“ASK THE PROVOST” meeting with Provost George Korfiatis
February 25, 2015

The following questions addressed during “Ask the Provost” were submitted anonymously. This document contains summarized highlights of the answers provided in-person by Provost George Korfiatis. Please note that this is not a transcript. Given the positive feedback by the 57 faculty and department directors who attended this session, this meeting will be repeated.

1. It is my understanding that the Howe School assigns a mentor to all new faculty —-And, the mentor feels committed and accountable (within reason) for the success of that faculty member. Can that model be adapted within other schools? And, to develop a culture of mentoring at Stevens, which we don't have overall, shouldn't the mentor be evaluated in part, on the success or failure of their mentee?

We have started to develop a formal mentoring program. This program will be in full implementation by the beginning of the next academic year. It will address mentoring of existing junior faculty and also all new faculty members. The program will be uniform across all schools and will be administered by the Center for Faculty Advancement under the Vice Provost of Academics. The Center for Faculty Advancement will put out a set of guidelines for the mentoring program and will be tracking and reporting progress. There are questions about assigning and choosing a mentor. Assigning a mentor may not be the best way to do this. In order to be a mentor, you have to have some training as a senior faculty mentor. What we will do instead is provide training for faculty and also have a list of expectations for those faculty who will be mentors.

For faculty who are new, they do not know who is who in their first year, so the dean will be responsible for their mentorship in that time. At any time during the year, the faculty member can come to the dean with a list of 2-3 faculty members that they believe could be their mentor. The dean will then work with them to assign the appropriate primary and secondary mentors. That becomes an official assignment and a structured way of doing the mentorship. We will circulate drafts of the mentorship process, request input during the faculty meetings, and implementation will follow.

2. When evaluating faculty, might you consider adding a faculty peer observation component to complement the student survey results?

I would consider this, but we need to evaluate how the faculty would value this. I don’t know how the faculty would feel with a peer attending the class and providing their recommendation to the department or dean. I would be more inclined to have a mentor attend your class and give you tips and pointers on improving teaching rather than peer evaluation. It is up to the faculty to decide how to do it. (The Provost asked faculty members present in the room about whether a peer evaluating their classroom to provide a recommendation to the department head is a good idea. Few raised hands. More raised hands when asked if they felt the above was not a good idea. Finally, the Provost asked how many would prefer mentors evaluating their classes. Even more raised hands. In response, the Provost said, “This is where the evaluation would be most effective.”)
Follow-up question asked during session: Can we do some benchmarking to see what is effective at other schools?
That sounds like a reasonable way to proceed.

Follow-up question asked during session: Faculty must have final exam grades submitted within X hours following exams but faculty evaluations are not due from students until after final exam grades are due.

Faculty have control over the start and end times of their evaluations. Moving forward there will be a universal opening and closing date, and two weeks later the faculty will have access to student evaluations. This will set the students at ease. A committee is in formation on the evaluation process and improvement process for faculty.

3. The FAR does not adequately represent a number of important items that faculty (tenured and tenure track and non-tenure track) do e.g. mentoring, contributing to diversity etc. Would you put together a task group of faculty to review the FAR to make recommendations?

We can do this. Siva Thangam will form a group for faculty to contribute suggestions for what should be in the FAR. Suggestions should be universal and apply to all faculty rather than adapting the FAR for differences that exist in each school.

4. Can you please comment on how raises are approved out of synch with the usual fiscal year process in some areas? And how some areas saw raises that ranged from less than 2% for some faculty to 10% for others?

Raises are effective on a calendar year basis as opposed to a fiscal year basis. We are portioned a pool of raises for half of the year and then it carries to the next year’s budget for another half. One can argue that raises could happen in July 1 to sync with the fiscal year but there is no benefit to this. What we like to see is the evaluation and FAR in the fall semester so that on January 1 we have recommendations for salary increases.

As far as the percentage, the process starts at the local level. The department or program director puts in a recommendation to the dean, the dean sits with department heads and program directors and they review the recommendations together. Then it comes to [the Provost] for review, where [he] looks for anything that may be out of balance. There are three types of compensation: merit increases (annual based on a pool that is approved by the BOT), equity adjustments (one-time adjustment if a salary is appreciably lower than peers), and incentive compensation (one time adjustment, recognizing the top 5-10% performers, determined by deans in terms of output).

