

Faculty Assembly Meeting Minutes

Via Zoom

Wednesday, April 14, 2021

1. Call to Order

President Chris Bonneau called the meeting to order at 3:00 pm.

2. Approval of the Minutes of the Past Faculty Assembly Meeting

Minutes from the March 17, 2021 meeting were approved as written.

3. Items of New Business

No items.

4. Report of the Senate President, Chris Bonneau (*submitted in written*)

In the words of noted lyricist Paul Simon, "April come she will, when streams are ripe and swelled with rain." This also represents my penultimate report to this body.

- *As the semester winds down, I want to remind you all to stay vigilant with public health guidelines. While vaccinations are on the rise, so are cases in our area and on campus. My colleague Kris Kanthak used a great metaphor: we have just taken a long flight and are on the ground. However, we are not yet at the gate. So, please listen to the captain, and stay seated with your seatbelts on.*
- *As many of you know, a grading option for students is a G grade. This is given when a student is not able to complete all of the course requirements. A G automatically turns into no credit after a period of time. Pitt has implemented a change to this that will allow instructors to enter in a "fallback" grade, if they choose. This can be done in cases where a student has done enough to achieve a passing grade in a course but would like more time to finish some well-defined final assignments. As with all G grades, the details are to be worked out between the instructor and the student. This policy change puts no additional burden on faculty members; the only thing that is changing is what happens when the G grade "expires." G grades should be awarded in exactly the same fashion and for the same reasons as in the past.*
- *The Plenary was held on April 7, and we had over 100 individuals participating at various points throughout the three panels. Based on feedback from both participants and senior administrators, it was a great success and sparked numerous ideas for the future. The plenary was recorded and can be viewed on the Senate's website. Thanks to David Salcido for organizing it, Robin Kear and David for moderating the panels, and, of course, Lori Molinaro and Linda Santa Casa for all of the organizational and logistical support throughout the planning and execution of the plenary.*
- *The changes to the bylaws we approved at the last meeting were unanimously approved by Senate Council.*

- *Voting in Senate Elections is at record-numbers; over 1000 people have voted thus far. The election is open until Friday. There is no truth to the rumors that the Bylaws Committee is considering changes to make it more difficult for people to vote in future elections.*
- *Today, we have a packed agenda. We will hear from the Budget Policies Committee on concerns over the new budget model, vote on resolutions from the Computing and Information Technology Committee and the Plant Utilization and Planning Committee, receive an update on the new strategic plan, and finally discuss a resolution calling on the administration to require vaccinations for people returning to campus in the fall semester.*

Following President's report there was a short discussion about the changes in the policy of awarding grade G to students, which has an option to change it to a "fallback" grade provided by the faculty. Frieze, Aziz, Streeter and Loughlin voiced some concerns and pointed out the following issues: additional work for contract faculty, advantages to students, historically higher than normal rates of giving incomplete grades at our university, extenuating circumstances needed to award "G" grade upon student's request and irreversibility of NG grades unlike any letter grades that could be changed more easily.

5. Reports by and Announcements of the Special and Standing Committees of the Senate

A. Budget Policies Committee – Professor Tyler Bickford, Chair

Bickford shared some findings from the work done by BPC related to the new financial model proposed for the University by the Huron Consulting. Our current model is an incremental budget (increased by certain percentage each year) with some components of RCM. According to the new decentralized Responsibility Center Management (RCM) model, schools would be more autonomous and able to keep all the revenues, but also more responsible for covering their own costs and for contributing some percentage to cover the central costs. The process involving Huron Consulting and Steering Committee, chaired by Provost Cudd and SVC Sastry (with 2 faculty representatives among its members) started in December 2020. The timeline is tight. This new model will be implemented the next FY as a shadow budget to the existing model, and after a year it will be accepted as the university new model. We are supposed to be in the stakeholders engagement phase, but faculty involvement is minimal. BPC had one presentation from Huron Consulting in February and Bickford had some conversations with our peer institutions who implemented this RCM model to learn more about it. Concerns surrounding RCM include: creation of many small programs to increase revenues, lack of internal competition, without strong governance, the decentralized decision-making is in danger, RCM not flexible enough in crisis. Priorities expressed by Huron Consulting focused on formulas for tuition, appropriation, etc, while priorities expressed by those from peer institutions focused on issues of governance and oversight. In our case: faculty and staff are not treated as stakeholders, 18 month timeline is very pressing, governance involvement planned for summer months is not optimal, BPC not involved in the process at all, timing during pandemic, when office responsible for it is shorthanded due to early retirements, is questionable. BPC will work on identifying some priorities and bring you something next month.

