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Faculty Affairs Committee Minutes (04-17-08)

Faculty Affairs Committee

Date: 04-17-08

Present: Stacey Parker Aronson, Bart Finzel, Tom Mahoney, Pam Solvie, Timna Wyckoff

Absent: Argie Manolis

The meeting was called to order at 11:00 a.m.

James Van Alstine

Van Alstine began working at UMM in the fall of 1974 in the Geology Discipline. He agreed to speak to us after we asked for volunteers among faculty who had been employed at UMM for more than 15 years. The Faculty Affairs Committee members asked him a series of questions to which he responded.

How has the decision making process evolved at UMM since your arrival in 1974?

According to Van Alstine, the process of decision-making began as a democracy, transitioned to a type of benevolent dictatorship and is now swinging back the other way with committees taking more responsibility. While he expressed frustration that curricular proposals have to go all the way through Campus Assembly, he did acknowledge that he has learned to live with this process and admitted that it creates ties with other divisions. He also expressed frustration that the divisional governance structure has not taken advantage of the power that it has. In addition, the UMM Consultative Committee has also not taken advantage of the power that it has. Generally, the system, as imperfect as it is, works.

How should the Consultative Committee be used?

The Consultative Committee should gather input from faculty/staff and make recommendations. He believes that the all university Consultative Committee uses its power better. Committee work at UMM is usually viewed as a distraction to teaching and research. Service has not been given priority in tenure decisions. The Twin Cities campus views committee work as crucial. For example, the TC Consultative Committee met with the president every other meeting. Unfortunately, he does not think that the UMM Consultative Committee meets with the Chancellor very often if at all.

How does he feel about phased retirement?

He recognizes that people generally phase out of committee participation. He feels that this is unfortunate because it results in a loss of perspective.

Has there been a change in faculty/staff' access to information?

Under Schuman's administration, decisions were made unilaterally, without input. This affected the attitude of the faculty/staff. Imholte's administration was far better at this, perhaps because he came up through the faculty ranks. He recommended that junior faculty get placed on significant all-university committees. Joe Latteral, for example, made important inroads in getting UMM representation on all university committees. With regard to the present administration and the backgrounds of the chief administrators, he is concerned that there may be a disconnect with UMM culture and history and with liberal arts. We are losing an administrative perspective on who we are and what we did.

Val Alstine thinks that the admissions counselors are working hard. Many, in fact, are UMM graduates. Alums are also very supportive of UMM. Students appear to be applying and getting accepted at UMM but are not coming. There seems to be a disconnect between what we do and how we are perceived.

Are long-time employees particularly "bleak and embittered"?

He admits that the change to semesters hurt geology. While he can't do field trips in the fall because students are not yet prepared, it is difficult to do field trips in the spring due to the weather. Therefore, there is less camaraderie among students.

Retirement is not driven by UMM. Students are not as curious and driven as they used to be. He is optimistic about the quality of new faculty.

Are there sufficient mid to late career opportunities for employees?

He thinks that the opportunities are there, but people have to be willing to change and adapt. Unsuccessful people have not been able to make transitions to energize themselves and their expectations.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by

Stacey Parker Aronson

Chair, Faculty Affairs Committee