5. Can you report on the statistics of tenure success for women vs. men for each of the schools? And also what has been the composition of the P&T committee in this regard?
6. To ensure unbiased "faculty-driven" processes, are there identified strategies to increase women in the ranks of tenured faculty in relation to this very important aspect of advancement?

About statistics, I am going to dig deeper into this data, and get back to the faculty. I only have data that addresses decisions of the University P&T committee – e.g. who was put up for tenure and who received or did not receive tenure. What is lacking are decisions made at the department level e.g. who was a candidate for tenure but did not get approved by the School P&T committee. Further, faculty who were never recommended for tenure may have left before any decisions were made. These data should be reflected in retention figures by gender. We will produce more complete data over the past 5-10 years to address this question.

7. What is the time in rank for women and men faculty at Stevens (for a range of different ranks and across departments/schools)?

The data I have gotten is very preliminary and lacks the complexity needed to understand what is happening. Again, I will need to dig into the data more. There is preliminary evidence that promotion from assistant professor to associate professor is about 6 years for both men and women. However what is not calculated are faculty who left before a possible promotion because they knew they would not be approved. Also, preliminary data indicates that in the Schaefer School of Engineering and Science, the time in rank from associate to full professor is 8 years for women and 7 years for men.

8. These questions assume that the proposed changes to the Faculty Handbook are approved:

   a. There is a statement in the proposed changes to the Faculty Handbook that states, "Non tenure-stream (NTS) faculty shall be granted an appointment for a specified term of years, not to exceed 5 years." Does this mean that NTS faculty will be given multi-year appointments, as opposed to single year appointments, going forward?

      We have never had a hard requirement that non-tenure stream faculty only get a 1 year appointment, so this is not a change. We often give multi-year appointments depending on circumstances.

   b. In the proposed changes to the Faculty Handbook, there is a change in the titles/promotion for NTS faculty to Research/Teaching Assistant/Associate/Full Professor. How will current NTS faculty be assigned a title (e.g. - assistant, associate, etc.), and will there be salary ranges associated with these different levels? How/when will this information be communicated to current NTS faculty?

      There will be criteria for rank expectations and moving up ranks. Faculty committees will have those criteria as guidance.

   c. The NTS faculty represent a significant percentage of the total faculty. Will NTS faculty ever be given voting rights at faculty meetings? If not, why not?
So that’s been the status of NTS faculty members in our governance structure. That said, this is a governance issue that the faculty themselves need to decide. I cannot say as the Provost that all T/TT and NTT faculty should vote equally. The faculty body needs to make this decision.

9. As an academic and a researcher I am first and foremost affiliated with Stevens. Although I have a faculty profile page on our website, this website doesn't appear in Google search results. Many of my colleagues here have this same problem. If you search any other faculty from other institutions, the first search result is usually the institution they are affiliated with. This is a seemingly trivial yet extremely important detail in today’s internet age. I’ve brought this up with our IT people many times and have not gotten a response. Can IT take care of this?

I don’t know how many of you know about web search optimization to maximize your chances to be on the first page of search results. I did an experiment and started searching random faculty members and about 50% of the names I put in had search results on the first page. If you want to learn more about search optimization, pay the experts in IT a visit. Or meet with Ed Fogarty (in attendance) who directs the Office of Academic Communication and Marketing. There are small things they can do, but there are also limitations. As we move forward, we can look at how we can formulate the pages so that we can maximize the likelihood of getting a hit higher in the search engine.

10. Several instances have surfaced involving an upper level administrator asking a non-tenure track faculty member for help in accessing tenured faculty members’ email. The non-tenure track faculty member achieved access with the aid of an IT staff member. Is there a policy to prevent unauthorized access to faculty member email? What kind of permission needs to be obtained to go into a faculty member’s email and from whom?

This is a serious charge. This is a privacy issue and we don’t want to create an atmosphere where people are afraid that others are looking into private emails. We will look to put out a broader notification to faculty to address this and other security related issues. No one is allowed to access others’ email accounts with very few exceptions such as long-term illness or legal issues. If those exceptions do occur, the General Counsel and the Provost, in cases where it involves faculty, need to approve access.

