

Faculty Assembly Meeting Minutes
Via Hybrid
2700 Posvar Hall and Zoom

Wednesday, October 4, 2023

1. Call to Order

President Robin Kear called the meeting to order at 3:01 pm.

2. Approval of the Minutes of September 6, 2023

Kear asked for a motion to approve the minutes. On a motion duly made (Scott) and seconded (Parker) the minutes of the September 6 2023, Faculty Assembly Meeting were approved as written.

3. Items of New Business.

None

4. Report of the Senate President, Robin Kear (submitted in writing)

Welcome to the October Faculty Assembly.

There is the usual disbelief that we are 6 weeks into the semester so I will not dwell on the quick passage of time.

Welcome to the Chancellor

- Thank you to the Chancellor for joining us so early in your tenure. We will hear an update from Chancellor Gabel just after my report.

I have a few topics to update you on:

Faculty Representation on Provost Search Committee

- As a reminder, for a Provost search, we utilize the processes outlined in the shared governance approved [Guidelines for Search Committees for Senior Administrators](#). (on senate website)
- Thank you again to the nominating committee from Senate Council. We met and finalized the slates from the self-nominations received. This was announced on Sept. 13th and the call went out for petition candidates. The Senate Office did not receive any petition candidates for addition to the nominated faculty election slates.
- On Sept. 27th faculty who are eligible to vote should have received a link directly in their email alerting them to the election they are eligible to participate in. **Please vote.** Faculty only vote in their respective area. Voting closes on Oct. 6th at 11:59 pm.

- We will again run approval voting. “Approval voting: For each candidate listed you must click either APPROVE or NOT APPROVE in order to submit your ballot. You may select APPROVE for as many candidates as you would like.” Approval voting is more likely to select consensus winners.
- If you missed it you can go back through your email and search for ‘Provost Search Committee Election’.
- Thank you to Lori Molinaro and Linda SantaCasa in the Senate Office and Mary Jo Race and Laura Winters in the Chancellor’s Office, who assisted this year.

Artificial Intelligence

- Discussions of generative artificial intelligence are happening all over campus in various ways. There are informal discussions, informal research groups, quickly changing research agendas, deep individual learning, class discussions, guidelines on syllabi, department level discussions, and a formal ad hoc committee from the provost and research office. It is being considered almost everywhere I look.
- There are so many unknowns and so many ways to influence the development of AI implementation at Pitt.
- A quick issue that I see forming is around the procurement of AI software, how to purchase, integrate, and use AI responsibly and ethically in our everyday operations, and how to choose vendors responsibly with privacy and ethical considerations addressed.
- Members of the Senate continue to be involved in these discussions as the informal and formal mechanisms take shape.

Provost’s Memo on Religious Observances

- On Sept. 7th you should have received a Provost’s Memo from Interim Provost Joe McCarthy. In response to shared governance concerns raised last year, this memo only gave guidance on consideration for religious observances throughout the year in the classroom and other scheduled academic activities, such as faculty meetings.
- In recent years, this memo has also addressed support for student well-being. As stated in the memo, “In an effort to maintain clarity and to expand that focus to encompass the well-being of all University community members, a separate memo discussing well-being will be forthcoming.”
- The provost’s office asked for a co-chair of the Senate Educational Policies Committee to participate in the discussions around a well-being memo and I asked for a Senate Officer to also be included, Kris Kanthak. This group has not yet convened, more information if forthcoming.

Graduate Student Healthcare

- Work is proceeding with shared governance on the short-term Student Health Insurance Task Force. This task force is chaired by Carla Panzella, Associate Vice Provost and Dean

of Students, and Melissa Kluchurosky, Director of Benefits. In addition to the student representatives, who should be the driving force, there is also a Staff Council representative, and a Senate Benefits & Welfare Committee representative.

- This task force will be discussing the needs of students, benchmarking with peer institutions, providing recommendations to the University, and ultimately receiving approval by the State of PA. Approval by the State is a requirement for student health insurance.
- Benefits & Welfare will also be examining this issue at their first meeting next week. Chair Linda Tashbook is working with HR and the GPSG President.
- The creation of the [Pitt Student Health Insurance Medical Hardship Assistance Fund](#) is in place to assist students with costs.

