AS&E Executive Committee – Annual Report 2017-2018

This has been a year of many changes. The Faculty Senate is now a functional decision-making body, which is changing how University policies are developed, from a per-school activity to a University-wide activity. The budgetary crisis has affected many aspects of faculty life in AS&E. Academic innovations were proposed in revising the Summer Session, in allowing SOE co-operative internships, and in instituting a truly cross-school Master of Science in Sustainable Water Management. The inclusion of the SMFA as part of A&S has required many changes and adjustments to governance and bylaws. The FRAC reorganization has placed a strain on how the faculty governs AS&E versus the separate entities of A&S and SOE. Thus the AS&E Executive Committee – hereafter called “the Exec” – faced many challenges in preserving and increasing the effectiveness of faculty governance.

The AS&E Budget Crisis
In 2017, the budget crisis was made apparent by the cessation of providing lunch at AS&E meetings. This symbolic act underscores how profoundly the budget crisis affects the academic mission of the University. Attendance at many AS&E meetings is low now, and there are concerns about meeting the bylaws-determined quorum for AS&E decision making in the future. The Exec plans in the future – as permitted under a previous bylaws change – to make a vote electronic if a quorum is not achieved at an AS&E meeting. The perception of the Exec is that the budget crisis is not a short-term problem and has the potential to seriously hamper our academic mission. Therefore, the Exec plans to host a faculty forum in Fall 2018 to discuss the budget crisis and its effects upon our academic mission.

Academic Innovations
The budget crisis came at the same time as several academic innovations, including revitalization and restructuring of the Tufts Summer Session, and a proposal to offer co-operative internships in the School of Engineering. The Tufts Summer Program this summer will include several experimental provisions, including the ability to offer courses over the break between the old summer session ending and the beginning of classes in September. Likewise, the department of Biomedical Engineering in the School of Engineering will be allowed to institute a “co-operative internship program” that places students in non-academic research facilities full-time for a term during their undergraduate education.

The TIE MS, the College of Special Studies, and the Faculty Senate
The Tufts Institute for the Environment (TIE) proposed Master of Science in Sustainable Water Management broke new ground in several ways. First, the MS program has broad participation from several schools, and is governed by a cross-school governance committee. Second, the original proposal was for the TIE MS to be awarded by a body independent of the schools: the College of Special Studies (CSS). This led to many complexities, including that the College of Special Studies was not – at the time – authorized to grant degrees, and was solely handling cross-registration of SMFA and non-degree students. Independent of AS&E, the Faculty Senate ruled that the CSS cannot grant degrees, and that the TIE MS has to be granted by a degree-granting body of the Senate already authorized to grant MS degrees. The Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy became the sponsor for this program.

Welcoming the SMFA
The inclusion of the School of the Museum of Fine Arts as a part of Arts and Sciences has required adjustments to the bylaws to provide adequate representation to the SMFA. As a result of a motion this
year, the SMFA acquired guaranteed representation on the AS&E Budget and Priorities Committee. This is just a first step and we expect that further adjustments will be forthcoming. Independently, the SMFA acquired representation on the Tufts University Faculty Senate.

Faculty Governance of the Academic Calendar
This year, the administration made an ad-hoc change to the academic calendar that added several new morning blocks to the block schedule without the approval of the faculty. The Exec reminds the administration that the academic calendar is and remains the purview of the faculty. The faculty supported this change in a vote of AS&E, but in the future, we would appreciate conformance to the standard process for calendar changes, which includes approval by the Educational Policy Committee and the faculty of AS&E.

The Program Development and Approval Committee (PDAC)
The budget crisis has had profound effects across AS&E, including a scramble to build new MS programs to enhance income, as well as the institution of new mechanisms to streamline new program development, including the AS&E Program Development and Approval Committee (PDAC). The Exec met with Kevin Dunn to understand the role of the PDAC and to ensure that the curricula remain the purview of the faculty. In this meeting, the role of the PDAC was defined as providing assistance and support, keeping faculty informed of new programs, and making suggestions that improve marketability. Thus, the Exec concluded that the PDAC as defined now does not conflict with healthy faculty governance.

Rethinking Faculty Representation in Student Affairs
In years before 2016-2017, the Exec discussed the gaps in faculty oversight of student programs, including the lack of coherent faculty oversight of student services. In 2016-2017, the Exec considered how to handle the fact that much more oversight is needed for student affairs than is currently provided by the Committee on Student Life. A proposal was developed that would split the CSL into a judiciary component “The Committee on Student Rights and Responsibilities” as well as a civic policy component “The Committee on the Student Experience”, that covers other issues including student facilities, co-curricular activities, and living spaces.

The Exec reconsidered this 2016-2017 proposal, rethought parts of it, and made a very similar counter proposal to the CSL. The 2017-2018 CSL was not ready to consider such a split due to other responsibilities (including a comprehensive review of the code of conduct), and the Exec did not proceed further with this proposal.

Later, the Exec considered a different approach: leave the CSL alone and instead institute a completely separate committee on “Advising and Co-Curricular Learning” that will oversee relationships between students and faculty outside the classroom. This charge has no overlap with the existing charge for the CSL and can be developed in isolation. This committee’s charge is being developed and will be discussed in 2018-2019.

Independently, the CSL came to the conclusion – as a result of their review of disciplinary process – that the CSL needs to be reorganized to address needs in this process. This will be a topic for discussion in the coming year.
Rethinking FRAC
Late in 2017-2018, several changes in the Faculty Research and Awards Committee (FRAC) necessitated changes in the bylaws that the AS&E bylaws were not equipped to handle easily. The provost’s funding to FRAC ended, leaving it with much less money than before. In concert, Dean Qu of SOE announced his intent not to contribute to FRAC, and suggested that the SOE should no longer participate in FRAC. Later, Dean Glaser of A&S agreed to increase the A&S contribution to FRAC to better serve the A&S population.

Since FRAC is an AS&E committee, removing the SOE would necessitate re-organizing FRAC as an A&S committee. This re-organization proved problematic because there are no bylaws for A&S separate from those of AS&E. Thus, there is no way for A&S to separate and run FRAC by itself without having A&S bylaws, and any changes to FRAC as an AS&E committee would – in principle – require a vote of the AS&E. At this date, this problem remains and will have to be solved in 2018-2019. One possible solution is to establish FRAC as a committee within LA& J, with participation from the graduate school.

Faculty Support and Attrition
The Exec is concerned about faculty salaries and attrition, as well as lack of faculty services and lack of price control over services supposedly targeted at faculty, including on-campus child care, which recently raised rates by 30%.

The HERI survey of faculty satisfaction was presented to the Exec by Dawn Terkla, Associate Provost of Institutional Research. This survey included comparisons with peer institutions, and indicated other indications of faculty unhappiness, including that a large percentage of faculty have considered leaving Tufts in the last five years. The Exec attributes this to several factors, including paying lateral hires substantively more than their existing Tufts counterparts, and failure to adjust salaries to compensate for that bias.

Spurred by the sudden cancelation of leases on temporary faculty housing, the Work-Life Balance Committee studied faculty housing support at peer institutions, and found Tufts to be below average in many respects. This report was provided to the AS&E faculty, which moved and unanimously passed a resolution in support of the findings of the study.

Ongoing Work
It was a very busy year for the Exec but there is much more to do. Other committee bylaws need to be revised for SMFA inclusion, and other ongoing issues include reorganizing FRAC and creating a committee to oversee faculty involvement with students outside classes. As well, several initiatives have not yet been discussed, including a proposal to adjust drop and withdrawal dates to lower student stress, proposed by the Mental Health Task force.