11. Can you speak to questions circulating about faculty work load for tenured and tenure-stream faculty increasing to 4 and 4?

Each of the schools is developing equity templates to apply the same standards to the entire faculty. At the end of May all of the faculty will get a letter regarding the process.

12. When will a maternity/paternity leave policy be put in place?

Stevens currently provides full-time faculty with full salary continuation during the period of temporary disability associated with childbirth. The disability period is determined by the employee’s doctor. This leave is in addition to the NJ Bonding Leave (which involves partial
pay) and federal and state Family Leave (which is unpaid). We are currently going through an evaluation of these policies. A paternity leave is not currently in place, but there is a paternity policy being put forth for approval by the board in early March.

13. Is Stevens going to maintain its old culture of a teaching school or it will transform into a full-fledged research university, where high-level research will be the main task of the faculty?

In the strategic plan we are positioning ourselves to be a “student-centric, research university” which means we must pay diligent attention to teaching and learning, while still being a national research university. We are ranked amongst the national research universities so that from the top level strategy the course that we have always been guided by has not changed. At different degrees, the teaching vs research output level might be different among different faculty across different schools, but the course will remain.

Follow-up question asked during session: Are you comfortable with the balance of teaching and research and support for the faculty?

Yes. More research is always better but we are heading in the right direction.

Follow-up question asked during session: Would you ever entertain a request for Stevens to fund research?

Occasionally I will consider funding some research if it improves teaching and learning or seeds an externally funded effort. However Stevens does not have the funds to support research.

14. Our classrooms are unsatisfactory. Can the Provost conduct an inventory of each of our classrooms and make a note of the following: 1) What is good about each classroom? 2) What needs to be improved? 3) What is the cost for the improvement? and 4) What is the time frame for the improvement?

Several of our classrooms with moveable chairs are overcrowded. My students have expressed concern about being able to exit if there is a fire or emergency. What is being done about reducing the number of moveable desks in a classroom?

When renovating classrooms are the faculty ever asked what their needs are? Having the screens block all the boards prevents faculty from using both. Most schools have the screen on one side of the front wall and the other half is either a dry erase or blackboard. Why does Stevens insist on centering the screen across all working surfaces? Course evaluations impact raises and promotions. However what student will give faculty high evaluations when they are in large lecture courses after being told about a low faculty-student ratio, or squished into small rooms, at times without sufficient numbers of chairs?
Overall we have 52 official classrooms for use, and we have embarked on a classroom renovation program. We have renovated 16 classrooms, and added 5 new classrooms using repurposed space. Classrooms are fixed seating and loose seating. Faculty prefer different things. We are trying to blend these types of classrooms into the mix. As we build Gateway, we will create 12 more ultra-modern classrooms. We have classrooms now that are over capacity.

A fixed seating classroom is on average 12-15 square feet per student, while a moveable classroom is 22 square feet per student. There is a classroom management program in existence, in which a group of students go out and monitor classroom conditions, report any issues and take photographs. We have an agreement to address any issues that are in need of repair as soon as possible.

**Follow-up question asked during session:** A big issue in the classrooms is that the projector screen covers the board, which does not allow full use of the board. It is disruptive to the flow of the classroom experience and teaching process.

One faculty member suggested that a simple fix is for Stevens to purchase movable white boards. Another suggestion was to place white boards along the side walls of classrooms. The consensus was that there was not “one-size fits all” solution and that a committee headed by the Vice Provost for Academics would be formed quickly to solve some of these problems.

15. **What are the statistics of patent filings for men and women at Stevens - i.e., what percentage of female faculty are on 1,2,3, etc. patents (and the same for men)? Are there identified strategies for increasing the participation of women faculty in IP endeavors?**

Applications are not tracked by gender but will be tracked by gender moving forward and we will see if we can collect these data for the past 5 years. What we do have is the inventors contact list from the Inteum (IP docketing) database. The database covers all IP/patent matters disclosed going back to 1996. Out of 520 total disclosures, 125 are by women faculty (about 24%). This reflects the percent of women relative to men in the university faculty.

Faculty member question: Does the above include co-inventors? Yes. Inventors are defined in this case, as anyone listed on an invention disclosure, regardless of whether the disclosure was filed / issued.