally Harmych, David Krantz, Charlie Odenthal, John Plenefisch, Anthony Quinn, Don Ronning, Joe Schmidt, Friedhelm Schwarz, John-David Smith, Steve Sucheck, Sibylle Weck-Schwarz, Denis White, Don White

Absent:

Randy Ellingson, Max Funk

Approval of minutes with modification from the April 5th meeting.

Report from Dean Bjorkman

Most of the issues regarding the current state of the college related to budget and the future effects on the college. The budget for visiting assistant professors and part-time faculty must be cut by 21% from \$1.4 million to \$1.1 million as part of a budget reduction process for the college. The concept of increasing workloads for faculty goes hand-in-hand with the cutting of VAP and part-time faculty. A portion of this budget gap might be closed through a fee increase, possibly the implementation of a “STEM surcharge” for classes taught in NSM. Council asked whether this surcharge would be used specifically for instructional support in the college or whether it would go to the University's General Fund. The Dean said that it was not clear at this point and that discussions were ongoing. Another point raised by the Dean is that President Jacobs told the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees that they should begin thinking about their definition of tenure.

Concerning possible changes to the college curriculum, the Dean indicated that she thinks that departments should be given significant flexibility to develop the most competitive programs possible. This would entail minimizing the college core curriculum, which would promote customization of multi-disciplinary degree plans. One prominent point was the idea of sub-semester modules (short courses taught for less than a full semester).

Responses from the council included questions of breadth in the college. For example, it is currently possible to get a degree from NSM where the student does not have to take any biology classes. Ideas to remedy this include a requirement of a series of sub-semester modules that are “big ideas” courses, focusing on such areas as abiogenesis, the big bang, etc. These classes, by definition, would include aspects of the humanities, sociology, religion, and other philosophical avenues of inquiry as each of these topics profoundly affect human thought about our place in the universe.

Old Business

Elections

Sibylle Weck-Schwarz, Chair of the Elections Committee, indicated that elections are moving forward. The response rate on the nomination balloting for CCAP was low. Only about 40% of eligible voters cast their ballots. Voting on the constitution will commence 2 weeks after the proposed changes were distributed to the NSM faculty. Ballots will go out in roughly 1 week, and the vote will close 1 week later.

Voting for the constitution by the NSM faculty will hopefully be on-line in roughly 2 weeks.

Further discussion regarding the college curriculum

It was indicated by Representative Quinn that if we do not take this opportunity to do so, this inaction might be viewed by the administration as confirmation that the faculty do not want to do anything to improve the university.

The council reached a consensus that the B.A. and B.S. degrees offered by the College of NSM can and should reflect markedly different programs. It was generally accepted that the BA degree should retain a strong liberal arts component. Much of the discussion concerned the magnitude of those differences and the impact of those differences on the students and the departments. Representative Gottgens noted that any restructuring of the BS degree needs to be in alignment with the principle expressed in the NSM Constitution of a broad based education. It was also noted that courses in the NSM college core will have a lower state subsidy, whereas courses outside that core will garner more dollars from the state.

As part of these discussions, the curriculum committee was charged by council with the duty of information gathering concerning degree requirements at peer colleges in the U.S. Ensuring that the college is on par with both peer and aspirational peer colleges/universities is important for both competitiveness and future accreditation.

Other issues raised were concerned with the expansion or creation of scientific literacy courses to be taken by students from other colleges and the possible creation of additional requirements/concentrations outside a student's primary field. One example is currently found in the math department, where students are encouraged to obtain additional majors/minors in economics, electrical engineering or other fields requiring higher-level quantitative analysis.

New Business

Election of Joe Schmidt (Dept. of Chemistry) as the NSM Council Vice Chair. By council rules, he will be the Chair of NSM Council for the 2011-2012 academic year.

The next meeting of the NS&M Council was set for May 3rd.

Adjournment at 5:03 p.m.