



FACULTY SENATE communications committee NEWSLETTER



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FEBRUARY SENATE MEETING

Executive Committee

Fred Murphy called to the Senate's attention his January 27 letter to Jimmy Feix, then chairing the search for a new football coach. In addition to rehashing the Senate's longstanding objections to athletic budgets and overruns, Fred's letter pointed out that the university's commitments to Coach Roberts lapsed when Roberts resigned. This made it, wrote Fred, a fine time to reexamine the scale and cost of football at Western. At the very least, the new coach should be told that many faculty resent the football program's free-spending habits and apparent immunity to budgetary controls.

Fred also distributed Jimmy Feix' reply. Every interviewee, said Jimmy, was being evaluated on his ability to observe a budget. Feix's concluding pledge: "I make a personal commitment to the time and energy needed to insure that all of the University's sports programs operate within their allocations."

Fred went on to mention the college-wide meetings being held with Jim Tomes to discuss Western's insurance options and costs. Unfortunately, it seems clear that last year's increases were not large enough to prevent rates from rising again for the next contract year.

The faculty-wide general education survey requested by the senate in January is underway, and the results will join the senate's recommendations as part of the material on general education to be considered by the Academic Council.

Fred closed with a report on a recent meeting between the Executive Committee and President Meredith. Two points got special emphasis: 1) Meredith feels student evaluations of teachers are one important indication of performance. Not only can evaluations help faculty improve, but they should be used in hiring and rewarding faculty. 2) Meredith also espouses merit pay. While merit is difficult to determine fairly, he feels Western will become stronger if ways are found to properly reward outstanding performance. Meredith intends that everyone needing improvement will be clearly told what his or her weaknesses are and helped to overcome them. This applies to anyone receiving less than full marks in any area--not just those declared unsatisfactory and denied even the across-the-board minimum raise projected for next year. Those cases will need additional written justification.

Faculty Status and Welfare

Bart White quoted a memo of President Meredith's on faculty raises. For non-classified employees, 5% more money will be available for raises for the coming year. All faculty performing acceptably will get a 2% across-the-board increase. The remaining 3% in the raise pool will be distributed on the basis of performance as determined in the departments and colleges. Colleges are free to add additional guidelines to these basic provisions.

Bart and his committee felt that with recent raises lagging behind the increase in the cost of living and the issue of basic department governance still unresolved, this is not the time for merit distinctions. Besides, the university's criteria for determining merit are anything but uniform, as shown by the "additional guidelines" left unspecified by the president's memo. While the committee did not reject the principle of merit increases, they did deplore present conditions and the arbitrary way merit increases have been handled at Western.

Finally, Bart discussed a letter from Jim Tomes to the Faculty Status and Welfare Committee. After analyzing the costs and benefits of faculty insurance plans across the state, Jim concluded that only Northern and Murray could be considered to have plans superior to Western's.

Additions to the General Education Proposal

With considerable rubbing of hands, the senate turned to its second reading of January's resolution from Academic Affairs on the General Education Task Force proposal now making its rounds on campus.

This document calls for a vastly streamlined lineup of requirements in Basic Skills (math, writing, use of library--ten hours); Western Civilization (six hours); Literary Landmarks (three hours); Logical Thinking (three hours); Natural Sciences (eight hours); Social Sciences (six hours); Foreign Languages/World Cultures (six hours); and Fine Arts (six hours).

Advantages of the Task Force proposal are that it reduces the number of hours in general education to 48 and replaces present general education offerings with a restricted list of truly general introductory courses, many specifically designed for the purpose. The disadvantages of the proposal are identical to its advantages.

At January's meeting, Academic Affairs presented amendments to the Task Force proposal based on a survey of faculty opinion. Appearing now for their second time were suggestions to add courses in 1) "health-nutrition-exercise physiology concepts and practices"; 2) computer literacy; 3) "oral communication concepts and skills"; 4) astronomy. An associated proposal called for the fine arts category to be renamed "Fine Arts and Humanities" and for philosophy and religion courses to be added, although the number of hours required in the category would remain the same. As determined in January, each of these issues was to be considered separately.

