

Eventually, But Why Not Now?



Paul LaFollette, Editor

*“Eventually, why not now?”
Advertising slogan for Gold Bond Flour*

*“Explicit is better than implicit.”
The Zen of Python Tim Peters*

Over the past few years, the Faculty Senate has asked for various bits of information from the administration. We have also requested clarification of a number of policies. Some of these requests have eventually been granted, and we appreciate that. Some, however, remain in abeyance. It seems to me that the end of this academic year may be an appropriate time to enumerate some of the information we are still missing.

- After several years, we finally received an initial report on faculty diversity, and we appreciate that. It has, however, now been more than a year since we requested that those data be expanded upon and clarified. There was an agreement to do so, but the detailed data have not yet appeared.
- During the April, 2014 Representative Faculty Senate meeting the following three motions were approved:

Recommendation 1:

That the Senate be informed, in writing, of exactly what changes have been made to the 2011 Presidential Guidelines document and receive written clarification that these guidelines are still in effect. That an explanation be made to the Senate as to whatever amendments have been made, and the process, if any, by which faculty were consulted in the making of these amendments. That the current guidelines be immediately posted on Temple’s web page where those guidelines are readily available to all faculty.
That the current guidelines developed by schools and colleges be placed on Temple’s website so that all faculty of our various schools and colleges, can easily find them.

Recommendation 2:

That the President and Provost shall convene a joint committee composed of leadership from the Faculty Senate and the administration, and jointly chaired by representatives of the Faculty Senate and the administration. That this committee would be tasked with evaluating recent amendments, taking into account the considerable diversity among our schools and colleges and their various programs, and recommending any additional changes that seem appropriate.

Recommendation 3:

That under exceptional circumstances where a decision by the President or Provost reverses a uniform, positive recommendation from the departmental/college and dean’s levels, the President and Provost should follow the spirit of the TAUP contract by providing written explanation, at least to the candidate, of the compelling circumstances occasioning this decision. That the written explanation shall be made available to the Faculty Senate Personnel Committee in the event that an appeal on the case is taken to that committee.

Although bits and pieces of these motions have elicited some informal response, I would argue that the spirit of these requests has been largely ignored. As we move further and further away from 2011, when the most recent Presidential Guidelines were developed, in consultation with the faculty, this document becomes increasingly irrelevant. The TAUP and Law School contracts have changed. Current practices have changed. It is time for a new set of Presidential Guidelines to be presented to the Temple community. It is unfair for all pre-tenured faculty that we do not have a current set of such guidelines. Ideally these new guidelines would be developed in accordance with the recommendations outlined in Recommendation 2 above. However, an explicit and binding written statement, even if the result of imposed *fiat* would at least provide fair notice to our faculty as to what they should expect from the process.

- The problems listed in the second bullet point, and other matters as well, are exacerbated by the fact that the most in-aptly named committee at Temple University, the *Standing Committee on Continuous Revision of the Faculty Handbook*, has not met meaningfully since my first term as Secretary of the Senate, nearly a dozen years ago. The *Handbook* was seriously out of date even then. It has kept abreast of neither changes in the TAUP and Law School contracts, nor of changes in day to day practice. The *Handbook* matters. It matters a lot. It is the governing document for those schools and colleges not covered by one of the union contracts. It is also the governing document in our unionized schools and colleges for those issues about which the union contracts are silent. It is high time that we set about the business of fixing this.
- Finally, the contracts negotiated between Temple and the TAUP during the last couple of decades have been “kicking the can down the road” with regards to intellectual property. Contract after contract has included language stating that intellectual property matters will be negotiated later. As far as I am concerned, it is time for “later” to become “now.” Faculty members should not, for instance, be expected to willingly engage in distance learning without knowing how the product of their work may be used. I personally would be loathe to permit making video copies of my lectures with no ability for me to control how that content would be used. Could Temple continue to use such materials after I retire? In absence of contract language, I am guessing “yes.” Even if the material becomes so out-dated that it is an embarrassment to me? Again I suspect the answer is “yes.” We are far too deep into the information age for these matters not to have a negotiated, contractual basis.

I would hope that in the next academic year, the Administration and the Faculty Senate might find some way of beginning jointly to address these vital, unsettled issues. I would urge the Senate to re-affirm this commitment – that we continue to prod the Administration into helping us settle these matters. ♦