RICHARD JASNOW REMARKS ON THE SPRING SEMESTER 2017 HAC ACTIVITY BASED ON HIS REPORT TO THE FACULTY ASSEMBLY

As Secretary of the Homewood Academic Council for Spring Semester 2017, I gladly present this report to you.

Now, my charge, I looked it up, is to “report on its major activities.” Obviously, with regard to tenure cases, the specifics are completely confidential. However, I can certainly give a general account of our “major activities” so far.

Over the years I have sometimes had the impression that HAC remains a bit of a “Black Hole” for our faculty. I myself hardly knew much about HAC until I became a member. I wish therefore also concisely to give you an idea of the work done by HAC.

As faculty members we are sometimes asked to join committees which serve little… purpose. HAC is not like that.

The Council truly has an important function within Hopkins. Best known for its role in tenure proceedings, it is also much involved in the annual reviews of departments and programs, as well as in other issues relevant to our University.

While only the 12 full professors (2 Social Science; 3 Humanities, 3 Natural Sciences, and 4 Engineering) vote on tenure and promotion cases, the membership includes the President, the Provost (who chairs), the Dean of Arts and Sciences, and the Dean of Engineering. The Vice Deans of Art and Sciences and of Engineering also attend meetings and participate. The HAC thus naturally becomes a forum for open discussion, productive interaction, between the faculty and “Administration.”

1 It is worth emphasizing that the administrative representatives to HAC are themselves professors.
HAC has several important sub-committees: Academic Affairs (reviews and submits to Council the proposals from the various university curriculum committees\(^2\)); Administration and Bylaws (responsible for drafting necessary revisions to HAC documents); Appointments and Promotions (responsible for communicating with Ad hoc committee chairs on procedural matters/questions/reviewing checklists for Ad hoc committee reports/reviewing and approving all assistant professor (tenure-track) and other non-tenure track faculty appointments). If you appoint a new lecturer, that Appointments and Promotions Committee will look at the appointment. If you as a chair are checking up on how best to proceed with getting a tenure case through, you will be dealing with procedures drawn up by the Bylaws Committee. These HAC Sub-committees are significant.

The HAC also stays in the loop, as it were, through liaisons with numerous other University Committees: from the Board of Review to those various Curriculum Committees. \(^3\)

These sub-committees, liaison positions, departmental reviews, tenure/promotion cases, and interaction with the Provost and Deans keep HAC members aware of many issues impacting the university.

Members generally have four year terms, which I personally think is a good thing. The regulations of the University are complicated; the tenure process evolving and delicate. Four year terms give members a chance to learn from others and to become familiar with the traditions and challenges of individual departments and programs. Such terms foster a kind of institutional memory beneficial to the optimal functioning of the committee.

The President, Provost, Deans, and HAC members through the Secretary, set the agenda for the frequent Wednesday HAC meetings during the semester. The HAC faculty also

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\(^2\)Working closely with the Two Associate Deans for Academic Affairs, this committee reviews and provides recommendation to HAC on proposals from various standing committees: KSAS Curriculum Committee; WSE Curriculum Committee; Homewood Graduate Board; Advanced Academic Programs (and a few others)
attends a monthly informal dinner to chat about subjects of interest. Sometimes other university colleagues are invited to this dinner to discuss specific topics.

A typical Wednesday Spring meeting begins at 3 pm, and consists, after opening remarks, of: a Departmental/Program Review (ca. one hour); 15 minutes for discussion of some procedural question, e.g., tenure letter-writer selection; two tenure cases, taking often two hours, a tenure vote about 15 minutes. Meetings thus generally last about three hours.

These meetings and the related “homework” comprise then the duties of HAC members.

We have dealt with about 11 tenure cases this Spring Semester. It should be emphasized that HAC becomes really involved at the point of the creation of the Ad Hoc. A member of that Appointment and Promotion Sub-committee meets with the Ad Hoc Committee appointed by the Dean. The HAC liaison explains ground rules, but also serves as an intermediary if issues arise during the Ad hoc process, which typically lasts about 3 months. The HAC liaison then also checks the final Ad hoc report and dossier (as do the Deans and the HAC administrative staff), to see if anything is missing. If passed by the Dean and the HAC liaison, then the dossier is submitted to the HAC a week before the case. The HAC members read the dossier. On the Wednesday meeting, the Departmental Chair and the Ad Hoc Chair come before HAC to present the case and answer questions. This lasts as long as it lasts, but often about an hour. If further information is needed, this is requested. Usually the case is then more briefly discussed at the next week’s meeting. When that discussion is concluded, the 12 HAC professors vote. If positive, the case advances to the President and the Board of Trustees for the final approval.

The evaluation and discussion of the dossiers, letters, and presentations, are core activities of HAC. I believe all Council members are keenly aware of the importance of these decisions. I suspect my HAC colleagues would agree with me if I say that this is the most emotionally demanding part of the job.

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3 Board of Review; Homewood Graduate Board; AAP Academic Committee; WSE Curriculum
The tenure process is not written in stone. Many of you know what profound changes have been made here at Hopkins on when tenure is given, and in the tenure process itself. There is always room for discussion and improvement. For example, the candidate’s role in selecting letter writers can differ widely among departments. The Administration and Bylaws Subcommittee has therefore been collecting information from chairs on current practices on that point in order to provide more guidance to the chairs. This is the sort of topic which has come up in recent HAC meetings. Similarly, it is sometimes necessary to revise the template letter sent to potential evaluators. These are superficially minor changes, but what could be more sacred to us as faculty than the tenure process? Even minor changes are major.

Just like the tenure process, our Hopkins review process has changed in recent years. The heavy burden of scheduling the double-barreled reviews, the internal and external committees, falls upon the Dean’s Office. This spring eight Departments or Programs have been reviewed at the Wednesday meetings.

HAC’s role in these reviews is as follows. A HAC member is appointed as Chair of the three-person Internal Review committee. This Internal Committee meets just as the External Committee with the students, staff, and professors of the Department under review. There is a good deal of interaction between the External and Internal Committee. While the External Committee is composed of specialists, the Internal Committee is composed of Hopkins people, who are perhaps more aware of our available resources and our particular Hopkins culture. Both the External and Internal committees write review reports. The Internal Committee naturally participates when the review results are presented at the Wednesday HAC meetings.

HAC members must obviously invest time and effort in serving on these internal review committees. There are on-going discussions about ways to lighten this obligation on the HAC members while maintaining meaningful Council involvement.

Committee; WSE Graduate Committee; KSAS Curriculum Committee.
These reviews certainly sharpen Committee’s awareness of challenges facing individual Departments and Programs at Hopkins. I for one, think it gives members a more nuanced understanding of the tenure cases presented to HAC.

HAC hosts several Junior Faculty lunches. Two members of HAC chat with non-tenured faculty and try to explain the tenure process and answer questions about this understandably intimidating academic hurdle.

The work of the Homewood Academic Council would be impossible without a great deal of help from staff.

I must therefore thank Ms. Aubrey Poysa, Academic Council Coordinator, and her staff for providing essential and efficient logistical support to the HAC. If you have issues which you want to bring forward to the Council, please feel free to contact her through the HAC Website. She will bring them to the attention of HAC.

Four years ago, a colleague told me I would “enjoy” my time on Homewood Academic Council. I was deeply skeptical. Well, it turned out he was correct. I have met many excellent scholars working in fields I did not even know existed. I am aware that we professors are all overwhelmed by projects and obligations. That is probably how it should be. Still, if someone asks you to let your name be put on the ballot for the Homewood Academic Council, I urge you, don’t be too quick to say no. You may well enjoy it as much as I have.

Thank you