

October 2, 2008

To: Herb Terry, Chair, BFC Agenda Committee

From: Jonathan Plucker, Chair, Faculty Affairs Committee

Re: Response to the Draft VPFAA Position Description

Per your request, the Faculty Affairs Committee offers the following response to the draft VPFAA position description. In addition to gathering input over e-mail over the past week, FAC discussed the position at our first meeting on Sept. 16th, shortly after the Provost mentioned that the position descriptions would soon be available for comment. That discussion focused on what faculty would like to see in the position description, and a few of the points from that conversation are included below. Finally, I corresponded with David Zaret to get his reactions to some of the major themes/concerns in the feedback (specifically the 2nd and 4th points below), and his responses were helpful and are also mentioned.

1. In general, the committee members had no problem with splitting the current Dean of Faculties position into two offices/positions, as the current office has grown over time to encompass much more than faculty affairs responsibilities. The group also felt that focusing the VPFAA's role more tightly on faculty issues may help the campus move forward on some faculty-related issues that have been stalled for several years. In general, my sense is that the committee members have no deeply-ingrained objections to the idea of splitting the office into two operations, but they have concerns that the most valuable aspects of the office – from their view, advocacy for faculty and, to a lesser extent, P&T – may be lost or weakened in the transition.

2. The traditional Dean of Faculties role of serving as the faculty advocate within the central campus administration isn't emphasized strongly. In reading through the description, that role is there if you read between the lines, but perhaps a line can be added that explicitly states that the VPFAA serves this role. David Zaret replied that a line could be added which states that "the VPFAA serves as an advocate for scholarly excellence, academic freedom, collegiality and faculty governance, helping to maintain these crucial traditions on our campus." Something along those lines would be helpful.

3. In a similar vein, a concern was raised about the VPFAA's role as a mediator of faculty disputes. "Mediation" is specifically mentioned in the first paragraph of the position description, but nowhere else. In the past, various deans of the faculty have viewed the mediation role differently, depending on their comfort level in mediating disputes between faculty and others within the campus community. Perhaps the role of mediator could be strengthened by mentioning it again in the second paragraph. A major reason for including this role within the VPFAA office is that, in lieu of the vice provost performing these functions, the campus faculty grievance system (the Board of Review) could quickly become overwhelmed.

4. The Dean of Faculties currently makes a formal P&T recommendation, yet the position description does not explicitly mention this role. FAC members believe that there is value in having the VPFAA continue to make a recommendation, largely in her/his role as faculty advocate. Indeed, the consensus was that the VPFAA's role as a "decision-maker" ensured that the advocacy function was front-and-center during the P&T process. David Zaret replied that he did not believe that the Provost intends to change the current involvement of the Dean of Faculties after the change to a VPFAA, but given the importance of this role in the eyes of the Committee, this point should be clarified.

5. There were a few comments on various aspects of faculty support, especially for early career faculty (in both tenure-track and NTT positions). Again, much as with the issue of advocacy, the position description alludes to this support role but not specifically state it. Strengthening the description's second paragraph by more strongly emphasizing the VPFAA's responsibilities to design and implement such faculty support would be a good improvement.

6. Finally, there was some discussion about making the VPFAA's relationship to the BFC more explicit, especially the VPFAA's responsibilities for implementing BFC policies. Although I have much less institutional history than others, several FAC and BFC members shared concerns that some deans of the faculties have enforced (for lack of a better word) BFC policies, where others have been more selective in their enforcement of these policies. For that reason, it was suggested that the third sentence in the third paragraph be changed to, "This Vice Provost is responsible for the promulgation and implementation of all governance and academic policies, including those of the Council." It was also suggested to add the following sentence to the third paragraph: "The VPFAA serves ex-officio on the Bloomington Faculty Council and is expected to work effectively with the Council and its Committees."

The Faculty Affairs Committee appreciates having the opportunity to provide feedback during the creation of this important position.