Faculty input regarding activities in which the University expects them to participate in

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Faculty input regarding activities in which the University expects them to participate in.

Submitted by: Jim Braselton
10/29/2016

Question:

Dear Senators,

Why weren't the faculty and staff members of the academic community affected by the abrupt change in the fall graduation schedule consulted about possible changes in the graduation schedule and their ramifications before those scheduling changes were made?

According to the Faculty Handbook 111.03,

"All Administrators

Georgia Southern’s policy is that planning is an integral part of each administrator’s job. Each vice president, dean, director, and department chair is responsible for the development, documentation, implementation, and measurement of the plans necessary to achieve the mission and objectives of their area of responsibility.

Each administrator is responsible for planning the work activities of the unit and for making certain that all affected employees understand and are committed to those plans. Communication of plans must also extend to all those departments that are affected by the plans or must provide support for their implementation. Documentation is an essential element of plan preparation. Each vice president is responsible for
making certain that appropriate planning work has taken place in each college or
department within his/her division."

The graduation ceremony and/or ceremonies is/are a *MAJOR* "work activity" of
Student Affairs that involves the participation and cooperation of a considerable number
of faculty and staff from Student Affairs as well as many other units from throughout the
University. For example, faculty are expected to participate in the graduation ceremony
as stated at the bottom of their academic contract below their signature.

If faculty (and other members of the academic community) are expected to be
participants in the graduation ceremonies, why was the important *POLICY* 111.03 not
followed in the making of a hasty decision that does not have considered the numerous
members of the University community affected by this abrupt change?

When reading the University's announcement, observing social media, and seeing local
news media, the University states that the decision to change the graduation was based
upon a petition signed by a few students that was then submitted to Student Affairs by
the Student Government Association (SGA). The fact that the University made a hasty
decision based on the responses of a few students who responded to an SGA petition
and ignored or made another exception to its own policy so quickly in making the
sudden change makes the question more relevant--why weren't others involved in this
decision process?

Of course, if faculty are not expected to be participants in graduation ceremonies and
the question no longer affects faculty and is relevant to Faculty Senate, the question is
moot for Faculty Senate and can be ignored.

Respectfully,

Rationale:

All faculty should be concerned when major changes involving activities expect their
input are changed. In this case, a major change in an activity that involves significant
faculty support was made without consulting faculty but rather based on a small sample
of students who responded to a survey. Note: Our faculty representative, the
moderator, told me "You're free to file an RFI, but I think this issue is a waste of time."
Minutes 11-28-2016: This was about the change of the graduation ceremony, which was already addressed at the last Senate meeting.

Minutes: 10-31-2016: [Secretary's Note: Some voices cannot be heard at this point in the recording, but a question was asked about moving December commencement outside to Paulson Stadium.]

Provost Bartels said that one of the primary drivers for it was logistics. We have too few seats in Hanner because of the success of our graduation numbers to accommodate all of the people who need and want to be part of the graduation ceremony, even with severe restrictions, and even with more than three graduation ceremonies. The Student Government Association did some surveying, and had several thousand responses requesting that the ceremony be moved, so that was the basis for the decision by the President’s Cabinet and the President.

Janice Steirn (CLASS) noted that Hanner would still serve as a rain location, and that in the event of needing to move to Hanner then the students would need tickets for their guests and would be limited to four. She asked if students would be told to go ahead and choose their four or get their tickets as a contingency plan, because they won’t be able to do it at the last minute.

Provost Bartels said they would, and that it is the same process as used in May. She noted that those without tickets could use multiple places where they can observe the ceremony, such as Nessmith-Lane and the Union, then join up for celebration afterwards. She noted it is not unusual for some families to want 25 people as guests, and that a limit of 4 was not popular. She gave credit here to what VP Thompson and her people in Student Affairs have done over the years, but we got to the point where even parents weren’t able to get seats. We have become a victim of our own success, and breaking into seven/eight different conferrals would not solve the problem either and would cost the University a significant amount of money that would then not be available for the other things. [Secretary’s Note: Again, speakers cannot be heard, but a question was asked about why faculty were not consulted about this move of the ceremony.] Moderator Flynn said it never would have occurred to him that he should be asked about this decision, that since the day hasn’t changed he can’t see how this would inconvenience any faculty, and didn’t really see what there was to discuss about
it. Rob Pirro (CLASS) said he thought it would have been “smart institutionally to include the faculty” in the discussion because they are obligated to attend this ceremony and it is a different, longer ceremony, and at just the last Senate meeting we had had questions about how faculty weren’t getting grades in on time. This may cause more problems in that respect. But he called this a “process question,” and faculty discussion would have avoided “a needless alienation of some faculty members.” He had heard from many that they felt left out.

Mark Edwards (COSM) did not mind not being asked about the change, but thought the valid reasons for it should have been announced at the same time the change was, but there was no explanation in the announcement email. Moderator Flynn recalled that the question of tickets was mentioned, and there was a story about it in the George-Anne. Edwards responded that the announcement had been two weeks ago and had not mentioned reasons.

[Secretary’s Note: Again, a portion of the recording is inaudible, but a question was asked about commencement speakers.]

Provost Bartels said no official invitations to speakers had yet been given. Moderator Flynn thought faculty should have input on choosing graduation speakers. Provost Bartels noted that “we do not pay our speakers to come, so all those great ideas you have about wonderful people that would speak, would be out of our league to probably invite.”