Kovacs raised several concerns:

- Lack of shared governance involvement,
- BPC reaching out for a meeting declined,
- New model seems contradictory to the messaging from administration promoting cross-disciplinary work,
- Some educational priorities, important to the institutional image, might not be revenue generators and therefore disadvantaged in the new model.

She concluded that we needed to say, “Stop” to our administration. Her comments started a heated discussion during which other concerns were raised: the process is rushed and there is not enough buying to convince us that this is the best model for this institution. If the new model is implemented this July and run without shared governance involvement, is it a valid test run? With separate cost centers in the new model, will the units have to hire financial specialists or duplicate/replicate financial structures at the university? We need transparency. Since the governance structures have not been done yet, there is still time to get involved.

Bonneau said that BPC have done great work. They will work a little bit more and prepare some actionable items for the next meeting, if needed. Kovacs thought it might not be enough. What actions could faculty take to influence the administration?

Salcido asked if other institutions moved as quickly as Pitt does and pointed out that we would not have a full FY to test the model.

Bickford said that looking at the peers success and satisfaction with the RCM model it seems that transparency and strong, shared governance are the most important variables.

Denman suggested revisiting Kovacs’s comment to ask for more information and faculty involvement today.

Bonneau asked Bickford to work on the wording for the resolution, to which we would come back after the next agenda item.

B. Computing and Information Technology Committee – Professor Michael Spring, Chair

Spring gave a short report on the activities of the SCIT Committee during this very difficult year, which followed the year with Deloitte study, which demanded a new IT structure. IT got new leadership and significant restructuring. SCITC has a great relation with Mike Anderson and Adam Hobaugh from Pitt IT. With Chris help, we made sure that we have representatives on the ITAC subcommittees for data governance and for network and security. Information Technology Advisory Committee is a new university committee structure competing with the senate committee. We have also representative on two big policy committees for use and access of equipment and networking. SCIT reviews EAI efforts related to computing issues. We were involved in migration issues from Blackboard to CANVAS. SCIT has access to help desk. Currently, we are involved in migration process from Box to OneDrive. One of the issues that come up is what happens to email, when faculty passes away. The motion presented today passed through SCIT. We ask for administrative action to assure equitable handling of email accounts and university provided storage. We ask for procedures to allow for family access to the stored information and personal email of faculty who passed away.

Vote: YES –40, NO – 0, ABSTAIN – 3

Passed.

C. Temporary Signage Policy – Professor David Beck, PUP Co-Chair

Beck presented the motion to approve the distributed Policy for Posting Temporary Signs and introduced Scott Bernotas and Tony Graham involved in creating this document and able to answer any questions.

Denman: Is there any list of places we could post advertising of our programs or events?

Graham: Facilities managers are working on a list of designated areas.

Wilson: How will this policy apply to other campuses? It is written as for one campus with rules that apply only to Oakland.

Bernotas: The intent is that it will apply to all campuses, but we may have to work on appendix to include the local city guidance from other counties.

Loughlin: It is a new policy, so currently no policy exists, correct? What is the motivator for this policy?

Bernotas: The incentive was to curb the hate speech.

Loughlin: Will it be true that policy do not impinge on free speech under the pretext of not following esthetics? A litany of bodies need to approve the signs 3 months ahead. How will the approval process work? It is not outlined. I am concerned about maintaining the balance between proclaiming to uphold the free speech and some students deciding that posting political message is a hate speech.

Bernotas: People can post without approval in designated areas. The lengthy process of approval is for the banners, which need to go through the city.

Vote: YES – 26, NO – 9, ABSTAIN – 7

Passed.

Budget Policies Committee (continued)

Next, Bonneau read the resolution discussed at the beginning of the meeting: *Whereas, The budget model restart process is rushed. The lack of joint governance involving the Faculty Assembly is regrettable and needs to be remedied immediately. The current timeline is not compatible with shared governance. The “infrastructure development” phase of this process is critical and cannot be adequately completed in May and June. Be It Resolved, This process should be paused until the “budget model governance” structures can be developed with full participation of the Senate Budget Policies Committee, Faculty Assembly, and University Planning and Budgeting Committee.”*

Vote: YES – 36, NO – 2, ABSTAIN – 3

Passed.

