Faculty Council Meeting Minutes, 3/9/16


Absent: G. Laurence (AAAC rep.)

The meeting was called to order at 2:40pm

Peggy Kahn, chair of the Department of Political Science, discussed an incident in a political science course involving Edwin Black, a scholar in resident in the local Flint Jewish community. Edwin Black has attempted for years to get speaking invitations at UM-Flint. He has left numerous messages for the political science and history department chairs. Neither of these chairs responded to his messages as he is not an appropriate speaker for an academic environment (he possesses no academic qualifications), and he has aggressive behavioral issues. The chancellor’s office directly contacted four lecturers in political science for Black to guest lecturer in their classes. Peggy found out about it only because she was observing Dr. Bromsen’s class on the Wednesday prior the lecturer and Dr. Bromsen announced Black would be the guest lecturer for the following Monday’s class. Peggy was not able to intervene at that stage, despite grave reservations about Black’s appearance. The lecturers approached by the chancellor’s office felt like they couldn’t decline a request from the chancellor. Edwin Black behaved inappropriately during the guest lecture. During the guest lecture he would approach students, violating their personal space, ask them their names, and then reply “I know what you’ve Tweeted.” There is a student group involving “justice for Palestinians” who regularly Tweet. Edwin Black called one of these students “a terrorist.” Black’s behavior shocked the faculty member teaching the course, and didn’t know what to do about it. Community members in attendance for the guest lecture applauded when students left the room.

H. Wehbe-Alamah asked what rights faculty members have to tell a guest lecturer to leave the classroom. Peggy responded that the faculty member in charge of the class has control over the space and has the ability, under academic freedom, to require the guest lecturer to leave. The issue for Peggy is that the chancellor’s office reached into the academic space without consultation with the departments or the college in pushing Edwin Black into these classrooms. Black’s behavior represents a violation of the standards and trust on how faculty conduct their classroom. A flyer promoting the event was circulated that stated that the event was sponsored by the Office of the Provost, though it is clear that the chancellor’s office was the major driver of the event. The question is how much responsibility the Office of the Provost has in vetting and promoting the event and respecting the academic space for events, especially for events from the chancellor’s office. A troubling response to this event is that the Office of the Provost and Barbara Avery’s office want to vet guest speakers brought to campus by faculty when the problem is that these offices didn’t vet the guest speaker that their offices helped sponsor.

Faculty Council discussed how they should communicate their concerns to the central administration. Lois will prepare and circulate a draft resolution.

The minutes from the Feb. 17th Faculty Council meeting were approved as amended.

M. Farmer gave an update for CAC/BSP. There have been a lot of meetings of the new joint budget committee. Faculty seem to be playing active role in the new committee. The committee is attempting to fund $500,000 worth of new initiatives. During its last meeting, the committee discussed fees and the request for new fees by department and units. Funding for one-time outlays will be discussed at the next committee meeting. The current budget proposal includes a 2% merit increase. A possibility for saving money was to eliminate or decrease the merit increase, which would have a detrimental effect on faculty morale.
No update is given for AAAC, as the committee hasn’t met since the last Faculty Council meeting.

Faculty have voiced several questions and concerns on the bias reported website recently developed by Barbara Avery’s office. H. Wehbe-Alamah gave an overview of the bias reporting website and the need for it. She stated that the website was launched before it should have been. The website is down until faculty concerns are addressed. The purpose of the website is for students to express concerns with regards to bullying or harassment. The committee behind the website will advise students on how to address these concerns, rather than adjudicating student complaints. A question was raised about why this website is needed, since we already have a student ombudsman who already does what this website is supposed to do. H. Wehbe-Alamah responded that students don’t know about this resource, and the website of more about data collection rather than looking at accusations. Faculty Council members pointed out that Faculty Council needs to discuss this website, how it should be set up, and why there is a need when it seems to duplicate the work of the student ombudsman.

The University of Chicago draft resolution on freedom of expression will be discussed at the next Faculty Council meeting.

C. Douglas will work with Sue Fabbro to draft an interest survey for governing faculty committees. He will update the committee roster to update the ex-officio officers given the new administrator positions that have been created.

C. Douglas will distribute the results of the administrator surveys. Surveys for the Vice Chancellor for Business and Finance and University Chancellor finally went out on Monday, March 7th and will close on Monday, March 14th.

C. Douglas will email the chairs of the standing faculty governing committees to submit their annuals report by April 19th.

The date of the next governing faculty meeting will be set when Suzanne Selig can be contacted.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:05pm