

Faculty evaluation criteria questioned

By Pamela Henrickson

Staff writer

Every summer, faculty members are evaluated on their performance during the previous academic year. Some members of the faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences expressed concern about how evaluations were done by the new dean, Marisa Kelly, this past summer.

Kelly, who started her job at St. Thomas July 1, was put in a tough spot, having to evaluate the faculty members as one of her first tasks as dean. The former dean, Tom Connery, did not do the evaluations because they spanned past his time as dean. Connery asked all departments to create their own criteria for evaluating faculty members in their department. Most departments created some criteria, some more detailed than others, but other departments did not develop any.

The department chairpeople evaluate each faculty member in their department, and then they meet with the dean, who makes the final decision on each faculty member's evaluation.

"I read and took into consideration elements of department guidelines that were somewhat consistent across departments and in all cases relied on the general guidelines as outlined in the university faculty handbook, which states that teaching will be the most important criterion followed next by professional engagement and then service," Kelly said.

Evaluations were based on a three-rank system in the past. A ranking of one meant "exceeded expectations," two meant "met expectations" and three meant "failed to meet expectations." Last spring the ranking system was changed to from three-point to five-point to allow for more defined scores.

"I personally felt the process with Dean Kelly went well," said Scott Wright, chairman of the history department. "She lowered some of my evaluations but listened to what I was saying. There seemed to be an overall consistency in the standards she was applying."

Some faculty members are concerned that Kelly did not use the criteria that individual departments created and that she lowered an unnecessary number of rankings.

"After all the time and effort that was put into this by the [College of] Arts and Sciences

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psychology professor

departments, and after we were explicitly told that these would be in effect for our evaluations last year, they were completely disregarded by the dean," said a faculty member who asked not to be named.

Kelly said she considered each department's guidelines, but could not rely solely on them because there was such a variation between departments.

"Since these rankings must be sent forward on a college-wide rather than department by department basis, this variation made the departmental criteria an inappropriate set of guidelines to rely upon exclusively," she said.

Having a fair set of rankings across all departments is important because there is money involved, she said. Those with rankings of one and two will get a raise.

"I think this year it is a combination of a new dean and a merit pay system that is annoying people," Catholic studies Chairman Robert Kennedy said.

Faculty evaluations are done in this process: A faculty member writes an annual review, the department chairperson evaluates and rates each faculty member in his or her department and the dean has the final say as to what ranking the faculty member receives.

Faculty members are evaluated on teaching, professional engagement (research and scholarship) and service. It is not stated clearly the weight of each, but it is understood that teaching has always been the most important part of a faculty member's job.

Faculty members said they feel Kelly is putting much more emphasis on the professional engagement than ever before.

"There's a confusion on how much attention we're supposed to pay to each part of our job and

how that is evaluated," theology professor David Landry said. "I think administrators have gravitated toward an emphasis on research. The concern that a lot of us have is that we came to St. Thomas to be teachers first and researchers second."

Psychology professor Greg Robinson-Riegler said he feels there has been growing emphasis on professional engagement over a number of years.

"Since I came to St. Thomas in 1990, there has been a shift in emphasis toward producing more in the way of scholarship," he said. "The rough split among the three, in terms of how they were to be weighted for evaluation, was something like 55 percent teaching, 25 percent professional engagement and 20 percent service. Some would even go so far as to say it was 70-20-10, but the bias was definitely in favor of a teaching emphasis. Now I would say it's more like 45-45-10."

Some faculty members are afraid to speak out about this because they are not tenured. One faculty member is concerned about this new-felt emphasis on research and how it will impact the students. She said it is St. Thomas' focus on teaching that separates it from a school like the University of Minnesota.

Robinson-Riegler and Landry said they feel that service needs to remain important. Landry said if service counts for little or nothing, fewer people will be willing to volunteer their time to advise student clubs, serve on committees, etc.

"Exceptional service to the university in a given year ought to be just as valued as exceptional scholarship in a given year, and I don't think it is," Robinson-Riegler said. "In fact, it's often the case newer faculty are discouraged from participating in service activities in their first several years at the university, in order to ensure that they make sufficient progress on research."

If the administration was to decide that professional engagement is more important than teaching it would be a violation of the faculty handbook, which states teaching is the most important.

Tom Hickson, chairman of the geology department, said he feels that Kelly "tried very hard to uphold standards for faculty evaluation that were completely fair and reasonable."

"I don't feel that there was some kind of shift

in the definition of scholarship," he said, "just a more accurate interpretation of what qualifies as good scholarship at UST."

Hickson said he thinks that there is a perception among the faculty that you cannot get a ranking of one without doing research or something to engage the profession. He said it is much harder to achieve a high ranking without research, but that was not all Kelly considered.

"Our standards to begin with are reasonable, and they're not ridiculously high," he said. "Our faculty should be able to meet them."

Multiple faculty members said they feel there were an abnormally high number of rankings changed by Kelly.

"No hard and fast quota for performance rankings existed and no one was assigned a ranking based on any distribution guidelines," Kelly said. "I assigned the rankings that I believe accurately reflect the performance of each of our faculty based on all available information including extensive consultation with department chairs."

Some faculty members want Kelly to make it more clear what her criteria are for evaluation.

"In fairness to faculty, they need to know at the beginning of the year what is expected of them," Kennedy said.

