Governance and Personnel Policy Committee of Faculty Senate
Tuesday, November 7, 2017
Faculty Collaborative Conference Room, D.H. Hill

Attendees: Ron Sederhoff, Marina Bykova, Donna Carver, Kerry Havner, Alton Banks, Karen Bullock, Doug Pearce, Phil Sannes

Discussion: Academic Analytics: Application, Monitoring, and Regulation

As a follow-up to two previous committee meetings this Fall, the Academic Analytics (AA) service was the topic.

- The meeting began with a discussion on how to best gage the accuracy of data provided by the service. A suggestion was offered that the committee gather credential data from NCSU faculty in 8-10 different departments, and compare it from that provided by AA (obtained from appropriate dept heads). Several concerns were raised about the establishing legitimacy for such an undertaking, and how to limit its scope. This seemed logical and useful.

- Frustrations remain as to why the service was purchased in the first place. Exactly how and who could use it, regardless of assurances made by the Provost. Standards applied by different colleges and departments vary widely, making interdepartmental comparisons within NCSU very difficult at best. This point was amplified further by differences in the importance of quality vs. quantity. Dossiers generally tend to highly qualitative, whereas AA data is mostly quantitative.

- The committee set out to consider the service's strengths and weaknesses.
  On the strength side:
  1) Useful for inter-institutional departmental comparisons appears to have validity to obtain rankings
  2) A large data based aggregates are a bit like comparing soups, but could be helpful when applied for broad measurements
  3) Could have potential for checking/summarizing RPT/PTF, but also could be a double edged sword (see below)
  4) Useful for evaluating and establishing research trends
  5) Could help examine/predict trajectories for individuals within defined groups

  On the weakness side:
  1) Serious concerns about the quality of the data
  2) Lack of qualitative indices
  3) Complexity of the data and its lack of coherence (= noisy)
  4) Lack of consistent, objective data
  5) Questions about interpretability and appropriateness
  6) How available is the data, and how transparently will be applied
  7) Questionable sampling with a high potential for error
  8) Overall not statistically rigorous

9) The appears to be no plan on how to internally evaluate the success/failure of service

10) Could be used inappropriately for RPT/PTR decisions, as well resource allocations

11) Data informed not data driven

- In short, there appears to be a great deal of potentially useful information in data provided by this service, including algorithms not yet developed and their utility as accurate predictors of certain outcome. But how it is to be used raises serious questions, as outlined above. The service manual should probably come with a warning label.