Discussion of adding a health requirement eddied and swirled, as such things will. Betty Fulwood, David Dunn, and Chuck Crume discussed the practicalities and philosophy of such an addition. John Russell was against adding anything to a document which is itself still up in the air. Georg Bluhm considered health a practical concern, like driving a car. General education, he said, should include only academic subjects. "What are we doing here?" asked Paul Campbell. "Where will the hours come from?" "Not our problem," responded Ron Veenker. "We're just recommending that health appear somewhere." The proposal to recommend adding health passed by voice vote.

"What is computer literacy?" asked Arvin Vos, opening discussion of that proposed addition to the document. Mostly terminology and hands-on practice with dominant types of software, responded Art Shindhelm, an ardent supporter. Sylvia Pulliam said the course is needed. Students fear computers and will not learn about them on their own. Anyone who doesn't need the course can test out, said Peggy Wright. The rest will find it essential to their education. Running a computer, put in the dogged Professor Bluhm, is like driving a car. Admitting that he is in the twilight of his career, Jim Wesolowski implied that were he a younger man he might take the course himself. It would help him access the information explosion. Computer literacy passed on a show of hands, 26 to 12.

Alton Little wanted to know what was meant by "Oral Communication and Skills." "Speech," it turned out. Joan Krenzin spoke in favor: You could put this in the "Logical Thinking" part of the proposed requirements. No one knows what that means anyway. Kids need speech. It's hard to think of an essential skill more widely slighted. John Russell maintained that both speech and computer literacy were remedial courses--things everyone should learn before coming to the university. Why water down our general education program with remedial courses? That's not what general education should be. "Remedial, nothing!" retorted Wesolowski. Speech, a.k.a. rhetoric, was for centuries "The Queen of the Trivium." Reminded of this, the senate passed speech by a voice vote.

The senators voted without fuss to add astronomy to the natural sciences category.

Two concerns surfaced in the discussion of philosophy and religion: 1) should the senate recommend such a course or courses, and 2) should it/they be tossed in with fine arts? Ron Veenker felt again that positioning the requirement would be up to the Academic Council, but Arvin Vos said that if we meant that, we should say it. He moved to drop all language about where the course would go. We should vote only on whether or not to recommend a course in philosophy or religion. Arvin insisted that the conjunction be or. The proposal carried by voice vote.

Bottom line: the senate now recommends that general education include options in 1) health, 2) computer literacy 3) speech, 4) astronomy, and 5) philosophy or religion. Except for astronomy, which would go into the natural sciences category with no addition of hours, how these courses are handled is to be decided by the Academic Council--supposing it accepts the recommendation.

Might not this recommendation be in conflict with the results of the senate's faculty survey? someone asked. "Of course," replied Chairman Murphy. The two are separate things.

Reaction to Administration Position on Merit Raises

After successfully proposing to suspend the rules and allow action after only one reading, Bart White presented his committee's resolution against merit raises for 1989/90. The proposal had three provisions:

that committees be appointed to list all activities and criteria counting toward merit raises in each department. All department faculty must have a chance to react to and eventually approve each list. Approved reports will go to the deans by the end of fall 1989 to be implemented in 1990/91.

that no quota limiting the number of faculty eligible for merit pay in a department or college or the university as a whole be implied or imposed.

that the President should reconsider his stand on merit increases and recommend instead a 5% across the board raise for all non-classified employees.

Discussion was general and heartfelt. Arvin Vos worried about requiring all departments to set up performance guidelines. Many have already done so. John Russell had two fundamental concerns. No list of criteria for merit will do much good until it's interpreted. Everything depends on how various criteria are weighted. John also argued that the resolution would be ineffective, like similar ones in the past. It's too late to comment on our raises, now that the policy is already set and the raises, for all we know, are decided. The senate needs to get to this issue--and other questions of fiscal policy--before matters come to a head. We merely squander our force by complaining after the fact.

Some senators mentioned that in their colleges or departments merit raises were neither extreme nor badly handled. Sylvia Pulliam answered that in Ogden only 25% of the faculty get merit. This means that 75% will get 2% raises, while the rest are getting 10%.