Senate Committees and Expanded Executive Committee

- This month I have been attending as many senate committee meetings as I can, at the start of the academic year. The committees drive the work of the Senate. Thank you all for your service commitment.
- In addition to other items mentioned in this report, the Bylaws Committee has revised and passed a resolution on part-time faculty participation in the Senate that will come back to Assembly in November. The Community Relations Committee is rejuvenating with a new direction based on a new co-chair and their 2021 mission revisions.
- The yearly meeting for the Expanded Executive Committee, consisting of the Senate Officers and the chairs/co-chairs of the Senate Committees, will take place this Friday from 10 am to 1 pm. We will have a discussion of committee functions, general Q&A, a discussion of current committee issues, and a discussion of free speech vs. hate speech at the university. The Chancellor and Interim Provost will be joining us for the last hour for an open discussion.

Race-Based Admissions Changes

- The Student Admissions, Aid, and Affairs Committee discussed Pitt's response to this summer's Supreme Court decision that race can no longer be considered a factor in university admissions nationwide.
- SAAA will continue to provide input. If you have questions or comments, please connect with that committee.

University Policy Open for Comment

- [Access to and Use of University Computing Resources](#) is available for comment from 9/13/2023 through 10/10/2023. This policy was endorsed by the Senate Computing and Information Technology Committee late last week and will be coming to the Faculty Assembly on Nov. 1st.

Interim Policy

- There is an interim policy on Research Data Management that will be presented at Senate Council next week by Bill Yates, Vice Chancellor for Research Protections. The Research Committee heard the impetus for this interim policy at their September meeting and found the interim policy to be reasonable. While the interim policy is substantial it does not substantially deviate from current practice and more closely aligns with federal requirements, and it included a representative from the Research Committee. There will be a permanent policy committee convened soon.

Dysfunction in Federal Government

- If you are like me, you are trying your best to ignore the clear dysfunction in our national House of Representatives.... If you are like our vice president and past president, you are being interviewed for your thoughts on the local news....
- However, a federal government shutdown would have an impact on the work we do here at Pitt. If this directly affects your work, keep on the lookout for more emails from the Research Office and others as needed when the stopgap funding agreement ends next month. I appreciated the communication and updating from our administration late last week when a shutdown seemed imminent last weekend.

Thank you for your service and dedication to shared governance. Here's hoping there is no need for recall votes in our corner of shared governance for the foreseeable future.

Any questions or comments on my report?

Scott: Thanks for updating on student health task force, but I was wondering if there was a process prior to the creation of this task force.

Kear: There was not a shared governance process for student health care. There is a Medical Advisory Committee that receives information and provides input on health plans for staff and non-represented faculty. I have asked Chancellor Gabel if this group could also look at student health care plans, which may mean some additional meetings for the group because of timing issues. It was not widely known that these changes were happening and it was a surprise to many people

Scott: There was a lot of surprise at the SOM, and at the Dean level and there needs to be a shared governance process.

Kear: The Chancellor has heard that from us last month.

Glynn: The students are now seeing the effects as many of them have seen their copays increase dramatically. The cost for counseling services has gone up 400% and the students are getting more distressed. Have the students been made aware of hardship fund?

Scott: I don't think many of them are aware of this fund.

Bonner: All of the students in the health plan were emailed about the changes and the hardship fund at the beginning of the semester.

Keown: Even if an email went out there should be other ways the information could be made more available. Making sure that resource is omnipresent is important as Graduate students I interact with are still unclear as to where to find it.

Kear: I will talk with Amanda Godly to make sure that gets sent out again.

Tashbook: Just a reminder that student employees are eligible to access Life Solutions, which is our employee assistance program and they can get 6 free visits with a mental health professional at Life Solutions in person or remotely for every issue they may have.

Kear: I will remind Amanda Godly about this resource. Concerning mental health, this is an issue that the new task force will be specifically addressing.

Stoner: Concerning government shutdown, which has been averted for now, may still arise due to the issue with leadership. This could affect students who are recipients of GI Bill funding and other students on payment plans. It would be good if students in those position could be made aware of what the University's position is on that question.

