

MINUTES OF THE GENERAL FACULTY COUNCIL MEETING

OCTOBER 14, 2003

Members present: Elaine Attridge, Jennifer Bauerle, Jean Collier, Phil Gates, Robin Kuzen, Lotta Lofgren, Chris Milner, Greg Strickland, Prue Thorner, Derry Wade, Lynda White, and Mary Abouzeid. Richard Lindgren represented Donal Day, and Jennie Moody represented Bill Keene.

Members absent: Nancy Gansneder, Robbie Greenlee, George Hashisaki.

The meeting opened at 12:05. The invited guest speaker, Ed Ayers, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, addressed a list of questions sent to him before the meeting.

Mr. Ayers explained that he became dean about two weeks before the budget fell apart (August 2001). Although times are hard, we as a University have withstood the crunch well; we have only lost 3 or 4 faculty to the budget shortfall. There is no decrease in numbers of classes taught, and the classes are not more crowded than usual. We are now working on the raises and starting to hire again; the College will be giving marginal salary increases and doing some new hiring. Mr. Ayers expressed his gratitude to the University community for its support during the budget crunch. Tuition may rise in the future, which could help our situation.

Mr. Ayers commented that his life has been intertwined with and dependent on the general faculty in this University, and that the general faculty are central to the kind of place we want to be. As we continue to develop along the interdisciplinary lines we have set up, the general faculty will become even more important to this university; general faculty are the connective tissue of this place. The configuration “general faculty” at the University is different from that in other places, and it has allowed us to become the University we are – the flexibility to be innovative.

Mr. Ayers asked the Council how many members of the general faculty teach in the College of Arts and Sciences. Phil Gates, chairman of the bylaws committee, reported that the College has the third largest group of General Faculty, second only to health sciences and administration, 234 at latest count.

When asked, Mr. Ayres explained that he has not seen the draft of the general faculty policy document and is not familiar with the changes to the document, although the Council was under the impression that all the deans had had input into the document, based on a conversation with Alex Johnson in the Provost’s office.

Mr. Ayers next asked the group how to proceed to address our concerns.

Lotta Lofgren asked: We are interested whether the deans will consider all faculty in raise considerations this year. Mr. Ayers responded that all faculty will be considered for the 2.25% raise. The 1.75% additional raises approved by the BOV will be “quite

targeted”. The degree of attention people get on third year and sixth year review is very serious.

Prue Thorner: We realize that part-time faculty health insurance as a policy is not under your control, but would you comment about it? Couldn't the University be in the vanguard of the state, advocating for better wages and for better benefits for general faculty? If we could give equal access to health insurance coverage and a living wage to all, the University would be a better place. There are about 250 part-time faculty who work at .5 FTE or above for whom we are advocating inclusion in the University health benefits plan.

Mr. Ayers responded that he spoke at a rally for Living Wage before he was the dean; he sees the living wage issue tied to the question of part-time health benefits because both policies reflect “state policy”. The savvy argument, Mr. Ayers suggested, is that we could attract part-timers (a cost-cutting mechanism) if we could offer them benefits. He suggested that the benefits for part-time workers could be presented effectively to the state as a cost saving measure because full-time employees, including faculty, might consider part-time employment if they had benefits. Mr. Ayers supported an expansion of benefits to part-time employees if and when the state permits it.

Mr. Ayres further asked whether the General Faculty has a position on the living wage issue. Lotta Lofgren said that the Council would look into this.

[Note: research into past minutes of the GFC revealed that the GFC did pass a resolution regarding the living wage campaign at its January, 1999 meeting. The resolution reads as follows:

We call on the administration of the University to make sincere and vigorous efforts to increase the wages of the lowest paid employees of the University. It is critical that the University remains active in protecting the interests of all their employees.

We are encouraged by the dialog that the University has undertaken with groups such as the Campaign for a Living Wage, with members of the General Assembly and with officials in state government around this issue. We believe that the leadership shown by the University to eliminate poverty level wages for state employees is critical to the welfare of our community.]

