

FPPC report / May 2017

Although there is a glimmer of hope going forward (I'll describe that at the end of the report), overall this has been a frustrating year for the Senate Financial and Physical Planning Committee (FPPC).

In the fall the committee continued its process of self-education. Last year, we really worked on getting a full understanding of IBB. We made a study of how IBB functions at other schools (since UVM's experience with this budget allocation model is only in its second year), but we also met with the Deans of the various colleges to get an understanding of the sorts of new initiatives underway at UVM (focused especially on changes prompted by the implementation of IBB). This past fall, we gave more attention to what committee members perceive as a problem with the current administration of what is called the Strategic Investment Fund (or SIF: a fund created through the IBB allocation process and administered by the Provost in support of the university Strategic Plan—it should be noted that while the amount of money in this fund has increased, and will continue to increase, through a particular algorithm of IBB, the fund itself is not completely new). As the committee sees it, the problem right now is that there is no faculty oversight of the administration of this fund, either at the proposal level or at the funding level: no defined advisory role and not even a clear opportunity for meaningful input. (The committee is not imagining that it should have a role in final decisions about how this money is spent.) So the FPPC spent some time investigating the oversight model in place at other schools. Some schools have very little oversight: their presidents and / provosts simply spend the available money as they see fit (sometimes in consultation with the Board of Trustees). Most schools, though, have some sort of joint faculty-administration committee tasked, minimally, with making recommendations about the uses of the available funds and in some cases actually making the final decisions. These are almost never Senate standing committees; but most of these joint committees have defined membership structures so that at least some faculty members serving on the relevant senate committees have guaranteed positions on these joint committees.

The Provost agreed early last Fall to come to one of the FPPC meetings to discuss this and other issues. A variety of scheduling problems prevented his coming until our April meeting. It's not clear that the Provost and the committee see eye to eye on the issues or how to address them going forward. The committee wanted to get the Provost's opinion about some of the wording in the Senate Constitution (approved by the Board of Trustees) regarding the FPPC: "The Financial and Physical Planning Committee shall have responsibility ... for matters related to the formulation of the University budget ... It shall assist in the formulation of the University budget so that this document reflects the instructional, intellectual, and service priorities of the institution." The Provost didn't offer an opinion on how this charge might work in practice; he did state that he didn't know what the charge meant. When pressed to explore with us issues related to the process by which decisions regarding allocations of the SIF were made, he sidestepped that issue to provide us instead with a list of many of the requests he has funded. But this list came without his offering specific insight into why he funded those items, how those funding decisions fit into the Strategic Plan, or, perhaps of most concern to committee members, any record of what proposals did not get funded. In short, the committee feels it still does not know much about the actual process governing the uses of the SIF, and we don't have a clear path forward on defining a faculty role in the process (even if just at the input level).

The committee was also concerned that neither the administration nor the Senate itself have placed a priority on faculty involvement in what the FPPC's charge calls the "university budget," even where that budget would clearly "reflect ... the instructional, intellectual, and service priorities of the institution." (The Preamble to the Senate constitution begins as follows: "The administration and the Faculty Senate of the University of Vermont *share responsibility* for the effective management of the academic affairs of the University.") But in the context both of the wording of the Preamble and of the committee's specific charge, committee members feel that several issues should have been—but were not—directed to the FPPC for review this past year: e.g. the move of Extension into CALS, the establishment of the Environmental Institute (in part because of the major commitment of money from the SIF), changes to the "taxation" system of IBB, etc.

To be clear, the FPPC feels that the Senate shares some responsibility for this situation. The committee's position is that unless Senate leadership supports faculty participation in at least some aspect of the university budgeting process—even insists on that participation when necessary—then the FPPC will serve no real purpose.

At the end of his visit to our April meeting the Provost did agree to visit the committee once a semester; more specifically, he agreed to come to the first or second meeting of the academic year (the September or October meeting) to review anything that had developed over the summer and to discuss with the committee his expectations for that academic / fiscal year. The committee feels that this is a step in the right direction. The committee intends to develop a calendar for getting regular updates from various administrators (most of whom have, in the past, been more than willing to attend FPPC meetings and to provide detailed answers to our questions). Our aim is to re-structure what to date has been a rather random visitor-schedule so that the committee gets information prior to final decisions being made. The hope is that faculty might then have the opportunity to weigh in on what is being proposed. Committee members also agree that if our work is going to matter, committee members need to find ways to fulfill their representative function on the committee; that is, they need to come up with more defined mechanisms both for informing faculty in their respective units of what is being proposed and for receiving, and then communicating to the committee, input from faculty in their units.

At our final meeting, the committee decided to return to a co-chair model it last used in AY 2015-16. Next year's co-chairs will be Andrew Barnaby (CAS) and Timothy Higgins (COM).

Respectfully submitted,

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