Minutes of the meeting of April 7, 1998
Student Commons Forum


1. The meeting was called to order at 4:05 pm by President Terry Oggel. The minutes of the March 4 meeting were approved as distributed, with a request to the Secretary to provide additional details of President Trani's responses to questions.

2. There being no additional nominations from the floor, the election of officers for 1998-99 was conducted by secret ballot. The results were:
   - President: Terry Oggel
   - Vice president: George Moxley
   - Secretary: Neil Henry
   - MCV Campus Representative: Wesley Poyner
   - Academic Campus Representative: Sue Brilliant

3. Jan Lewis reported for the Academic Support Services Committee.
   - A mediation program for settling faculty disputes without beginning a formal grievance procedure has been set up, and a brochure announcing it has been sent to all faculty. A training program for volunteer mediators will be held in May.
   - The library budget issue was the subject of a memorandum written by the library advisory committee of the College of Humanities and Sciences and endorsed by the Faculty Council of the College. The Academic Support Services Committee distributed a report that summarized ULS needs and urged Senators to seek support for ULS in the Executive Budget Committee.

4. John Guthmiller reported on legislative relations activities. He announced that
Senator John Watkins (Chesterfield-Richmond) would be visiting the campus on April 24 as a guest of the Faculty Senate.

5. Mike Spinelli presented the Faculty Transition Incentive Plan (FTIP) which had been approved by the task force he chaired. He pointed out that several modifications had been incorporated as a result of the open hearings the task force had held. Lucy Harvie moved that the Faculty Senate approve the report and transmit the FTIP to the Provost.

Discussion centered on two points:
- Collateral faculty are not covered by the document. There was general agreement that the needs of long-term collateral faculty must be addressed in a comprehensive manner, and that the Faculty Senate in 1998-99 should report on the commitment of the University to collateral faculty.
- Some details of the plans, such as the three-year limit on phased-in retirement agreements, may prove to be counter-productive.

The motion to approve the FTIP passed by voice vote.

6. Kathleen Cauley reported that the Task Force on Year-round operations would present its final report in May. The report is now available.

7. Charles Byles reported that the Faculty Senate sponsored mentoring program would begin with a group of 17 students, and would continue with a new assignment of students to volunteer mentors in the fall. Mentors have been drawn from faculty, staff, administration and the Board of Visitors. A reception on April 24 will mark the start of the pilot program.

8. Sue Brilliant announced that she and Neil Henry were circulating a petition that would amend the Bylaws of the School of Graduate Studies to enlarge the University Graduate Council. Schools would have 1, 2 or 3 members on the UGC depending on the number of graduate faculty in the School. This amendment is consistent with motions adopted by the Faculty Senate in 1996-97. The Senate endorsed the proposal by voice vote.

9. Phil Olds introduced Vice President for Finance and Administration Paul Timmreck, who began by summarizing the University's standing with respect to this year's legislative actions. The faculty salary increases should amount to 5.6% in each year of the biennium. The capital spending endorsements for the new Life Sciences building and the renovation of Sanger Hall are in recognition of our needs. Renovation of other facilities will be a high priority in years to come.

Timmreck noted that as the car tax reimbursement is phased in and as money is allocated for much-needed renovation of public school facilities around the state, the percentage of the state budget spent on higher education will likely decline from its relatively low figure of 13%. In order to justify continued state support
for our needs we will have to put before legislators and administrators hard data on the cost of education: how much and where the money is spent. His office has been studying the cost of education at VCU over the past decade, and reports that when inflation is taken into account the cost per FTE student has actually decreased by approximately 4%.

Some statistical comparisons of enrollments and staffing at VCU from fiscal year 1989 to 1998:

- FTE enrollments up 8.5%
- FTE staffing for E&G programs down 13.6%
  - Instructional faculty down 6.5%
  - Classified and administrative faculty down 20.4% (partly due to privatization of services)
- Number of physicians down 14%

The Base Budget Review process, which is now underway, has been designed to produce such data at the program level. Note that the reporting forms (distributed to senators in the call to meeting) call for a diverse set of performance measures rather than a single summary; the administration recognizes that all programs are not the same either in their inputs or outputs. While the process is behind schedule (due to unfilled vacancies in the Budget Office!), it has been endorsed by the Board of Visitors and will probably take four years to become a routine part of the University's system.

Discussion included a question about whether the quantitative measures of performance such as degrees awarded and FTE credit hours might not lead to devaluation of the quality of performance. The reply made clear that quality matters a great deal, but that evidence of the quality of our educational outputs must be presented in an equally rigorous manner if it is to be effective in winning public support of our missions.

10. The meeting adjourned at 6:00 pm.