

**Faculty Assembly Meeting Minutes
Via Zoom**

Wednesday, January 13th, 2021

1. Call to Order

President Chris Bonneau called the meeting to order at 3:01 pm.

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

The distributed minutes from the December 2, 2020 were approved as written.

3. Items of New Business

There were no new business items.

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

Welcome back. I hope you all were able to take some time to recharge over break.

The spring semester begins on January 19. Unsurprisingly, we will begin online as the COVID Medical Response Office has advised that students should not travel yet. The University will provide students with at least two weeks' notice before university housing will reopen, so the earliest students will begin moving in will be the last week of January. When this occurs, I urge you to be flexible with students, as some of them will need to travel and move in while classes are going on. Students should not be penalized or disadvantaged for complying with University guidelines. And a final reminder that, as you finalize your syllabi, please make note of the two "self-care" days. These are not optional; there are no classes on those days. Also, please do not have exams or major projects due immediately after the self-care days. It defeats the purpose of them if students need to spend their self-care day studying for an exam or writing a paper.

I have received many questions about vaccine availability and priority. The COVID-19 Medical Response Office (CMRO) is currently in the planning process for vaccine prioritization and distribution. As of now, vaccine distribution is limited to hospitals, long-term care facilities, and clinics. A limited number of Pitt faculty and staff who are engaged in patient care are beginning to receive vaccinations.

The repopulation of campus is beginning to take place. The first wave of students is scheduled to arrive on January 29. Students will be required to shelter-in-place for 7 days prior to travel. All students will be sent self-administered COVID tests as well. For those students living on the Pittsburgh campus, students will be required to present a negative COVID test prior to moving into the dorms; off-campus students are not required to do this but are strongly encouraged to do so. Once on campus, students are required to shelter in place for 10 days, but note that they can still attend in-person classes during this time.

Since our last meeting, I received two expressions of concern from faculty at the Johnstown campus about the relationship between their campus and Outlier. These concerns were in response to both my comments last month and President Spectar's letter in the University Times. I met with the President of the Johnstown Faculty Senate on January 11. This was helpful for me to gain the perspective of faculty leaders there. I offered to meet with them as well as the larger faculty to discuss this.

The Senate Officers are participating in The City Game Virtual Trivia Bowl, and would like to challenge you to participate as well. It would be cool if some of our committees organized teams. On the other hand, you can do so with friends, departments, etc. Teams are 3-5 players and registration closes on January 20. The cost is \$25 per team and all money benefits the United Way. More information can be found [here](#). To entice you, here are a couple of trivia questions:

- *Which two Senate officers represented their schools in the College Bowl regionals/finals while they were students?*
- *Which Senate officer was once "ejected" from a College Bowl match for disputing a judge's ruling?*
- *Name the two Vice-Presidents of the U.S. who are also ABD in Political Science.*

The Bylaws Committee is meeting later this month to discuss a proposal to increase the term of office for the Senate President (and possibly other officers) to 2 years, with the possibility of reelection to another 2-year term. Thus, the maximum term would increase from 4 years from 3 years. Not only do I think this is a good idea given the amount of time it takes to learn the job and build relationships, it is a fortuitous time to do this since my term is expiring this year. Thus, we have a "natural break." I also think a 2-year term would help with recruiting candidates and provide continuity. If you have thoughts or comments on this, please contact Nick Bircher, Chair of the Bylaws Committee. We can also discuss this briefly at the conclusion of my report.

Finally, I would be remiss if I didn't comment of the recent insurrection perpetrated by supporters of the current President. Five people died because of falsehoods perpetrated and amplified by members of the administration and elected members of Congress. It is profoundly shameful, disgraceful, and seditious. But one thing it is not: surprising. Political scientists have been sounding the alarm for the past five years about the potential consequences of President Trump's words and actions. As my colleague Seth Masket [wrote](#), "We Freaking Warned You." This is relevant to the COVID-19 pandemic as well: public health experts have been warning us for months about the importance of wearing masks, physical distancing, etc. And yet, the virus continues to ravage the country. There is a good lesson here: we should listen to experts. That doesn't mean we unquestioningly accept everything they say. But it does mean that we take their opinions seriously. Or at least more seriously than Uncle Bobby, who gets his news from talk radio and the internet. As educators, teaching our students how to critically evaluate and assess information is one of the best tools we can give our students.

