**Annual Committee Report**

**Faculty Relations Committee**

**Faculty Senate of Texas Christian University**

**Academic Year 2017-2018**

Prepared by Andrew Ledbetter, Faculty Relations Committee Chair (Spring 2018)

**Committee**

Members of the committee were Marinda Allender, Kendra Bowen, Jill Havens, Emily Herzig, D. Lynn Jackson, Kevin Johnson, Andrew Ledbetter (chair during Spring 2018), Karen Nelson, Sally Packard (absent), David Preston, Greg Stephens (FSEC Liaison), Alyssa Stewart, Dan Williams (chair during Fall 2018)

According to the Bylaws of the Faculty Senate, the purpose of the Faculty Relations Committee (FRC) is to “monitor the effectiveness of University policies on tenure, promotion, and grievance, and serve as liaison with Human Relations on faculty benefits and Compensation” (<http://www.fsn.tcu.edu/Constitution_Bylaws.pdf>, p. 4). The remainder of this document describes our standing charges and specific charges for the academic year 2017-18, with accompanying description of the committee’s actions on each charge. The minutes for each meeting appear in Appendix A.

Standing Charges

1. **Monitor the effectiveness of University policies on tenure, promotion and grievance as set forth in the Faculty and Staff Handbook.**

Over the years, this standing charge seems to serve as an umbrella for special charges addressed by FRC. This year, our examination of the proportion of administration, faculty, and staff frequently involved consideration of the role and status of tenure at TCU. Next year, the committee may want to consider making that question more central to its work, and the data we’ve gathered should help toward that end.

1. **Monitor the effectiveness and outcomes of faculty conflict resolution processes for ensuring due process.**

We did not address this charge specifically this year, but did address concerns about this a couple of years ago. It is probably time for FRC to check in with Human Resources about the university’s philosophy on conflict resolution, as that seems to have shifted over the past decade.

1. **Consult with Human Resources on benefits and compensation.**

For the last three years, FRC has devoted one meeting to a conversation with representatives from Human Resources. We did not hold such a meeting this year, but I did e-mail with Human Resources when it came to our attention that the Camp Fire program, which provided access to childcare resources for TCU employees, was no longer available. We discovered that this was not TCU’s decision, but rather than Camp Fire decided to cease offering this service.

**Special Charges**

1. **Examine ways to increase/improve faculty-trustee relations, including identifying practices of peer and aspirational institutions.**

Our committee addressed this charge by identifying a list of peer and aspirant institutions. We aimed for a representative list rather than an exhaustive one. Our final sample included a mix of Big XII and private universities: Baylor University, Drake University, Duke University, University of Kansas, Northwestern University, University of Oklahoma, Rice University, University of Richmond, Southern Methodist University, University of Texas at Austin, Tulane University, Vanderbilt University, and Wake Forest University. We then reached out to contacts at these universities, such as Faculty Senate chairs, and asked a series of questions. Here is a brief summary of responses; see Appendix B for a more specific breakdown by school.

1. **Do any faculty members sit on the Board of Trustees/Regents or any of its subcommittees?**
* The majority of schools have faculty representation on their Board.
1. **If so, are they voting or advisory members?**
* Responses revealed a roughly even mix of voting versus advisory representation.
1. **How long do the faculty member(s) serve (i.e., term length)?**
* Faculty representatives served 1-3 year terms.
1. **Are they appointed or elected?**
* Faculty representatives were often appointed, with the process typically involving the Faculty Senate in some way.
1. **What is the added value of having a faculty member on the Board?**
* Frequently mentioned were the opportunity for feedback and sharing of perspectives.
1. **Are there other faculty and Board points of contact/interaction?**
* Other points of contact include through presentations, meals, and committee work.
1. **Does the Board come to campus for faculty and/or student interactions?**
* A variety of practices were reported, with some Boards featuring fairly frequent contact and others having little/infrequent contact.

We were encouraged by Chair Legatski’s report that there is movement toward greater contact between the TCU faculty and the Board. In order to facilitate shared governance and to avoid miscommunication among university stakeholders, the Faculty Relations Committee strongly recommends that we establish clear procedures for such contact. We remind the Senate, administration, and Board that the TCU Faculty Senate called for the reinstatement of the Trustee/Faculty Relations Committee (the resolution, which emerged from much work by FRC, passed November 2015). The sense of the Faculty Relations Committee is that having a faculty member on the Board would also be an acceptable, and even preferable, means of achieving effective Board/faculty communication. The data we’ve collected this year suggest doing this would also seem to be a “best practice” enacted by our peers.

As these conversations continue, we hope that the Faculty Senate Executive Committee and other interested stakeholders will use the various information and resources on this topic that FRC has gathered over the last four years.

1. **Examine/review TCU’s research/sabbatical leave policies.**

Similar to the previous special charge, we examined sabbatical practices at peer/aspirant universities (see Appendix C for detailed data), chiefly relying on information available on the Internet and, if information there was ambiguous, following up with a contact at the school. TCU’s current policy provides for the possibility of merited academic leave every 8 years (7 years between leaves). We found that this is highly unusual, with peer/aspirant universities almost universally offering leaves every 7 years (6 years between leaves).

We also found that, generally, peer/aspirant universities offer leaves to tenured faculty for research purposes. TCU’s handbook language is ambiguous on this point, as it describes leaves as being “for fulltime faculty” (tenurable status not mentioned) yet, two sentences later, notes that “Normally, leaves are awarded only to tenured faculty…”

We began some research on the history of this handbook language, and it appears that it has changed somewhat over the years. More work is needed to ascertain the nature of these changes and, if possible, the reasons for them.