Question from a guest attending the meeting (a former Chair of the General Faculty Council): Why has it taken seven years for the administration to complete the general faculty policy document? I have some guesses as to why this is: Richmond has some problem with the general faculty issue. We hear we are appreciated. But, in effect, we get lower raises than classified staff. In other words, this is a form of patronization. In a discussion of “financial stringency” in a University committee two years ago, President Casteen took the stand that he would have to declare a declaration of financial stringency for general faculty to be let go and he wouldn't do that. Does that policy still apply?

Mr. Ayers responded that the category “general faculty” is used here to cover a wide-range of positions and the people who hold these positions fall under this one rubric (rather than being called Administrative Staff or other more descriptive titles.) He commented that the central administration of this university supports all employment categories, but it is probably difficult for them to explain to the state legislature what general faculty is. For example, recently the Board of Visitors targeted measurable merit increases. We have the best Board of Visitors we’ve ever had, but they come to us from the standpoint of business. It’s hard for them to “put a budgetary box” around the concept of general faculty in its dealing with the University. This sometimes leads to confusion about the identity of the general faculty.

Mr. Ayers asked if there are things that fall under University policy that he could work on for the general faculty and commented that he was not aware of ways in which general faculty were treated differently from other faculty.

Lotta responded that there are fellowships, grants, travel and other reimbursements, professional development opportunities, and sabbaticals available to tenure-track and tenured faculty that are not available to general faculty. Mr. Ayers responded with some surprise that some general faculty are not given the same professional development opportunities as regular faculty. He clarified the fact that travel and professional development money is distributed out of departments. He expressed his opinion that people who are teaching the same classes should have the same professional development opportunities.

Comment from Jennie Moody: Perhaps there is a need to disaggregate the General Faculty in any discussion of our needs. The fact that we do not have access to tenured positions may imply that General Faculty are lower status.

Mr. Ayers agreed and asked what we could do about this perception of our lower status.

Follow-up from Ms. Moody: The University prides itself on being a great research institution and has just announced that enhancing its reputation as a research institution is one of its current highest priorities. Yet the University makes many of its researchers feel like second-class citizens – many of us pay our own raises: when we are allowed raises, we have to apply to our sponsors to increase our grants. And we don’t have the same kind of leave allowances and compensation other members of the faculty do. How can this University develop an outstanding stature as a research university without coming to grips with this whole issue?

Mr. Ayers responded that new initiatives recently announced will create larger numbers of research faculty; the new faculty will be interstitial and will work cooperatively. Moving forward, the University will promote research teams throughout the University. From a broader perspective, our goal should be to work in interdisciplinary teams that include general faculty such as librarians, research scientists, administrators, and others, and that all employees regardless of category are vital to the research and teaching

mission of the University. Mr. Ayers commented that his own research has illustrated to him the need for team-oriented research.

Follow-up from Ms. Moody: It is ironic that we're talking about teams at the same time as we talk about positions going away. How can this be? Part of what concerns us about the draft general faculty policy document is that previously when there was a gap in funding because of the inherent vagaries of grant funding, we may not have had a salary every month, but we didn't lose our appointments as a result; the current draft policy suggests that under those circumstances we will lose our appointments.

Mr. Ayers responded that the University often functions by *ad hoc* arrangements, but it is hard to codify these matters which are usually worked out amicably on a case-by-case basis. Everything is accomplished with a handshake and good will, and that will not change. At the same time, there is a growing attempt to make sure things are written down, and then most things look harsher than they did. When the state targeted the institution for budget cuts, no one wanted to see it. It seems that the term "general faculty" itself confuses things. It's good to be allied, but because of the diversity of positions advocacy might be difficult because of the inherent differences in the group. Trying to come up with ONE policy for such different groups may be good, but the one name for all the different groups may be problematic. Mr. Ayers observed that he doesn't want people to feel that regular faculty carry any disrespect for general faculty and asked whether our major concern was a lack of respect from the rest of the University.

