The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) finds the idea of meaningful faculty shared governance of a university paramount. For more than 100 years, we find it in our foundational documents; this has been an historical topic throughout the country.

Where do we need shared decision making? Where the rubber meets the road for faculty it is on personnel decisions, selection of administrators, budget prep, curriculum, and the classroom.

But faculty seem to feel this lacking. For example, in our recent AAUP COVID-19 survey, we asked: “Please indicate your level of satisfaction with UCO about the following statements -Consultation with faculty as shared decisionmakers for fall planning.” Of the 348 faculty who answered this survey’s question, only 81 (23%) of the faculty felt “very satisfied” or “satisfied.” Most (200, or 59%) felt either “generally” or “very dissatisfied.”

A time for collaboration

We fully understand how COVID-19 threw all of us for a loop. But, since March, we had some time and we still do. This recent pandemic would have been a great opportunity to collaborate and tackle the intellectual complexity needed to combat it.

Survey results indicate faculty concerned about UCO’s response to COVID-19

Half of the UCO faculty surveyed this summer felt that UCO was not adequately prepared for the start of the fall semester due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The UCO chapter of AAUP conducted a survey this summer regarding COVID-19 and how the University is responding to the pandemic. As of July 20, 2020, 348 faculty members had responded to the survey. Survey results indicate faculty thought some areas were successful and other areas needed improvement.

Only a quarter of the respondents (24%) thought UCO was prepared for the fall semester.

However, nearly half (45%) were satisfied with the support UCO administration is providing. On that same question, 35% felt dissatisfied with the input they were receiving from the administration.

Other areas of satisfaction included knowing who to contact about changes on the campus; that was at 66%. A little over half (53%) were satisfied with UCO’s communication on COVID-19 and felt it was timely.

Close to half (47%) were satisfied with the clarity of communication, as well as the support they received in transitioning classes to online or remote options (41%).

A full 94% agreed with the mask mandate that everyone should wear a face covering in all public places on campus.

Several faculty members made positive comments regarding President Patti Neuhold-Ravikumar for taking quick, proactive action to protect the UCO community during the spring 2020 semester by moving all classes to an online format. They also had positive comments about the quality of the communication.

Faculty also expressed their appreciation for the help they received from the Office of Information Technology and the Center for eLearning and Connected Environments in adjusting to alternative teaching formats.

They also provided input for opportunities for improvement.

For instance, over half (58%) said that faculty were not being adequately consulted as shared decision-makers for the fall semester, compared to less than a quarter (23%) who were satisfied with
Welcome!

More faculty join UCO’s AAUP chapter

Several faculty members at UCO have joined the AAUP chapter in the past few months. They include:

• Shun Kiang, Ph.D.
  Assistant professor, Department of English
• Karen Manna, Ph.D.
  Assistant professor, Department of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
• Cynthia Johnson, Ph.D.
  Assistant professor, Department of English
• Sophia Clark, Ph.D.
  Assistant professor, Department of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies
• Chad King, Ph.D.
  Associate professor, Department of Biology
• Annie Holt, Ph.D.
  Assistant professor, Department of Humanities and Philosophy

Survey results indicate faculty concerns

Continued from page 1

Faculty’s role in shared decision-making for fall.

Another concern was dissatisfaction with the timeliness of information from HR about EEOC underlying condition applications; 43% were dissatisfied and 40% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (the qualitative results reveal the fact that many faculty did not know anything about this).

Only 29% were satisfied with information about changes at UCO that will impact faculty employment; several mentioned concerns for UCO’s financial future in their qualitative remarks.

In the qualitative portion of the survey, most faculty seemed concerned about face-to-face classes, the spread of the virus through the campus community, worries about students refusing to wear masks, and technological challenges for the fall.

When asked about their risk, 35% of faculty said they were currently in a vulnerable population, and 41% said they were a caregiver for someone in a vulnerable population. This is also borne out by the age of UCO faculty: 18% report being in their 50s and another 20% report being in their 60s or older.

Not surprisingly, more than 9 in 10 faculty are stressed about COVID-19; 61% of respondents reported “a great deal” of stress, plus another 33% reporting “some” stress.

Specifically, when asked to rank the amount of worry they have for 11 various items, faculty are most worried about:

• the health of their students (96% worry sometimes/often/very often),
• the health of their colleagues (95% worry sometimes/often/very often),
• the health of their friends and family (94% worry sometimes/often/very often),
• their own health (94% worry sometimes/often/very often), and
• doing their job effectively amidst a changing work environment (89% worry sometimes/often/very often).

A total of 313 COVID-19 cases have been reported on the UCO campus as of Oct. 6, 2020, according to information available on the UCO’s COVID-19 website. Current active cases total 96 with 217 recoveries.

These are self-reported cases, and the count started August 11, 2020.

All fall classes will transition to being taught online by the Thanksgiving Break to conclude the fall semester.