Glenn Lohr detected a "fundamental error" in the thinking behind the proposed resolution. Why accept the President's assertion that only 5% is available for salaries? Each year we are told that salaries are the university's first priority, yet each year money materializes to cover special events or unbudgeted overruns in athletic expenditures. We should ask for 5% across the board and an additional 3% for merit. This way we'd at least keep pace with the cost of living, while the administration could still reward outstanding performers. If the President is really interested in recognizing merit, let him prove it. Let the university find money for this purpose, just as it annually finds money to keep the football program afloat or cover other unbudgeted expenses.

Following Glenn's speech and a later suggestion from Jim Wesolowski, the resolution on the floor was changed to recommend that "the President allocate an amount sufficient for a 5% across the board (cost of living) pay increase for all non-classified employees performing at an acceptable level, plus an additional 3% for merit raises."

Now we're talking!, exclaimed John Russell. This is what he had meant before when he spoke of general fiscal policy. Western has never had a true budget because every year overruns in athletics and elsewhere are tacitly allowed for. The administration retains control over a large sum of discretionary money that never appears in budgets approved by the regents. John thought there might be a million dollar "float" in our most recent "funny budget." If this money were spent on merit raises we could have a true performance reward. John agreed that this would require a cost of living increase just to keep us where we were last year and then additional money for outstanding service.

Betty Fulwood was reluctant to specify 5% and 3%. Let's ask for 5% across the board and additional money over and above that to fund merit raises, she moved. Others feared her language was not sufficiently concrete, and the amendment failed on voice vote.

This brought the senate back to the 5% across the board, 3% merit amendment, which passed resoundingly.

Still dissatisfied, Paul Campbell proposed a new amendment. He argued for a blanket across-the-board increase for 1989/90 with no merit component, no matter how much money should become available. Even if an additional 8% could be found for salaries, Paul wanted it all distributed across the board. His motion failed.

Discussion flagging at last, the senate adopted the proposal as amended, favoring 1) merit criteria committees in each department, 2) no quotas on merit, and 3) 5% across the board and an additional 3% for merit in 89/90.

Betty Fulwood wanted each departmental senator to circulate a petition supporting the 5%/3% idea. While her plan met with a great deal of sympathy--it would show that faculty support the senate on this issue--it was eventually defeated by practical difficulties. There might not be enough time to get everyone to sign, and a petition with less than full participation might work against the salary resolution. Besides, department head recommendations were due before the petition could possibly be completed.

Arvin Vos raised one final consideration. In view of staff raises for next year (3.5% across the board) he wondered whether faculty were justified in seeking more money for themselves. No one had anything to say on this point.

By now it was approaching 6:00, and the senate adjourned.

Upcoming in March

Jim Wesolowski and the Professional Responsibilities and Concerns Committee will present a report and resolution on part-time teaching at Western.

Arvin Vos and Fiscal Affairs will distribute the annual report on athletic spending.

VIEWPOINTS, ADVERSARIA, TRIVIA

Because of the flap over his contributions to this newsletter and also because of his disagreement with the senate about how the publication was to be funded, Ed Dorman has resigned from the Communications Committee and will no longer take part in putting the newsletter together. That's a shame. Ed's judgment may have been questionable sometimes, but his writing sparkled and 90% of his barbs found the right targets. On a campus that doesn't exactly seethe with intellectual aggressiveness and style, many of us will miss his newsletters a lot more than Ed will miss writing and producing them singlehandedly, as he often did.

As I understand it, primary responsibility for the newsletter will now rotate among the remaining Communications Committee members, including Connie Mills, Chuck Crume, and Tom Noser. Connie will do the March meeting. After that, we'll see.

One thing that would help us enormously would be submissions to this section of the newsletter. If you have anything to say to your colleagues at large, this is the place. Why suffer in silence? We'll distribute your comments as you wrote them to all faculty. As long as it's not downright actionable and you'll sign it, anything you want to say is fine. Submissions for March go to Connie Mills in Special Collections.

Joe Glaser
English