6. Unfinished Business and/or New Business

A. Plan for Pitt – Melissa Schild, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Planning and Performance and Laura Winters, Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of the Provost

Schild recapped the process of the Plan for Pitt, from original priorities through the work of the committees, which identified goals from the initial priorities, to consultations with Pitt community. After several month pause due to COVID, the work on the strategic plan for Pitt resumed. The group created the framework focusing on three main elements: people, programs and purpose. This simplified blueprint will be the base of the strategic plan, which will lead to detailed plans with specific actions and objectives. The Plan for Pitt group is asking Pitt community for feedback before moving to the next step.

The links to the framework will be send out. Please check it out and comment.

B. Resolution on requiring COVID-19 vaccine before the start of the fall semester – Professor Chris Bonneau, President of the Senate

Bonneau introduced the resolution on vaccination requirement distributed earlier. The resolution asks that Pitt requires COVID-19 vaccination from all students, staff and faculty before the start of semester, and calls on Pitt to facilitate equity of vaccination.

Bratman: Was it intentional not to include the religious base for exemption and only leave the medical reasons?

Bonneau: Yes, it was intentional, but if Assembly wishes to amend it, we could.

Bratman: There are two levels to it. Beyond someone's beliefs, there are also legalities of such exclusion.

Loughlin: It is important topic and discussion. It seems rushed. I see pros and cons. We do not know long-term history, people have different reasons to object to vaccine and we do not need to vaccinate all, we only need to have herd immunity for the safety of our campuses. It does not have to be a punitive measure. We have other ways to go about it.

Taboas: Can we separate two clauses?

Aziz: We should know our policy on other immunizations before we delve into this one. It may be difficult to verify and keep track of vaccinated people.

Bonneau: We have policies for other vaccinations. How this vaccine is different from them?

Bickford: We should focus on whether we want vaccination requirement and do not try to design the

detail policy.

Bonneau: Faculty's concerns are about campus safety and not necessarily the same concerns of administration, which focus on legalities.

Loughlin: I'd like to call to table it till next time so we have more time to consider and discuss.

Bonneau: We will have a revised version for the next meeting.

7. Announcements

Aziz announced that this is his last year on Faculty Assembly. Starting next year, he is going to focus on rebuilding the local chapter of Phi Beta Kappa, the prestigious Academic Honor Society and asked to contact him if one wants to get involved.

8. Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at 5:03 pm.

Documents from the meeting are available at the University Senate website:

<http://www.univsenate.pitt.edu/faculty-assembly>

Respectfully submitted,

Małgorzata (Gosia) Fort
Secretary, University Senate

Members attending:

Almarza, Anderson, Aziz, Beck, Bench, Berenbrok, Bickford, Bircher, Bonneau, Bratman, Brodt, Buchanich, Bunger, Conley, Darnell, Denman, Falcione, Fort, Frieze, Goundappa, Guterman, Henker, Jeong, Judd, Kanthak, Kiesling, Kohanbash, Kovacs, Labrinidis, Loughlin, Maier Molinaro, Morel, Mulvaney, Munro, Newman, Pacella-LaBarbara, Paljug, Poljak, Rauktis, Roberts, Salcido, Sant, Schuster, Scott, Spiess, Spring, Streeter, Swigonova, Taboas, Tashbook, Vento, Wilson, Wood, Yearwood, Zack

Members not attending:

Adams, de Vallejo, Gramm, Jefferey, Jones, Klem, Kory, Kregg-Byers, Mostern, Mulcahy, Murtazshvili, Nelson, Oyler, Paterson, Popovich, Postoski, Stoner, Sukits, Triplette

*Excused attendance:

Bove, Cousins, Hall, Kiselyov, Kucan

Others attending:

Aiyangar, Armstrong, Bernotas, Graham, Harrell, Jones, Lyon, Manges, SantaCasa, Savoia, Schild, Seldin, Suppok, Tuncer, Tuttle, Wallace, Wang, Winters, Zwick

*Notified Senate Office