Frieze: Can you tell us more about Outlier and about the nature of the discussions you are having?

Bonneau: When talking with the President of the Johnstown Faculty Senate I learned that there is some dissension, and that faculty are cautious about the relationship. There is more interest in courses than opportunities, but not enough information how all this will work. She wanted to know what the

objections in Oakland campus were. They have another meeting of their governing body next week and I offered to come and answer questions.

Frieze: When you say “faculty involvement”, does it mean that Johnstown faculty are creating courses?

Bonneau: The faculty worked with them on developing the syllabus. There was some faculty oversight, but I am not aware to what extent. They signed five-year contract. I have not seen the contract, so I do not know if there are any escape clauses. Any other questions about it or about vaccines?

Hall: There are graduate students and postdocs working in buildings with patients or seeing research participants, and for those people departments may send their names for considerations to vaccinate.

Kiesling: What is being done for students who are required to come back due to clinicals and labs? They have no food service, for example. There is some disconnect with housing.

Bonneau: It did not come during the Resilience Committee. I will look into that.

I have just been authorized to share the campus repopulation plans. It will start on January 29. Students will have to shelter-in-place 7 days before travel. Students living on campus will be required to present a negative test before allowed in the university housing. Off-campus student will not be required but encouraged to do so. Students will have to shelter-in-place for 10 days after arrival (though they will be able to attend in-person classes). There will be four groups arriving on Jan 29, Jan 31, Feb 3, and Feb 5.

Loughlin: It is surprising that we do not have at least the same delay in the start of in-person classes that we had in the fall. Now the situation is so much worse. Why are we not starting all virtual?

Bonneau: When everything was online in the fall, there was an effect of inertia observed then, so we do not want to run into the same problem, which hurts our flexibility.

Bickford [in chat]: Will we still be in Elevated Risk?

Bonneau: Correct.

Stoner: Are there any current plans to increase intensity of testing?

Bonneau: It would be similar, but staff and faculty with on campus duties would be included now in testing too.

Newman [in chat]: has anything been announced about student retention rates from the fall to spring?

Harding [prompted by Bonneau]: I do not have the numbers, but Vice Provost McCarthy should be able to provide them.

Bonneau: I have heard that retention is pretty good, but I do not have the numbers.

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

None this week, but we may have something from Bylaws and Procedures and from TAFC next month

6. **Unfinished Business and/or New Business**

None.

7. **Announcements**

Wilson provided updates on the upcoming elections: FA and Senate Officers elections are slotted for April 9 through April 16; the elections for Senate committees will take place on April 23 through May 5. We got many candidates for FA representatives, but there are still openings in all schools except: Dental Medicine, Health and Rehabilitation, HSL, Pharmacy and Nursing.

We do not have official candidates for officers yet, but some people who are considering running. I would be contacting them individually to check if they want to accept nomination. Elections Committee will meet in February. It is important time for people to consider stepping up. These jobs require effort and time, but they are challenging and satisfying at the same time. Chris, as past president, will still be there to help the new officers.

Hall: Do officers rotate on the same cycle?

Bonneau: At the moment, it is one-year term, that can be repeated 3 times, but it can change.

Hall: For committees' elections, do we know which have the openings?

Molinaro: All committees have openings.

Loughlin: The term dates are listed on the committee website, but will we have a separate webpage for elections?

Molinaro: We use Read Green to communicate about elections.

Kovacs [from chat]: I have a question about COVID-maybe I missed it. What is Pitt's stance on the recent CDC guidelines about inoculating all people above age 75?

Bonneau: Pitt is following the Pennsylvania Department of Health guidelines on vaccines.

Bonneau called Salcido to present his announcement.

Salcido talked about the Spring Senate plenary, which would concentrate around the findings reported by all committees as the result of the *Senate Directive to the Standing Committees on Systemic Racism, Inequity and Justice* sent to committees in the fall. We are actively working on planning the multi session plenary. If there are issues people are passionate about, please share them with us.