UCO is making guidelines much stricter for teaching remotely in the spring semester and will require faculty and staff to acquire a letter from their physicians. Age as a risk factor will not be enough to qualify for remote teaching.

From the President

We are really on the same team because we live in an inescapable interdependence among many groups – governing board, administration, staff, students, public and faculty.

Survey on shared governance

Recently the UCO-AAUP executive team had a great discussion on this and other matters with President Neuhold-Ravikumar.

To follow up on that the chapter will be sending out a survey soon regarding shared governance at UCO.

Please complete this survey to help us understand what faculty know and think about the subject. For our administration to listen to us, we need more faculty members like yourself to speak up. If you want to join AAUP, please email me: jwood41@uco.edu.
Debate over role of student evaluations

The AAUP-UCO Chapter has been discussing student evaluations and opinions appear to vary across campus. As such, we asked two of our executive committee members to write articles and share their thoughts on whether or not student evaluations should continue at UCO. The following two articles are opinions from our membership and do not necessarily reflect the consensus of AAUP-UCO.

- Now is the time to abolish student evaluations of teaching
  By Elizabeth S. Overman, Ph.D.
  Sergeant-at-Arms

Bottom line, student evaluations are unfair because they reflect the misogyny and racism extant in the broader society.

In addition to AAUP¹, the American Sociological Association (ASA), the American Historical Association (AHA), as well as the American Political Science Association and 21 additional professional associations signed onto the statement from the ASA calling for the termination of student evaluations of teaching.

The AHA writes in its endorsement that “Studies have shown that student evaluations of teaching are easily biased, particularly toward women and minorities, and weakly related to other measures of teaching effectiveness and learning outcomes.”

The ASA points out that “Black and Asian faculty members are evaluated less positively than White faculty...In both observational studies and experiments, Students Evaluations of Teaching (SETs) have been found to be biased against women and people of color.”

If UCO as an institution is actually learning, growing and moving beyond statements of righteousness in the age of racial reckoning, it is time to reconfigure processes and internal mechanisms that are damaging faculty starting with SETs.

- Who owns student evaluations of faculty and how should they be used?
  By Jim Biddick, Ph.D.
  Emeritus President

While some may contend that student evaluations are owned by the University and should be used to manage employment, others disagree.

Logic would dictate that it is important to have input from the students we serve and administrators use that input constructively to champion good teaching and provide possible suggestions for improvement.

Those who disagree with the implementation and use of student evaluations argue that they are not a true measure of student learning; that they are more of a popularity contest; and that administrators can and will use low scores and negative comments to justify criticism and possible termination of faculty members.

Most would agree that some sort of data are needed to determine if a faculty member is worthy of teaching, and that individual faculty members are bright enough to use input to improve upon their own performance.

But there are instances where certain scores and comments in student evaluations arise, in part, from other circumstances.

A brief search in the literature does suggest that the rigor and type of the course, as well as an array of personal traits about the instructor (attractiveness, gender, political preference, popularity, race, religion, etc.), can affect comments and overall scores reported in student evaluations.

Interpretation of evaluations can be pretty straightforward for self-reflection and can take many issues into account.

However, when an administrator uses the input from students (scores and comments) to evaluate a faculty member, the interpretation can be subjective.

Sometimes, getting an opinion from an experienced administrator is helpful, but other times that opinion should be taken with a grain of salt.

Perhaps it is best to allow faculty members to use student input to improve upon themselves and state their own approach toward self-improvement, rather than being told what to do by someone else.

Conclusion: The purpose of student evaluations is to champion good teaching and use constructive criticism to continuously improve performance of faculty members.

Continued on page 4
Debate over student evaluations

Continued from page 3

When student evaluations are at or above average and the overall comments are constructive, a faculty member should be applauded for good performance.

Administrators should emphasize the general consensus of student evaluations and be discouraged from using one or two (anonymous) comments from students as the main focus of discussions.

While it is okay for administrators to work harmoniously with faculty members to be excellent teachers, it is not okay for administrators to focus on a few low scores and/or derogatory comments from students for punitive action. ‘Lawrence, J.W. (2018). “Student Evaluations of Teaching are Not Valid: It is time to stop using SET scores in personnel decisions.” AAUP Article. https://www.aaup.org/article/student-evaluations-teaching-are-not-valid#.X1IGqtKjIlU

Administrators should emphasize the general consensus of student evaluations and be discouraged from using one or two (anonymous) comments from students as the main focus of discussions. }

Good question

Continued from page 3

latest rumor is about a possible future development.

In other words, AAUP is a great way to marshal collective intellectual resources, and to aggregate news from all over campus. Especially in these chaotic and uncertain times, a little knowledge can go a long way.

So if you find yourself looking around campus and wondering, “What is happening?!?!?” make AAUP one of the places you can go for information.