Faculty Affairs Committee
2020-2021
Chair's Report

Committee Members:

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Accomplishments:

1. **Sabbatical leaves: increasing the number of awards per year**

   Much of the work of the FAC in 2020-2021 focused on issues with the awarding of sabbatical leaves. Continuous growth in the overall number of faculty on campus starting in 2012, coupled with the inception of sabbatical-like leaves for nontenure-track resident faculty has resulted in a 50+% increase in the number of eligible faculty from 2012 to 2020, many of whom recently became eligible and, as such, are at the point in their careers where they are most likely to apply for sabbatical. As such, the number of faculty applying for sabbaticals in recent years has increased markedly. However, the number of sabbaticals awarded had been held at a maximum of three sabbatical leaves and one sabbatical-like leave per year within the last few years, creating a situation where faculty effectively had to compete with one another for a limited number leaves based on specific merits of the proposed leaves. As such, the sabbatical leave program became a de facto competition between faculty as opposed to a benefit of employment as a senior faculty member at Indiana University as outlined in ACA-47.

   One key rationale for the maximum of three awards per year appears to have been that the number of awards made in the last ten years or so had been 2-3 per year during a time period where there had been considerable turnover in the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. As such, patterns in the number of leaves were based largely on relatively short-term precedence (perhaps misinterpreted as a reflection of policy) rather than on change in the number of eligible faculty and subsequent demand for these leaves. Indeed, further investigation revealed that although only 2-3 leaves were awarded per year since 2010, larger numbers of leaves were awarded in 2001 (5), 2007 (6), and 2009 (4) based on demand in those years.

   Through discussions with the EVCAA in which we addressed the philosophy of sabbatical leaves as a benefit of academic rank, historical changes in the numbers of sabbatical leaves granted in a given year, overall increases in the number of eligible faculty, and exploring means of mitigating the impact of sabbatical leaves on the faculty

members' academic units and on the finances of the campus, we were able to secure a commitment to increase the number of sabbatical leaves that will be awarded each year in the future.

In-Progress:

1. **Sabbatical leaves: revising the sabbatical leave evaluation process**

   Decisions regarding sabbatical and sabbatical-like leaves are currently based heavily on the evaluation of proposals the Faculty Development and Grants Committee (FDGC). Much like evaluations for grant programs such as the Grants-in-Aid and Summer Faculty Fellowships, the proposals are reviewed by the members and are assigned numerical rankings which are then forwarded to the EVCAA who, in turn, makes the award based on proposal rankings and the number of awards that can be funded.

   Concerns have arisen regarding the appropriateness of this approach to sabbatical leaves which, for many faculty, are considered an entitlement of employment and rank. Although clearly there is a need to ensure that a proposed leave "will significantly enhance the faculty member's capacity to contribute to the objectives of the university" (ACA-47), basing such decisions on a numerical ranking of the applicants relative to one another creates a situation where applicants must compete with one another as opposed to whether the applicant independently meets the criteria for eligibility as presented in the proposal. In such a situation, applicants who are eligible for the leave may be repeated denied the leave based on the rankings of other applicants applying at the same time. Furthermore, given the broad diversity of scholarship and creative activity on our small campus, such rankings may be subject to bias related to the area of scholarship, stylistic presentation in the proposal, etc. Finally, there have been issues with transparency regarding how the award decisions are made. Faculty who are turned down are not necessarily provided with feedback on their proposals so that they can revise them for reapplication the following year or provided with an explanation of why their proposals were rejected but others were granted leaves. Lack of transparency and perceptions of bias (real or not) have unnecessarily strained interpersonal relationships among faculty and between faculty and administration, negatively impacting morale.

   In addition, while the current process of evaluating sabbatical leave proposals focuses on the scholarly merits of the proposals, the impact that a sabbatical leave may have on the faculty member's academic unit appears to have less consideration. Although the sabbatical leave application process does require that the head of the faculty member's academic unit provide a statement concerning adjustments and expenditures that would need to be made, this appears to be a relatively minor component in the evaluation process despite the fact that unit heads (deans or chairs) are often in the best position to assess the impact the leave will have on the academic unit, and can often provide insights into the faculty member's performance that can be helpful in determining whether the

proposed project will meet the goal of improving the faculty member's impact on the mission of the university.

