

University Chairs' Meeting
Kilcawley Center Gallery
April 11, 2006
Minutes

I. Announcements

Associate Provost Bege Bowers noted that YSU units that handle complaints will need to provide logs of formal student complaints for the two years prior to the accreditation visit (the time period includes fall semester of 2005, the current semester, and next academic year, but will need to continue to be kept until after the February 2008 site visit). The Higher Learning Commission requires us to track “nontrivial complaints, either academic or nonacademic, made formally in writing, signed by a student, and addressed to and submitted to an organizational officer with the responsibility to handle the complaint” (*Handbook of Accreditation*, p. 8.2-4).

Chairs and deans are asked to maintain a log and file(s) of any formal, written, signed student complaints. Informal, “trivial,” or preliminary complaints that don’t reach the formal-signed-written stage of complaint do not have to be included in the logs. The log should also include descriptions of how and when the complaints were resolved. The President’s Cabinet may ask that we use a standard log form. If so, you will be notified.

E-mails from students may or may not be considered formal complaints, depending on the circumstances. If a student e-mails a complaint but the complaint is resolved informally, it may not rise to the level of a formal complaint. Use your judgment.

Chairs were also reminded to follow the procedure for handling student academic grievances outlined in the *The Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct* (see <http://www.ysu.edu/thecode.pdf>, page 20).

II. Training Session for Chairpersons' Evaluation of Faculty

Interim Associate Provost Nate Ritchey reviewed the evaluation process (see attached *PowerPoint* presentation). Chairs must forward the evaluations to their deans by the end of May. It was mentioned that the Deans’ comments should be circulated to the chairs since a copy of the finished evaluation is no longer sent to the chair.

Ron Chordas, Acting Director of Human Resources, and three panelists then made comments about the evaluation process.

Ron Chordas – Emphasized the use of evaluation as a professional-development tool. Even for senior faculty, the evaluation serves as a source of feedback.

Ikram Khawaja – Emphasized the need to create a positive culture within the department. Stated that the chair’s relationship with faculty prior to the evaluation is an important part of building trust and credibility; chairs need to have conversations with faculty on an on-

going basis. Also emphasized the need for the chair to have a single-minded dedication to the general welfare of the department; the chair cannot be seen as issuing evaluations influenced by the politics of the department.

Robert Beebe – Stated that a pre-evaluation conference is important. He asks faculty to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses. If you and the faculty member generally agree on the strengths and weaknesses, it makes writing the evaluation much easier. He emphasized the need for chairs to do some cheerleading; people are invested in their work at the University, and we should not miss the chance to say positive things. He also noted the reality of the potential political ramifications of negative decisions. Chairs should consult with their deans before negative decisions.

Tom Shipka – Chairs need to be very careful as to the recommendations they make in section VII. Chairs should review past evaluations to see whether faculty have taken the previous recommendations seriously. Faculty need to be held accountable for their use of reassigned time.

Additional discussion questioned whether the ranking “Satisfactory” really was a satisfactory evaluation (i.e., could someone who received satisfactory evaluations in all three categories get promotion or tenure?). There was concern whether “ranking inflation” meant that a ranking of “Satisfactory” was not really satisfactory, and a concern about the failure to use the literal meaning of the word. The need to maintain predictability in the evaluation standards used was also mentioned.

III. Discrimination and Harassment

Jimmy Myers, Director of the Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity, discussed discrimination and harassment procedures. He noted that the University is legally obligated to investigate a charge of discrimination or harassment, regardless of whether the individual bringing the charge has proof. However, the person making the complaint ultimately has the burden of proof in the determination as to whether the charge is valid.

Referring a student to the Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity is an appropriate way for a chair to handle a complaint. He noted that in some cases students want to discuss their situation but do not want to file a formal complaint. One way to handle that situation is to have a discussion with the student in which no personal identifiers are used. After that discussion, the student can decide whether or not to pursue action.

He noted that if the complaint is valid, the University is obligated to make the person “whole.” He also noted the difference between discrimination and harassment. To prove discrimination, it must be shown that a member of a protected group has been treated less favorably than members of other groups. To prove harassment, you need to show that a “reasonable person” would find the behavior offensive.