Kanthak: The money in those programs still goes out automatically, but you cannot talk to anyone if you have a problem.

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

None

6. Unfinished Business and /or New Business

Chancellor's Update

Joan Gabel, Chancellor

It has been 80 days and want to start by thanking Robin and the Senate for all of the things you do. We have really good, shared governance here and a lot of strong people who step in to help things get done.

Some examples of the things we have been working on together:

- We had an abrupt change in the Board of Trustees leadership, with Chair Browning stepping down unexpectedly for unanticipated personal reasons. This was resolved last week as the interim chair, Louis Cestello, was approved as the new Chair. He will serve out the remainder of Doug Browning's term which ends next summer when there will be an election process.
- The first week I was here we approved a budget without resources from Harrisburg. We are still awaiting action from the legislature and in the meantime the deadline for the 2025 request has come. We have asked for the funds to hold tuition flat for Commonwealth students. That would be an 11.75% increase and we have asked for

9.25% and we could cover the remainder through our own efforts at reducing costs. We have received very positive feedback from this, but we are still awaiting funding for this year. Many meetings have been happening.

- The ACC went through conference realignment, which includes the addition of three new schools.
- We have been working on the aftermath of the Supreme Court decision on affirmative action.
- We had Welcome Week. We brought back a large and historically diverse first year and transfer class.
- I had my first official Board of Trustees meeting last week.
- We joined 13 other universities, now 15 total, who have signed on to the Campus Call for Free Expression. This is an effort launched by the Institute for Citizens and Scholars and is a public commitment to the importance of critical inquiry and civil discourse on university campuses. This is a commitment to helping students learn what they need to be part of solutions, particularly in divisive and provocative challenges. A lot of this work was happening through the Provost office through the upcoming Year of Discourse and Dialogue, and additional events are being planned. The other campuses will be hosting speaker series, courses and other events on these topics.
- Last week we signed onto the College Cost and Transparency Initiative, which is sponsored by APLU and ACE. This is a commitment that all the signatory universities will maintain a benchmarked set of standards on transparency around cost of attendance. We did not have to make any changes to be in compliance, but felt it was important to express our agreement that this is critically important, and if the standards change, we will adjust accordingly.
- We have kicked off the Provost search with Anantha Shekhar as chair. Please vote for your representation on that committee.

Chancellor Gabel presented the new path for Plan for Pitt.

Generically, University strategic plans are quite similar in terms of student wellbeing and success, research etc. But there is a difference in thinking strategically about this institution and what is unique about it and its connection with the community. Good strategic plans have three main components: 1) they give us the architecture to talk about what we are working on, not just at the individual level but how all of that informs a signature of what we are about; 2) they should be inspiring and 3) they should provide a mechanism for accountability. If you have those three things you start to see the plan take the shape of the Institution that created it. This is what you will see from me as we move forward with the Plan for Pitt. The plans can give us permission to acknowledge and reaffirm what we are already doing and are good at and also give us a change to take some moonshots in the right proportion. We can think of it as a bell curve in which the fat part of the curve is what we are doing well and we should reaffirm this and build on it. Bell curves have tails and one tail can give us the opportunity to think about some chances we could. The other tail reflects the areas we are not satisfied with and we can look to ways for improvement. I am not talking about closing things down but rather continuous improvement.

There has already been a lot of work on the Plan for Pitt with input from many stake holders. In 2021 phase 2 started and that is where objectives were established. There was a Performance Management Office established that helps track runs and special projects and will report to Bill Haldeman. WE are looking at measures and outcomes. The thing I really like about Plan for Pitt right now is the overt expression of values, and I want to retain all of that. The values expressed are Academic Excellence, Innovation, Inclusion, Collaboration and Community. Using the values we have come up with the following strategies: 1) drive student success; 2) propel scholarship, creativity and innovation; 3) be welcoming and engaged; 4) promote accountability and trust; and 5) it's Possible at Pitt. The Chancellor expanded on each of these strategies and how they are measured and how relevant and specific to Pitt. Concerning It's Possible at Pitt, these are our moonshots and there are some exciting things already happening.

