



2012

Newsletter, December 2012

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Recommended Citation

Matthews, Jim and Sainsbury, Alison, "Newsletter, December 2012" (2012). *Chapter Activities*. Paper 13.
http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/iwuaaup_act/13

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Illinois Wesleyan Chapter of the AAUP

DECEMBER 7, 2012

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 2, NUMBER 2

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Chapter website:

<http://www.iwu.edu/~iwuaaup>

Après la visite

By James Matthews

The process of making decisions at IWU was once described to me before I came to campus as being rooted in a desire to develop consensus on campus before moving ahead with an initiative. I was told that it was important to win the approval of as many faculty members as possible; it was the intention to have as much buy in as possible. Once on campus, I quickly learned that the only consensus to be found was a general loathing of the top-down management style then in place. Decision-making was slow and deliberate and necessitated much discussion in faculty meetings. I do not suggest we return to those days; I remember our salaries were slow and deliberate as well. What does worry me is that if data collection, evaluation, and reporting are going to increase to the speed of a microchip, will we as faculty be able to keep up?

Two administrations later, as the self-study report *Transitions, Reflection, Renewal* makes clear, we are in a different place. Faculty participation in governance has increased since those bleak days of the late '80's. Faculty and staff are now witness to, if not full participants in major decisions of the institution and we anticipate with somewhat shaky confidence no repeat of the retiree health benefit "surprise." We have survived a visit from representatives of the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). We have been informed we are re-accredited for another ten years.

This is not, however, the time to wipe our foreheads and say, "Whew, they've gone. We're good for another ten years." There are structural changes coming in January to the re-accreditation process that faculty will be foolish to overlook. The intent of the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) is to eliminate these mad efforts at the assembling of data once a decade, usually two or three years before the Visiting Team arrives on campus. What the HLC seeks is a more routinized reporting of data in either of the two new "pathways" it proposes for future re-accreditation. IWU has not yet chosen which pathway to follow, but it appears likely that we will follow the "standard" pathway that calls for a Team Visit in year four, regular submission of certain data in years 5-9 and then another visit in year 10. The University will continue to be evaluated according to pre-determined criteria set by the HLC and we will need to make an argument that we have met each criterion.

Much of the data that informed *Transition, Reflection, and Renewal* came from Michael Thompson's office, as well it should. Other data came from surveys developed by the steering committee and from interviews with representatives of various campus communities. The committee spent more than a year just sifting through this data to identify strengths and challenges for each criterion before formulating recommendations. Now, with more reporting going on more often, will there be enough time for appropriate evaluation? More importantly, what role will faculty play in assessing the data reported each year? What role does faculty want to play in assessing this data?

The reality of increased participation in governance is that it requires an investment of more faculty time, something we all hold dear. Re-energized assessment efforts take time in department, program, or school meetings. Now let's think about hosting two Team Visits per decade, as well as participating in the discussion of, if

not the collection of, data reported on a routine basis. More time. What, if anything, will we have to give up in order to ensure faculty voices are heard?

The positive I see in this new re-accreditation process is the opportunity for the entire campus community (if it pays attention) to remain more aware of the successes and the challenges facing the institution. Instead of becoming aware of shortcomings in our assessment activity, for example once every ten years, we have the chance to track that information much more regularly. Ignoring this increased opportunity may lead to indifference, reducing the actual decision process to a relatively few individuals. I know some faculty around the country will adopt an attitude of "let the administration gather and report this data; we'll pop our heads up when the Team is here." This is an example of a faculty that will surely decrease its role in governance. I would argue that is not what we want at IWU.

Reports we make to the HLC, whether once a decade or annually are available to everyone. I suggest that, independently of whatever formal role the administration affords faculty, the AAUP chapter make a point of reviewing these reports annually and organizing opportunities for faculty to discuss them in open meetings. I can't imagine anything in which I would more willingly invest my precious time than ongoing conversations organized by faculty for faculty where we can discuss from readily available information the health and vitality of IWU. Not to achieve consensus, but to offer creative if often cautious voices to our community as to how to address concerns raised. To remind the community that we are here to stay, that we care about the institution as much as anyone, and that we have the minds and the experience to make significant contributions to the governance of the University.

What I Learned about Faculty Governance from Larry Stout

By Alison Sainsbury

When I was a young faculty member first coming to meetings of the entire faculty, Larry used to drive me crazy. In faculty meetings he would raise questions about what I considered mere detail, ask for clarification of minor points. I didn't understand, then, that Larry's questioning, his insistence that even the least of the details be explained and justified, was not unlike my own attention to language—how I spend months worrying, for example, the sound or rhythm of a closing sentence or line until I have satisfied myself that it is right.

I grew to understand the more important thing: Larry's sharpness kept us all honest—faculty, committees, administration. In fact, I grew to rely on it. And when Larry got sick, when he was no longer there at faculty meetings, I missed him and I missed what he did for us. I missed his insistence that we get it right and that we demonstrate to his satisfaction—in a kind of public "proof"—that it was right, even down to the smallest details. Because as a faculty we need to question and we need to prove: to keep us sharp, to keep us honest.

Upcoming Events

January 22. "Exploring Open Access" led by Stephanie Davis-Kahl. At 4pm in the Henning Room.

February 12. Reading Group Meeting: Michelle A. Massé and Katie J. Hogan (eds). *Over Ten Million Served. Gendered Service in Language and Literature Workplaces.* SUNY Press. 2010. Please contact Meghan Burke (mburke@iwu.edu) if you want to participate. At 4pm, location TBA.

February 19. A discussion of the university's proposed intellectual property policy led by Stephanie Davis-Kahl. At 4pm in the Henning Room.

February 25. Non-Org presentation: From Complaint to Case to Investigation: Committee A by Joerg Tiede. At 12 in the Davidson Room.

*Joining the
AAUP:*

<http://www.aaup.org>