Kelly has put together an ad-hoc committee of department chairs who are working to create a uniform standard among the departments.

"Personally, I think the new dean is right that there should be uniform standards," said a faculty member who asked not to be named. "But all that work and effort to create standards for each department was for nothing; that's the kind of thing that kills morale for faculty," he said.

Faculty members want to know what they are expected to do in their jobs.

"Whatever the standards are, they should be clear, they should be explicit and they should be publicized," Landry said.

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Cadets honor POWs and MIAs

By Heather Rule

Staff writer

A silent, slow and steady march along the sidewalk beneath the flagpole by Air Force ROTC cadets may seem like a simple affair, but the meaning behind the marching is one of great importance.

The Air Force ROTC Detachment 410 held its annual 24-hour vigil Nov. 9-10 to honor prisoners of war and those missing in action. The vigil also was in honor of Veterans Day Nov. 11.

Two cadets in uniform marched 15-minute shifts around the clock for 24 hours straight. Hanging at the tip of the flagpole was the red, white and blue American flag. Below the stars and stripes hung the black POW/MIA flag. Beams of light rose from the ground fixtures to illuminate the flags as they flapped in the breeze.

Cadets marched along the barricaded sidewalks surrounding the flagpole in the Lower Quad just north of the arches. The vigil was to remember those who have served and for those who never made it back home.

"We just want to make sure they're not forgotten," said Cadet Chris Carson, the Cadet Wing Public Affairs Officer. "All too often people forget that."

The vigil kicked off with an opening ceremony at 5 p.m. Nov. 9 near the flagpole. Immediately following the 30 minute ceremony was a talk regarding the vigil given by retired U.S. Army Lt. Col. Joe Repya.

"They gave all of their tomorrows so we could have today," Repya said.

Repya is a veteran of Vietnam, Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom. He also worked in Iraq as a military analyst and a freelance journalist. Repya and his wife, Debra, founded the Minnesota Support Our Troops Coalition.

For more than 90 cadets in the Air Force ROTC Detachment, this day is all about remembering those who served, defended freedom and risked their lives for this country.

"This isn't about us," said Cadet Brian Leitzke, junior and Arnold Air Society Director of Operations. "It's about the prisoners of war and those missing in action."

Air Force ROTC cadets sacrifice a few little things, such as sleep, to represent the tremendous sacrifices made by the many men and women in uniform.

"It's one day out of the year that we sacrifice just a little bit," Carson said.

They stand guard and march at the flagpole to honor POWs and MIAs. Each cadet in the Air Force ROTC realizes the importance of remembering those in uniform who put their lives on the line.

"We all get something out of this," Leitzke said.

Each of the 96 cadets is required to help out with the vigil in one way or another. Most are required to march two 15-minute shifts, although some may march three, and some may only march one shift. Helping to make sure everything falls into place with the speaker and logistical issues is another way cadets lend a hand to make the vigil run as smoothly as possible.



JESS SMITH/THE AQUIN

Air Force ROTC cadets stand in formation at the opening ceremony for the POW/MIA vigil.

"There's a lot of coordination that goes on," Carson said.

The vigil is run by the Arnold Air Society. The AAS commander organizes the vigil by dividing tasks among the staff. They handle everything from media advertisements to selling T-shirts.

The vigil ended at 5 p.m. last Friday with a closing ceremony. The ceremony was brief, with

the taking down of the flag to officially signify the end of the POW/MIA vigil.

"We have some sort of salute to end the vigil," Leitzke said. "The closing ceremony is just a respectful end to the 24 hours."

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ACC discusses core curriculum

By Rory Mattson

Staff writer

The All College Council welcomed guest speaker Michael Jordan, chair of the core curriculum task force. Jordan discussed the ongoing efforts to further improve St. Thomas' core curriculum requirements.

Discussion topics included strengthening the diversity requirement, increasing the intensity of writing throughout all core curriculum classes and potentially abolishing the physical education requirement. The changes the task force generates must be done without adding additional credits to the present core curriculum requirements.

The task force is working toward integrating already-existing courses to create a broader view on subjects that are similar. The task force also is looking into implementing "team-teaching" for certain courses, where two professors would collaborate and address complementing areas of study in a single course.

"We need to fulfill the integration of the liberal arts and career preparation," Jordan said.

The idea of abolishing the physical education requirement stemmed from the task force's uneasiness of requiring a zero-credit course. The task force believes that freshmen should be required to undertake more integrated subject matter, Jordan said.

"We are not proposing the elimination of the physical education requirement because we see it as unimportant," Jordan said. "[But] we believe the fitness and physical development component can be achieved by other means here on campus."

The ACC proceeded to officially endorse the actions being taken by the core curriculum task force.

The ACC finance committee proposed the allocation of funds to on campus organizations. The groups included Up 'til Dawn, Volunteers in Action, Bicycle Enthusiasts at St. Thomas, the Management Club, the Communications Club and Students for Justice and Peace. All fund allocations were first proposed and then voted on by the council. The ACC accepted all propositions and funds will be allocated soon.

The ACC recognized St. Thomas as recently being named the Midwest's "large school of the year" by the Midwest Affiliate of College and University Residence Halls. The award is given to the university that is deemed to have the most active residence hall organizations throughout the region. The term "large" is in reference to the category that St. Thomas falls under based on the number of undergraduate students.

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