December 7, 2021

Dear Chairman Mitzner, President Berman, Provost Botman and Vice President Harman,

As we are entering a period of preparing for an accreditation site visit by the Middle States Commission (MSCHE), the Faculty Council took upon itself to review the MSCHE’s report from 2012. The purpose of this review is to highlight the areas which the Council sees as potentially problematic, and to offer ways it can be helpful in resolving or alleviating these issues. The Council reviewed the deficiencies that were cited in the previous report and identified those that might still be an issue in the upcoming review. We quote from the last Middle States report and provide a 2021 “current situation update” for each of the report items below while offering constructive ways to resolve them.

**Middle States Commission on Higher Education report of the evaluation team in April 2012 found the following (excerpts in quotes are from the report):**

1. **Standards 2 and 3: Planning, Institutional Resources: Meets standard, with a “significant concern”:**

“The Institution's success during the current transitional period, and during any future planning effort, would be greatly facilitated by improved internal communications (listening and sharing) and a commitment to working together across administrative areas with faculty and staff ( and students) on an integrated plan. Change is difficult. Yeshiva is extremely fortunate to have a dedicated family of faculty and staff, led by talented leaders. They deserve to be heard.”

Suggestions for Improvement: “(1) Yeshiva's leadership should make every effort to communicate more openly with faculty, staff, alumni, and students about the current situation, recent changes, and ongoing planning.”

2021 Current situation:

Although the Provost reports to the Faculty Council regularly, the two areas where open communication and transparency can be improved are: 1) open and detailed communications as to the University’s financial situation; 2) ongoing Academic and Strategic planning.

YU Faculty Council suggestions:

* Scheduling quarterly meetings between the Council and the President as well as the CFO to provide a platform for an open discussion about the financial situation and about YU’s future strategic planning.
* Create a protocol of communication between administrative leadership and the Council.
* Following our letter on salaries from the Council to the President on November 29, developing mechanism to address the deterioration of the salary, benefits and compensation of the faculty, and bring it to a level consistent with achieving academic excellence within our University, and stay competitive with similar institutions.

* Establish faculty representation on the budget committee that oversees general compensation and benefits for faculty.
1. **Standard 4 & 5: Leadership and Governance, Administration: Meets standard, but notes:**

“Outside of departmental curricular and pedagogical matters, where the faculty holds sway, faculty members feel uninvolved and under consulted even in important issues bearing directly upon them (P&T, salary allocation practices, hiring of new faculty, budget cuts). At the college and school level, faculty involvement in self-­governance is organized around appointed and elected divisional committees, and this system sometimes works reasonably well. Nonetheless, there is no consistency across these units, and the sense of frustration is palpable….

The Trustees, President, and Provost all want to see a much stronger role for the faculty in appropriate governance matters, have mandated it, and support the new Faculty Council and related governance structures. A great deal of hope rides on that body.”

 2021 Current situation:

Although the Faculty Council has been instituted since the last accreditation site visit and was directly involved in the revision of the Faculty Handbook, processes that would reflect shared governance do not exist at present. Faculty remain under-consulted in issues bearing directly upon them, as listed above. Although the Faculty council gets a report of the processes, and is allowed to have members sitting in on the Academic Affairs Committee and on the Health Benefits Committee, these are not committees where decisions are made, but where updates are made. Hence the Council is being informed, but not heard.

An example of such a case was the University’s reopening plans in the context of the pandemic, where Faculty were not consulted. This resulted in the need for an emergency meeting of the Council prior to the Fall 2021 semester. As a result of this meeting, a request for a mask mandate was made, which was ultimately granted. If the Council had been included as a participating member of this process, we could have avoided the mask crisis that almost prevented the semester from opening smoothly.

YU Faculty Council suggestions:

When it comes to matters that affect faculty directly, faculty should play an active role in the decision process. This may apply to (but not necessarily exclusive to):

1. Healthcare and benefits decisions
2. Budgetary decisions
3. Academic strategic planning decisions
4. Hiring of Academic faculty decisions

**3) Standard 6: Integrity: Meets standard, with a concern:**

“A significant weakness relevant to the integrity standard is the limited extent to which Yeshiva has incorporated transparent practices and policies in hiring and evaluation of faculty, including tenure and promotion decisions. Evidence in the Self-Study (p. 98-11 O; 154-161) indicates significant ambiguity and variation in the hiring and tenure processes for faculty. Although the Provost provides candidates for tenure a checklist of items to be presented, interviews with faculty members point to a lack of written indicators of effectiveness in preparation for tenure or promotion. In some cases they have annual meetings with their deans to review their progress. On the whole faculty described ambiguous and inconsistent practices with no set timetable for promotion and tenure decisions after applications have been reviewed….

