

Office of the Provost: Updates to Faculty

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Office of the Provost



August 4, 2020

Dear Faculty Colleagues,

Good afternoon, I hope you are each safe, well, and managing through this unprecedented pandemic. As President Frederick indicated in his communication to the Howard University Community earlier today, the University's revised Re-opening Plan has been accepted for implementation by the District of Columbia Department of Planning. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many faculty, staff, students and administrators who worked tirelessly to consider the significant implications of the pandemic,

application of guidance from the CDC and DC Department of Health, and concerns of colleagues and students to create our plan. It was reassuring to hear from District of Columbia officials that the Howard University plan was thorough, and addressed complex issues that are constantly changing, and necessitating flexibility, while prioritizing safety.

In the midst of this pandemic, and our earnest efforts to plan for a complicated fall semester, I am also in receipt of an update to faculty distributed by Dr. Marcus Alfred, Chair of the Faculty Senate. Under ordinary circumstances, I would typically ignore the continued pattern of half-truths, and misinformation. However, these are not ordinary circumstances, and we see on a broad scale how deceptive communications can have an outsized negative impact. In regard to the Faculty Grievance Commission (FGC), the revised 2019 Faculty Handbook modified the process by which members of the FGC would be elected. The new process indicates; “The Faculty Grievance Commission (FGC) consists of one representative from each of the schools and colleges (except the Graduate School), elected at-large by the faculty of the respective schools and colleges.....The FGC shall annually elect a chair from among its current members. The chair shall serve as the presiding officer of meetings of the FGC.” The Handbook continues; “Members of the FGC and of the Hearing List shall receive appropriate training regarding the proper procedures for conducting hearings.”

In June, 2020, Dr. Alfred submitted a proposed budget suggesting the funding of five (Administrative Law judges) to provide 15 hours of training to the members of the Faculty Grievance Commission at a cost of \$15,750. I indicated in my response to him “It is not clear why the proposed training should require this additional level of depth proposed, nor these particular individuals to provide it.”

Members of the FGC were in concurrence as several noted “ 15 hours of training was considered excessive by the faculty members at the meeting.” Dr. Brian Laurence, elected Chair of the FGC further noted that “...Fifteen hours is excessive and unreasonable by any measure considering what our purpose is.”

To assist in moving the process forward, the Office of the Provost contacted 4 other academic institutions to inquire regarding their Faculty Grievance process, as well as inquiry regarding training for their members. The institutions included George Washington University, American University, Tulane University, and North Carolina State University. In summary,

training at each of these institutions is provided by internal resources including current and former members (including Chairs) of the Faculty Grievance group, staff in the Office of General Counsel, Office of the Provost, and Faculty Senate. Regardless of who provides the training, it ranged in duration from 1 -3 hours **total**. The topics covered included; an overview of the process, the role of a Grievance Commission Member, the role of serving as a Chair, specifics as to jurisdictional issues for grievances or petitions for non-reappointment, due process, conflicts of interest, the sequence of events in a hearing, closed session and final recommendation(s) to the President.

As Provost, I approved \$4,000 for the development and implementation of training for the FGC, in areas requested by FGC members, and consistent with sister institutions. While current FGC faculty colleagues (including a trained trial attorney, and former FGC Chair) offered to provide the training, I further indicated to Dr. Alfred that the FGC and/or Faculty Senate select the experts to provide the training. **To be clear, the FGC has indicated that they will require no more than 2-3 hours of training to conduct their work.** I am quite frankly baffled why the Faculty Senate Chair has continued to delay, obfuscate, and serve as an impediment to the reasonable training of FGC members, for a reasonable duration of time, and at a reasonable cost to the institution. This coming particularly at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic is draining the resources of institutions across the country, and the University is making every effort to save jobs of staff and faculty. I continue to be disappointed with the rhetoric and misinformation that is often presented by Dr. Alfred. However, unnecessarily delaying action regarding grievance matters that may impact the careers of colleagues is unconscionable and disturbing. We have real work to do to improve the University, support faculty and staff, and help students achieve their academic dreams. I will continue to work on behalf of the faculty, and in the best interest of the University, despite this ongoing cacophony of misguided behavior. It is not my place to tell the Faculty Senate Chair how to conduct his business, I can only pray that Dr. Alfred will eventually also act honestly, and in the best interest of the faculty and the University.

Excellence in Truth and Service

Anthony K. Wutoh, Ph.D., R.Ph.
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