



College Senate Report

October 2022



4 General Topics of Importance

Faculty Handbook

Strategic Framework

Healthcare Plan

Faculty Morale

Faculty Handbook

College Senators noted unknown changes to the Faculty Handbook in July 2022 and most recently in September 2022. A comparison of the Faculty Handbook from August 2021 to now was shared with College Senators and has revealed major changes impacting College faculty that were unknown. In meeting with Interim Dean Tony Marsh, he shared that the Faculty Handbook is “informational and not contractual” and we found such language in the second paragraph of the Faculty Handbook. Such language leaves faculty confused about the purpose of the Faculty Handbook. If the Faculty Handbook is not considered formal policy and is not contractual, then what policy documents are guiding faculty and what documents are considered contractual? Which version of a Faculty Handbook or other policies must faculty follow upon being hired to guide reappointments, promotions, tenure, standards, etc.? Interim Dean Marsh reminded us that the process of handbook changes is not documented, but that there is some unwritten protocol that is followed involving Deans, Provost, legal counsel, and Board of Trustees. He noted that for Chapters 1-3, the Board of Trustees have authority to approve changes. For each chapter associated with each School, the Dean of the School has the authority to make changes. The College Faculty only have authority to make changes to the appendix of Chapter 7 as long as the changes remain compliant with the rest of the handbook.

Faculty Handbook

The Faculty Handbook is a top priority area for College Senators this year and serves as an opportunity for collaboration between faculty and administration to build trust.

Faculty Handbook

The College Senators advocate for the following initial set of recommendations:

- (1) The Provost/Provost's Office should notify faculty promptly when Faculty Handbook changes take place and all changes should be made clearly visible to faculty.
- (2) The Office of Institutional Research, which is the virtual home of the Faculty Handbook's presence, should establish effective documentation standards in disclosing all versions of the handbook and tracking changes with each version.
- (3) Each representative Dean should communicate with faculty what changes are forthcoming and invite faculty input with future changes to the Faculty Handbook.
- (4) Each representative Dean should communicate with their faculty about what is considered contractual policy versus informational documentation in guiding faculty on all matters covered in the Faculty Handbook.
- (5) The Faculty Senate President forming a new ad-hoc committee within the Faculty Senate to look into matters of the Faculty Handbook is a positive sign and the College Senators advocate for quick action to communicate with faculty and to address the challenges that have been made visible. The College Senators advocate for the Faculty Senate to have a standing committee that oversees Faculty Handbook changes and to establish a process where faculty offer feedback and have the ability to propose changes to the Faculty Handbook. Such a committee should advocate for faculty-proposed changes to the Faculty Handbook and make recommendations to Deans and the Provost for proposed changes.

Strategic Framework

College Senators reflected on the Strategic Framework Forums that several College Senators attended and noted the thoughtful conversations that occurred, the interdisciplinary ideas that emerged, and the appreciation of having faculty from across departments and schools present. The College Senators also noted that in addition to open-ended questions guiding the Strategic Framework Forums, there should be more targeted forums on envisioning the future together across key topical areas (e.g. embodying Pro Humanitate at all levels, the role of the university and the responsibility of WFU to the community, cost of higher education, online education, the student experience, the faculty experience, the staff experience, university structures and operations that build trust, embodying the teacher-scholar model, etc.)

Strategic Framework

According to page 4 of the Faculty Handbook, “The Senate has the power, unless otherwise directed by the Board of Trustees, ***to participate in long range planning for the University, to consider other matters pertaining to the general welfare of the University,...***”

Considering the role of the Faculty Senate as described in the Faculty Handbook, the College Senators are advocating for the Faculty Senate, as a representative and elected body of the faculty, to play an active and integral role with the strategic framework. Examples of engaging the Faculty Senate with the strategic framework include:

- (a) the Faculty Senate reviewing draft documents of the Core Planning team and offering feedback (such as in the case of the emergent themes that guide future steps),
- (b) the Faculty Senate playing an integral role with the thematic groups that form,
- (c) the Faculty Senate proposing strategic directions around specific and targeted topics for future forums as well as inviting external experts and internal experts to facilitate conversations in order to minimize inherent biases that exist in how we are envisioning a future WFU vision.

The College Senators will continue to discuss this topic in the future.

Health Insurance Plan

College Senators noted that many links on the HR website relating to the new healthcare program are broken and that increases in healthcare premiums is not good (particularly when considering that inflation hovers around 10% and faculty salary increases were in the neighborhood of 2-4%.)

The College Senators advocate for comparative data from other schools to be part of healthcare plan efforts, for consideration of graded increases so lower-paid university employees can actually afford health insurance, for using government COVID funds to help defray healthcare costs (as appropriate), and for incremental health insurance premiums to be considered.

Faculty Morale

College Senators expressed concern about low faculty morale (most certainly in the College) and a need to create more of a community feeling and bringing faculty together.

College Senators will continue to think about this topic and share ideas.