Murtazashvili raised the issue of parents and caregivers among faculty and said that the childcare issue did not get enough priority, but it is very important. Many faculty are in difficult situation. Public schools are closed, they have to care for the children and teach from home. University could be a little more

flexible with parents. OMET scores discriminate against women and minorities. The solution recently open to faculty - the Proctoring Center at CMU is very expensive. The child caring issue should be on our radar.

Bonneau: Thanks for bringing it up. It is important issue.

Berenbrok: We talked about it in our committee (Benefits and Welfare Committee) and I will follow up on this at our next meeting.

Swigonova: EIADAC is also looking into it.

Bonneau: We have two issues here: (1) evaluation of faculty and (2) what is Pitt doing to support faculty during this time.

Murtazashvili: This should be decided on the university level, not pushed to schools or departments. Faculty should not be in the position to have to defend themselves among their colleagues. The issue is not only childcare but also flexibility.

Hall [in chat]: Could we generate a statement on importance of this matter?

Bonneau: Absolutely. Maybe Benefits and Welfare Committee and EIADAC could work together on that.

Bickford: From the perspective of Budget Policy Committee, should the faculty involvement in the University budget decisions was greater, maybe the costs of financial impact on faculty would not have been set aside as irrelevant to the University budget.

Stoner: Educational Policies Committee pressed for discontinuing student evaluations of teaching. We will have a meeting with Cynthia Golden. With distribution of vaccines slower than anticipated, the issue will persist, so we will need to pressure administration not to put much value on current metrics.

Bonneau: We should not rely on them even outside of pandemic situation.

De Vallejo: Have we thought of involving the Provost Office in the effort, especially the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs? The welfare of the faculty is the university responsibility. It may be a good time to raise the issue, so she can advocate better for the faculty.

Bonneau: It was raised multiple times, but we need to continue doing that.

Kovacs: I agree with all the previous comments, but I do not agree with direction that Abbe is suggesting. It is not a Provost issue, but primary financial issue, so it should be addressed on Chancellor's level.

Munro: It may help if the Registrar Office could let parents and caregivers schedule their courses first.

Murtazashvili: I think it is important to have the Provost Office involved. The survey distributed in the fall was interested only in childcare. Also, I am curious, if we raised this before, what was the senior administration reaction.

Bonneau: "We are working on it" is the persistent response on childcare. Regarding OMETs: there is interest in student opinions and feedback, the promise that the evaluations will not count, but they could be used to reward faculty who are doing well. There is a certain lack of understanding of the problem, so we proposed certain options that would be relatively cost free: allow asynchronous teaching, reduced course buyout, which would not be a complete solution, but it might help. The course time suggested by Paul is another example (in my department better times are given by seniority not by childcare needs).

Berenbrok shared the 2019 COACHE data on childcare. Only 23% were satisfy, but 47% were dissatisfied with childcare at Pitt.

Bonneau closed the discussion by suggesting that Benefits and Welfare committee would work with EAIDAC to prepare a statement on the importance of childcare.

8. Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at 4:05 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:

Adams, Almarza, Anderson, Aziz, Beck, Berenbrok, Bickford, Bircher, Bonneau, Bratman, Brodt, Buchanich, Bunger, Conley, Cousins, Darnell, Denman, de Vallejo, Falcione, Fort, Frieze, Goundappa, Gramm, Guterman, Hall, Henker, Judd, Kanthak, Kiesling, Kiselyov, Klem, Kohanbash, Kovacs, Kregg-Byers, Kucan Labrinidis, Loughlin, Maier, Molinaro, Mostern, Munro, Murtazashvili, Newman, Pacella-LaBarbara, Paljug, Paterson, Poljak, Popovich, Rauktis, Roberts, Salcido, Sant, Schuster, Scott, Stoner, Streeter, Swigonova, Taboas, Tashbook, Vento, Wilson, Wood, Yearwood, Zack

Members not attending:

Allison, Bench, Bove, Jeffrey, Jeong, Jones, Kory, Morel, Mulcahy, Mulvaney, Nelson, Oyler, Potoski, Spiess, Spring, Sukits, Triplette

*Excused attendance:

Landsittel

Others attending:

Harding, Harrell, Jones, Manges, Pil, SantaCasa, Suppok, Tananis, Wallace, Yates Zwick

*Notified Senate Office