

Dear Faculty,

Dec. 12, 2017

I am writing in my current role as the transition chair of the LRT revision process.

There has been some apparent miscommunication and misunderstandings about the process and timeline of the current LRT revision process, so it is vital for me to try to clarify this process, and stress several important points. My hope is that we can all be part of a constructive and positive process going forward, and work toward making the new LRT policy the best that it can possibly be.

First, I would like to stress that since we started the revision process in fall of 2015, no LRT revision was ever approved by the faculty senate. Since nothing was ever approved by the faculty senate, there was of course nothing to ever officially be considered by Deans Council, the Provost's office, President's Council, or Board of Trustees. In fact, the only revision to be officially considered within the faculty senate was overwhelmingly shot down (see below).

Second, I would like to stress that the only instruction we received from the Provost's office regarding the content of the LRT revisions was to ensure that the policy reflected what we really value as faculty at SUU, and to ensure that it rewarded those things that we value. It was to be a completely faculty driven process.

To clarify the history of this latest LRT revision process:

Kevin Stein as faculty senate president, was given the charge from the provost to revise our LRT policy to reflect what we value as faculty. As I remember it, his sole desire was for the revised policy to make sure it aligned with, and rewarded, those things that we value as faculty. This was to be completely faculty driven through a faculty senate ad-hoc committee.

We spent our first year investigating and discussing broad ideas and how we could adjust the current policy to fit what we cared about. These discussions took place, with input from an outside consultant, Cathy Trower, and with broad faculty input via an open campus forum.

Fall of 2016, we finalized wording as a committee to incorporate these ideas. I sent out the first completed draft on December 17, 2016 to the entire faculty. I remembered getting all positive feedback. Apparently, I had my rose-colored memory on, because not all was positive. In fact this feedback is what prompted me to try adding a fourth criterion of 'engagement' to the policy.

Here are some of the negative comments on draft of December 2016:

Clarify the use of the term "right to work state". (Term was deleted.)

One person was disappointed that the revision retained the three main criteria (Teaching Excellence, Scholarly/Creative Contribution, and Service).

One person wanted a dramatic increase in the usage of the terms engaged, experiential, and interdisciplinary, and more focus on the University Value Statement.

Purpose of "banking" of scholarly/creative work was questioned.

Also a concern that the revisions may make it too hard to terminate tenure-track faculty members was expressed.

As a result, I had the bright idea for a fourth pillar of 'engagement'. This would have required faculty to simply explain how they were 'engaged' in at least one of the three other criteria (teaching, scholarly/creative, or service). I thought this could motivate faculty to consider how they could follow their passion in one of these three areas. The draft with this additional pillar was the only one that the faculty senate actually reviewed and discussed (in our March meeting). It was resoundingly shot down because senators thought it would add to our workload. ☹

The plan for our next step was to try to incorporate the value of 'engaged, experiential, interdisciplinary' ideas into the teaching, scholarly/creative, and service criteria, instead of having a fourth section of engagement. However, this rewording of the document NEVER occurred. This is another misunderstanding I need to make sure is clarified.

On August 15th before the semester began, Nathan Barker and I attended a meeting with Provost Cook, Associate Provost James Sage, Johnny MacLean, and Steve Barney. A decision was taken that a change to the process would be made to ensure a policy revision was completed by the end of spring semester 2018. And a strict timeline would be followed. There would be two co-chairs of the new committee: Johnny MacLean and Steve Barney. Nathan and I were given the opportunity to suggest names for consideration for the four remaining spots to make up the new LRT revision team. The idea was that a small group could work efficiently, and if they were dedicated to the process, we could get a completely new policy written. A complete rewrite would allow us to break free from the constraints of the current policy. Importantly, they would look at all the feedback from the previous two years, and try to incorporate all our work as they constructed the policy from the ground up. Together, we came up with some suggestions for a diverse group of very good faculty members who we thought would do an excellent job on this committee.

Working through these suggestions, I believe we were very lucky to assemble a very strong, dedicated, and capable group of faculty members for this difficult task. The current faculty task force consists of faculty from different colleges, and at different points in their careers, which should strengthen their input from a variety of points of view. This task force also includes two prior faculty senate presidents, who bring extensive experience from within SUU. It is hard to imagine a better group of people to tackle this challenging job.

Finally, I would like to emphasize the importance of participating in this revision process in a constructive and productive way. It is clear that this policy revision will happen. If we disagree with any idea put forward, it is important to not only make this clear to the task force via feedback on their surveys, in open meetings, or one-on-one, but also vital that we make constructive suggestions for changes or modifications. It is clear they are very active in soliciting feedback, and if you have philosophical or ideological concerns or suggestions, please let them know sooner rather than later so this feedback can become a part of their task force discussions going forward.

Sincerely,

Bruce Howard
Faculty Senate Past-President and LRT revision Transition Chair