The faculty grievance process is described as "ad hoc" and does not follow the procedures outlined in the 1993 Faculty Handbook for the Manhattan Campuses.”

Recommendation: “Yeshiva must develop, document, and publish criteria, policies, and procedures for faculty tenure and promotion at the department and University level. A formal and well promulgated process for addressing faculty grievances must be implemented.”

2021 Current situation

The Faculty Handbook has been revised, and grievance procedures have been delineated. However, the revised Handbook has not yet been implemented (although there is progress in that regard).

The revised Handbook requires Letters of Appointment for each full time faculty that delineate course responsibilities, salary, and research funding. The Provost’s office has not provided these for several years.

YU Faculty Council suggestions:

* Publish the revised Faculty Handbook online, and provide a copy/link via email to the whole YU faculty and Deans.
* Provide a specific procedure to be followed in all of YU’s Schools as to the hiring and evaluation of faculty so that these processes are transparent.
* Send out Letters of Appointment to all f/t faculty by August 15th, annually, before the fall semester begins.

**4) Standard 10: Faculty: Does not meet standard:**

“Given the expectations it has of the faculty, the University does not adequately support the advancement and development of faculty in areas of teaching and research….”

“As mentioned elsewhere, the faculty is not sufficiently integrated into key governance processes, including the macro development of academic programs and curricula at the University level….”

“The most egregious failure to comply with Standard 10 has been the absence of published criteria - either at the University level or the unit level for undergraduate and graduate faculty - for faculty appointment, tenure, and promotion. While the revised, but as yet approved, Faculty Handbook includes the grounds and procedures for faculty to grieve tenure and/or promotion decisions, these processes are not yet formally or systematically in place; nor have they been, even though such processes exist on an ad hoc basis. Many pre-tenure faculty members attest that they had not seen written expectations for scholarship, teaching or service; nor had they received written evaluations annually or at the time of the third year review….”

Requirement: “As soon as possible (certainly within two years), Yeshiva's administration and faculty, together, must develop, approve, and publish clear procedures and policies governing the promotion and tenure process, and general University standards are to be articulated. Clear, coherent, and written processes and disciplinary criteria for promotion and tenure at the department (division) levels must be developed (and/or current drafts finalized) through processes of shared governance.”

Requirement: “The implementation of a Faculty Council or other such representative faculty body that will have appropriate input into University- wide decisions affecting academic life and the well being of students and faculty must be completed and fully functional as soon as possible (ideally within one year).”

2021 Current situation

* Administration has made constructive steps in this area, such as hiring a Director of Sponsored Programs, Research Policy and Integrity within the Provost’s office.
* The University’s support for faculty development in areas of teaching and research remain minimal, as demonstrated by very limited internal grant funding, scant funding for conferences, and sparse administrative support for faculty who receive grants.
* A Teaching development and advancement center was opened and then closed.
* Library budget was cut resulting in removing essential databases such as Hoover and Web of Science.
* IT support staff has been reduced to a bare minimum resulting in faculty encountering faulty teaching equipment and lack of in-class assistance in resolving equipment issues.
* Criteria for evaluation of faculty, including tenure and promotion have not been subject to review by either the YU Faculty Council nor faculty from each college.
* Neither the Faculty Council nor faculty of individual colleges are integrated into governance processes including the development of new academic programs. Without input into University-wide decisions, the Council cannot function as an effective body.

YU Faculty Council suggestions:

* Dedicate specific funding to support: 1) conferences, 2) research execution 3) grant assistance
* Provide an incentive system to promote teaching excellence and research excellence.
* Provide an annual evaluation report for each faculty member of their performance (teaching, research, service). Incentivize faculty to perform above average.
* Provide a role for faculty in the Hiring Committee, not as a passive observer, but as an active player.

All of the above are areas that we identified as potentially problematic in the upcoming review. We would like to offer our assistance and cooperation in helping administration resolve these issues. In the spirit of collaboration, we ask that the administration and faculty join together to foster a respectful, collaborative culture at the University, as this is foundational to our joint mission.

Sincerely,

The YU Faculty Council