

Research and Professional Development Committee report for Winter 2008

The committee met five times with almost full attendance. The goal for the quarter was to develop a working list of ideas that if implemented would improve/increase the ability of faculty to pursue research activities. Suggestions offered by the provost in December 2007 formed the foundation for committee members to work with.

Ideas presented at the February 26th meeting of the Academic Senate Executive Committee were: 1) going to semester teaching- this would save 1/3 of the time now spent getting coursework ready. We realize that going to semesters has significant impediments and is not likely to ever happen. 2) offering a year-round University- would allow faculty to better manage when they would teach and pursue research. This has been stated as a University goal for at least the last 15 years. 3) restructuring/reducing the teaching load for all faculty- methods to be worked out but is possible; 4) increase use of distance learning- this increases the workload, but could allow for more flexible time management; and 5) increasing teaching week to include Saturday and expanding the size of the class day- both would allow for flexibility of the teaching schedule to secure significant time blocks to assist creative work time. Both of these were met with universal resistance by the committee members.

A partial list of ideas discussed (after reviewing the June, 2006 College of Engineering Workload Task force report) since are: 1) replace current individual senior project format with a senior project class or team senior projects- would free up time but may impede research activities by removing assistant researchers; 2) hiring graduate students to assist in labs and to grade- part of the goal of getting a better graduate program and will improve research; 3) increase class size to accommodate more students in fewer sections- currently impeded by lack of suitable classrooms; 3) combine similar classes between departments- questions of who leads and who gets credit; 4) use student self-learning procedures to reduce faculty in-class time- ie., create class projects to replace portions of class time; 5) increase RPT cycle to two years- frees up a large amount of time but must work with unions to achieve; and 6) reduce number, size, and meeting frequency of departmental and college committees.

The committee will meet a few more times in Spring and have a report ready mid-May.

Respectfully submitted,

Bill Plummer
Chair