Given the issues above as well as progress regarding the number of sabbaticals that the campus is willing to fund, the Faculty Affairs Committee recommends an overhaul of the sabbatical leave review process that evaluates applications based on three fundamental criteria:

(A) Whether the applicant is eligible for sabbatical leave (e.g., has completed six full years of employment as a full-time faculty member, is not on an improvement plan, minimum four years since last sabbatical leave, etc.).

(B) Whether the faculty member's academic unit be able to meet the instructional needs of the unit while the faculty member is on leave. This would be the responsibility of the faculty member's chair and/or dean.

(C) Whether the sabbatical project proposed by the faculty member will meet the objective of enhancing the faculty member's contributions to the university. This would be the responsibility of the FDGC although some input from the faculty member's unit head would also be beneficial. The FDGC will be responsible for establishing the thresholds for meeting these criteria.

A faculty member who meets all three of these criteria should be granted the requested leave. In the event that there are more applicants that meet all three criteria than can be accommodated, proposals should be prioritized based on factors that would influence the success of the project (e.g., additional funding), fundamental type of project (e.g., scholarship/creative activity vs. teaching) and previous efforts on sabbaticals (e.g., first sabbatical vs. multiple leaves within career, reapplication for a project could not be funded in previous years) rather than the relative merit or importance of one faculty member's project vs. another's.

In addition, we recommend the following to increase the transparency of the application review process:

(A) A full description of the application review process with timetable be posted on the Academic Affairs web site.

(B) An "FAQ" page for applicants be developed that will provide definitive answers long-standing questions on eligibility _before_ a faculty member goes to the effort of writing a proposal (e.g., "Is a tenured faculty member who does not have a course release for research eligible for a sabbatical?", "Can an assistant professor starting their sixth year apply for a sabbatical leave for the following year?").

(C) A web-based application submission be developed so that reviewers in the FDGC can access proposals and supporting materials in a central location as opposed to submitting materials via email.

(D) A letter be issued by the OVCAA to the applicants concerning whether their leave is approved, and in the event it is not approved provide a full, clear rationale as to why it was declined. Supporting information (e.g., a summary of the evaluations by the FDGC membership, the academic unit head, etc.) should accompany this notification.

The Faculty Affairs Committee will continue to work with the FDGC and the OVCAA in order to develop these specific policies, with hope that we can implement them by the next application cycle in Fall 2021.

2. **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Training**

Christina Downey met with the FAC with a proposal to have faculty develop a mandatory program of training in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Dr. Downey provided quantitative evidence that our campus is having increasing difficulty enrolling and retaining students of color, as well as provided some anecdotal evidence of similar problems with recruiting and retaining faculty of color and students who are non-binary in gender and/or non-heteronormative, as well as some inadequate or inappropriate actions taken by current faculty with regards to addressing DEI issues. These are likely consequences of the campus' underperformance in addressing diversity issues and developing a campus climate that is inviting and inclusive for all of our students and faculty. Given the heightened intensity of national conversation regarding issues of race, ethnicity, and gender identity, faculty need to be able to understand these issues fully in order to understand the impact that our interactions with others in our campus community can have on the campus climate and, in turn, how that affects recruitment, retention, and our ability to foster learning.

The FAC enthusiastically supports the development of a mandatory DEI training program for all faculty that will be akin to one already established for IU Kokomo staff. The specifics of the training program will be developed by the faculty rather than imposed by the administration. We will continue to pursue the development and implementation this training in 2021-2022 through advocacy for its acceptance by the Faculty Senate and, assuming the program is approved by that body, in constructing a robust, multifaceted program with numerous different approaches to training in order to ensure faculty have both the ability to meet the goals of the program and accountability for creating a safe, inclusive environment for all members of our campus community.