Although the question of who is eligible for leaves is a matter for further consideration, what seems quite clear is that TCU offers leaves less frequently than do comparable schools. Research leaves provide faculty members with time to explore new ideas and prepare more ambitious research projects than they can during the regular rhythm of teaching. Likewise, research insights gained during sabbaticals translate into renewed insight and revised syllabi when the faculty member returns to the classroom.

The Vision in Action strategic plan identifies goal #1 as “strengthen academic profile and reputation.” Offering research leaves every seven years seems consistent with that goal.

1. **Examine proportion of administrative, support staff, and faculty among TCU’s workforce and compare with peer and aspirational institutions.**

We were able to partially achieve the first half of this goal. Information from TCU factbooks reveals trends in the composition of TCU employees over time. From this initial look at the data, it appears that the number of tenure/tenure-track faculty has grown at the same rate as the number of administrators (about 120%) over the last 10 years, with full-time non-tenure-track faculty growing even faster over that time period (162%). Complicating the interpretation of this data is uncertainty regarding how Human Resources classifies administrators, versus professional support staff, versus clerical staff, etc. Clarifying this is one possible direction for future investigation by FRC.

1. **Investigation of concerns related to changes in study abroad policies.**

Although this was not listed as a charge at the start of the year, FRC became aware of faculty concerns about changes in protocol at TCU’s Center for International Studies. We invited Sandy Callaghan, Director of the Center, to speak with us about these concerns. Specifically, concerns include (a) the need for two program leaders per trip, (b) the need to exercise responsibility over students from the start to end of a program, (c) limitations on the quantity and nature of time off for faculty during leaves, and (d) limitations on the guests that may accompany faculty, with guests under the age of 18 no longer permitted. These concerns are mainly meant to clarify protocol and to address potential liability concerns. The official description of these changes is awaiting codification, and the FRC hopes that such codification will occur soon so that faculty will have greater clarity regarding policy.

**Recommendations for Special Charges in 2018-19:**

As the FRC Chair consults with FSEC regarding charges for the upcoming academic year, the following seem worthy of particular consideration. Note that this list is probably more than the FRC could accomplish in a single year. They are offered in the spirit of brainstorming possibilities, recognizing that the FSEC may have additional avenues of interest other than these.

* **Faculty-trustee relations.** I hope this will remain concern #1 for this committee. In the view of FRC for the past four years, the lack of formal means of contact between the faculty and the Board represents a grave structural weakness in TCU’s culture; it may not be too strong to say that it is a “ticking time bomb,” such that if TCU hit a point of crisis, lines of communication and a sense of mutual trust have not been built between the two entities. FRC hopes FSEC will continue to push this issue, and we hope that FRC will be able to support those efforts where appropriate.
* **Monitoring the effectiveness of University policies on tenure, promotion and grievance as set forth in the Faculty and Staff Handbook:** This is our first standing charge, yet in my four years on the committee, we have only addressed this obliquely. As we face an upcoming transition in the Provost’s office, it may be a proper time to investigate this matter more directly. A survey of faculty regarding tenure and promotion next year may provide useful data for our incoming Provost in the subsequent year.
* **Resolution to reduce time between research leaves to 7 years.** This is a clear outcome of the data gathered this year and is consistent with Vision in Action goal #1. I recommend passing a resolution toward this end early in the next academic year.
* **Composition of TCU employment, particularly growth in administrators.** This charge was only partially completed this year. Remaining work includes clarifying with Human Resources the nature of employee classifications, and then gathering data on peer/aspirant institutions.
* **Further clarification regarding study abroad.** Although I think the changes initiated by the Center for International Studies are generally understandable, I remain concerned about the matter of guests under the age of 18 and the seeming assumption that faculty must be “on” around the clock during international travel. For example, if a faculty member’s spouse takes their minor child to the same city and is staying in a location apart from the TCU students, when and how is the faculty member allowed to visit with their family who just “happens” to be in the same city? Are greater restrictions placed on faculty visiting family nearby than if the faculty member were to, say, meet with a colleague at a university in the city, or a friend who lives there? There may be some cause for a Title IX concern here as well, as faculty may be disproportionately burdened by gender and family status here (e.g., this policy may create a barrier to study abroad travel for a breastfeeding mother that it does not for a male faculty member who has no children). These issues are worth exploring further, hopefully in a collegial manner with the Center rather than an adversarial one.
* **Utility of testing centers among the colleges.** I admit this is my own concern, and I have not discussed it broadly with the committee. However, it concerns me that TCU relies on testing centers among the different colleges rather than using a single university-wide center, as was called for by the Senate (in 2013, I believe). This is an inefficient approach and one ripe for the possibility of differential policies across the Colleges, which may be a liability exposure; but more pertinent to the faculty perspective, at least in my College, the hours of our testing center are somewhat limited, which may make it difficult to faculty to use our center. It may be useful to gather data on the efficacy of these centers from the perspective of faculty. This may lay the groundwork for informing our new provost of possible changes, if needed, in how we provide such services to our students. One possible avenue would be for FRC and another committee (such as AEC) to explore the multiple facets of this issue.

Gratefully,

Andrew Ledbetter

Faculty Relations Chair, Spring 2018