

Faculty Senate Meeting of August 20, 2004

Members Present: Asmare Atalay, Dawit Aberra, Ghyasuddin Ahmed, Kenneth Bernard, Rodger Doss, Lucious Edwards, Ephrem Eyob, Sharon Ferguson-Roberts, Deborah Goodwyn, Reginald Hopkins, Mark Kraemer, Ali Mohamed, James Norman, Steven Ramold, Ago Quaye, Tom Larose, Ben Nwoke, Brian Nerrie, David Shaffer-Gottschalk, Maxine Sample, and Shaukat Siddiqi

Officers of the Faculty Senate

For the position of secretary, Dr. MacDonald was nominated and elected unanimously.

For the position of Parliamentarian, Dr. Shaffer-Gottschalk was appointed.

For the position of Assistant Secretary, a motion was made to delay electing an assistant secretary until more senators had arrived, Dr. Nerrie (in particular) being delayed.

Formation of Nominations and Elections Committee

The executive committee agreed to appoint to the Nominations and Elections Committee the following faculty: Drs. Salame Amr, Deborah Goodwyn, Mark Kraemer, Ago Quaye, and Steven Ramold

Standing Committee Chairs

The NEC collected the following nominations for the standing committee chairmanships:

CAIC: Drs. Nwoke and Doss

Reconciliation: Drs. Bernard and McClenney (in absentia)

JCSAL: Dr. Asmare Atalay

Faculty Policies: Dr. Ali Mohamed

AEC: Dr. Reginald Hopkins

SPC: Drs. Brian Nerrie and Pamela Thomas Buchanan (in absentia)

The NEC agreed that Dr. Kraemer would chair the NEC, which arranged to meet following the FS meeting to determine which names to recommend to the Faculty Senate at its August 27th meeting.

Dr. Nwoke requested direction regarding pending proposals to the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee, and the FS agreed that he should delay forwarding them until the standing committees had been arranged.

University Council Representative

Dr. Dussere was nominated and elected unanimously

Schedule of the Faculty Senate

The FS agreed to meet at 3:00 on the second and fourth Fridays of the month in the Academy of Faculty Development.

Internet and Intranet

Dr. Shaffer-Gottschalk introduced the proposition that the Faculty Senate comment upon policies governing University communication in response to Tuesdays meeting in which faculty were informed that the intranet, not Groupwise, would be their sole direct resource for University-wide communications and that University-wide e-mail must be disseminated through the Provost's office. Provost Thomas was asked to comment, and he explained that the policy change did not curtail communication but re-directed it, and that the intranet (though still a work in progress) allows University-wide communication.

Discussion included the following points: that Faculty Senate elections would require university-wide e-mails, as candidates campaign; that Faculty Senate communications such as the announcements of faculty assemblies would require university-wide e-mails; that announcements of AAUP meetings would require University-wide e-mails; that, in principle, faculty should have access to faculty; that groupwise is more effective than the intranet at bringing information to recipients because the intranet requires active searching for information; that faculty possess the judgment required to discern frivolous from profound e-mail communications; that the intranet is presently unavailable off campus for faculty not using VSU dial-up accounts; that the definition of "official University business" is not necessarily always agreed upon; that censorship may be an issue if faculty must rely upon

University offices to forward e-mail; that the policy change does not seem to save money; that faculty expressed feelings of humiliation and disrespect when groupwise privileges were revoked; that VSU should look at the precedents of other Universities regarding e-mail policies; that the policy change affected the entire University in order to affect a small minority of e-mail abusers; and that the intranet showed potential but presently lacked features and accessibility to make it convenient and effective.

During the discussion, Dr. Thomas noted that work was in progress to improve the intranet, that continued feedback from users would help improve the technology, and he repeated that the intranet allowed University-wide access.

The Faculty Senate agreed that, once the AEC was constituted, it should be charged with identifying what level of communication faculty require so that faculty requirements can be presented to administrators, who can work to achieve them. Further, it was agreed that the Faculty Senate would re-visit the issue, continuing to offer input as the process continues.

Provost's Report

Dr. Thomas noted that the opening conference and the entire first week of the semester had been successful, that more activities had been available this year than last, and that the workshops had been well attended and effective. Discussion followed, in which faculty expressed appreciation of the efficient presentation of the opening conference, with some dissent over whether or not to applaud the absence of a keynote speaker this year. Further, faculty observed that demand for workshops outstripped the supply, recognizing, however, that some workshops will be repeated during the semester. Dr. Thomas noted that new faculty had expressed a desire to have the human resources seminar earlier, and it was suggested that new faculty be asked to arrive prior to the opening conference so that important workshops could be attended and the first week of school could be spent on preparation of classes.

Faculty recruitment, Dr. Thomas noted, had been very good this year, bringing thirty-six new faculty with excellent credentials, though some vacancies remain. He indicated that if enrollment grows, new faculty lines may open, but only if present vacancies are filled. Discussion suggested the possibility that VSU may have a problem with faculty retention.

Enrollment, Dr. Thomas indicated, included over 1000 freshman, of which 850 were validated, and over 200 transfer students. He expected a total enrollment of 5100-5200 students.

Looking forward, Dr. Thomas expressed optimism regarding the coming academic year, noting the high quality of the incoming students and faculty.

FS Budget

Dr. Sample reported that the Faculty Senate now had an account set up, but that it was empty. She said that the Provost had offered to help transfer funds to the account, and she sought his help in formulating a future operating budget for the FS. She stressed the immediacy of action in this regard, citing the effect of early planning upon the success of the FS's major budgetary item: the faculty senate retreat.

Praxis

It was noted that, although faculty teaching freshman math and English course were urged to take the Praxis exams, faculty were unsure that this method best guaranteed that they would understand the test or improve their ability to help students pass the exam. Further, faculty were concerned that taking the test under the required conditions necessitated participation in a study for which they had not volunteered as human subjects.

Dr. Thomas noted that over the summer faculty had been asked to volunteer to take the Praxis, but that only three responded; thus, this fall the action was more strongly urged, though not required. He added that the University was producing few teachers, that students were failing the Praxis in high numbers, and that the only wrong response to those problems was no response.

After some discussion, it was agreed that both the faculty and the Provost shared concern for students' success on the Praxis. It was noted that methods for alleviating the problem had already been taken by some departments: the creation of freshman courses focused on education majors and taught by professors familiar with the Praxis exams;

the thorough familiarity with the Praxis exams of professors who most instruct majors in education; and the purchase and department-wide study of old Praxis exams. It was suggested that faculty response to the problem would be more forthcoming were departments approached to become part of the discussion of how to solve the problem rather than being asked or directed to accomplish tasks which may not immediately seem efficacious.

Looking forward, the Provost expected to discuss the issue with the affected departments, hoping that the discussions would lead to actions that would improve students' performance on the Praxis exams.

Further discussion raised the question of what effect VSU students' failure of a test measuring tenth-grade abilities might have on admission standards, and it was noted that the incoming freshman class's average SAT scores were higher than usual.

At 5:00, the faculty senate agreed to adjourn.

Respectfully submitted,

Gary MacDonald
Secretary, FS