Lotta responded that although respect is an important consideration we are more concerned about losing our jobs than about having our feelings hurt. We are concerned that the proposed changes in the current draft of the general faculty policy document will put general faculty who have earned the expectation of continued employment in a position to have their appointments terminated without a declaration of financial stringency; the new wording defines insufficient funding in a very broad and vague way. In other words, the expectation of continued employment seems now to be defined in new and weaker ways. Some recent terminations in the College (particularly in the Physics department) suggest that this is the case.

Mr. Ayers asked for a clarification: are research faculty the only ones affected by these proposed changes? Lotta responded that the changes in the policy could potentially affect all general faculty because of the broad definitions and imprecise wording.

Q from audience: When Richmond targets a grant directly to discontinue it, what is the University's role? Is there money at the University to bridge the grant until a new one is found? Mr. Ayers responded that it makes things much harder when the state targets a program.

Comment from Mary Abouzeid: If the general faculty is a University entity with a University-wide general faculty policy, perhaps the problem is that when the policy is implemented by the Schools, there is disparity among the schools as to how they do that.

We question whether individual deans and their department chairs are familiar with the role of general faculty and the policies governing retention and promotion. Mr. Ayers responded that this was an interesting problem and one he wanted to pursue. Mr. Ayers asked what could be done. Replies from the group ranged from educating chairs and deans to doing away with the tenure model to five-year contracts for all faculty.

In summation, Mr. Ayers said that everything at the University is unit-based. He suggested he has the responsibility at his “unit” level and learned a lot from this meeting. The power lies in the departments, and the cross-checking of departments is important. The strength and the anomalies are interstitial. He asked whether the general faculty wanted to be more aligned with the vertical policies or identified with departments. He suggested we should all be looking to get out of the silos and have less balkanization. He sees the general faculty as the connective tissue in the University’s desire to build interstitial relationships. We will see that the general faculty will have a larger role functionally in the future; whether or not there is a policy flexible enough to encourage that remains to be seen.

Lotta thanked the guests for coming. We continued with the meeting.

CHAIR’S REPORT

- Budget: We spent no money this month. Lotta thanked Prue for the budget estimate for the communications committee. Lynda also supplied a year’s projections from previous years and we are within the ball-park of where we were last year.
- Regarding the draft of the general faculty policy document, Bill and Lotta met last Thursday with Gene Block and had a frank and useful discussion. Richard Lindgren asked whether we had had a lawyer examine the draft of the general faculty policy document. Lotta responded that we have had a lawyer look at the document, but that we don’t have enough negotiating power with the Provost’s office to involve lawyers at this time. Our only strength is in numbers (almost 2000 at last count).
- Benefit Committee meeting: Because of changes on the state level, the University has lowered the bar on health benefits so that now all faculty at .8 FTE and above will receive health benefits. This will affect 22 employees at the University. The limit for the flexible spending accounts has been raised to \$5000, and the university will start reimbursing costs for many over the counter prescriptions under the new program. These changes are the result of recent changes in federal laws. The open enrollment period is coming in November; HR will conduct several information sessions across grounds and urges everyone to attend one of them.
- We discussed various ways to link sites of interest to our website. A short discussion ensued relative to linking our members to other sites. We are discussing possibilities with the Women’s Center.

DATA MANAGEMENT: Lynda reported that we are still trying to get complete data on the General Faculty from the University. And we are looking at ways to get this

information onto the website (using the Data Digest model: break out by types/appointments/race/gender/etc. and do a cross-tab to Council constituencies on the website). We should have new email addresses this afternoon.

UPDATE FROM COMMITTEES.

- There was no time left for these reports. Lotta reminded committees to pursue their committee goals.
- Prue reported that the current article she wished to place with Inside UVA has been rejected because of lack of space. We will continue to offer them articles.
- Prue asked for volunteers for the October 24th reception at the Art Museum.

NEXT MEETING: Members were asked to come up with ideas for the Forum and for questions for Anda Webb, who has been invited to speak to the Council in December.

The meeting ADJOURNED AT 1:30.

Respectfully submitted by: M. Abouzeid