The next step involves conversations with all the stakeholders to talk about the process, think about the things we might measure. We use all of the feedback to create proposed targets and measures. Even though we are already measuring many things this will be to decide which measures indicate that we are achieving what we set out to do.

This is the same presentation I made to the Board of Trustees, and I look forward to have iterative discussions on this plan.

Any questions?

Scott: I have a question about state funding situation. Previously there were concerns raised about NIH-funded stem cell research from NIH and I wondered if these concerns are still there.

Gabel: I met with caucus leadership and asked that question. They said that while it was a key issue for some legislators it is not a party issue. The issue now is that it needs a two thirds majority to get anything approved but now no one agrees on anything at all.

Scott: What input do schools have in the strategic plan?

Gabel: The Council of Deans is a place where this would happen. Each school is doing their own strategic plan and should inform us of what is going on. This should be a guidepost to help Schools see where they fit into the wider Plan for Pitt.

Burton: Is there a fall launch for a capital campaign? My understanding was that it might be a student focused campaign rather than a full capital campaign. What is the latest on that?

Gabel: It's been more than 10 years ago since the last campaign. We are doing an assessment of our readiness to have a full-on whole university-wide campaign, as this involves a great many steps. As a bridge the PAE is suggesting that we do a focused campaign on student support, until we start the big campaign, and that this started last year.

Murtazashvili: The ideas in the slides are really exciting. I wonder how we can work better or more agile, in terms of management and getting things done. In organizations as old as the University of Pittsburgh some rules have been around forever and they may or may not make sense. How does the ability to be more agile align with different the areas that you outlined in the strategic plan?

Gabel: I would put this under the accountability area, although I think you are thinking more of vibrancy. Universities have been reluctant to do disruptive things, and often take the slower

route to things. This is a conversation that we will need to have but we have not started this yet.

Kear: I am also excited by the It's Possible at Pitt and to hear your talk of agility. Sometimes the bureaucracy can get in the way of agility and innovation. Being able to respond to that is more agile way will be a great thing.

Gabel: one last thing: we will be sending out an announcement shortly with a short survey about these issues. As you think about the strategic plan and talk to your colleagues please send me or Bill Haldeman a note, We welcome your feedback as we move forward with this.

General Education Project

Belkys Torres, Associate Vice Provost for Inclusive Excellence in Education

Dr. Torres presented the plan for rethinking Pitt's General Education Curriculum. The goal is to seek the counsel of FA on the goals and aspirations of the plan. It is important to partner with faculty to ensure success of these programs. She talked about her history, being the daughter of Cuban immigrants and lacking the mentorship and advice she needed to avoid some mistakes along the way. She is excited to advance equitable student success at Pitt. The concept of Inclusive excellence arises from a decade of research from the AACMU, about how we make success inclusive across higher education. Students from all marginalized groups should feel safe to explore their educational and extracurricular interests and this effort in conjunction with the Office of Diversity Equity and Inclusion and the Provost's office is working towards that goal.

We are suggesting that we examine our current university-wide student learning outcomes and the degree to which our general education requirements (GERs) are guiding students towards those outcomes.

The aim today is to have a conversation about a university-wide approach to define learning outcomes at Pitt. The last were defined in 2006, and while the list contains some good outcomes there are some that are absent, that should be there. The current status does not include outcomes related to equity and inclusion, the language around data literacy is outdated and there is a weak connection to ethics. The values and learning outcomes are not aligned. There is also little or no connection between the GER and the learning outcomes. All six first year admitting schools have their own GERs.

There are several challenges with the status quo, including the fact that: a) Pitt is vulnerable in future accreditation evaluation; b) there is a need to streamline GERs for transfer students to ease their transition to Pitt without inflicting undue financial or educational burden; c) inter unit transfer is overly complex leading to extended time to degree and increased debt load.

Many of our AAU peers are forging ahead in this area such as OSU, BU, SUNY.

There is an opportunity to explore curricular innovation that is already happening on campus, and to build on lessons learned from faculty who have championed Gen Ed review and reform . and to consider how successful elements of the first year curriculum may be adopted Pitt-wide.

It sounds daunting and intimidating, but a curricular mapping of our Gen eds shows that across the 9 different GERs at Pitt there is more alignment than not. This about shifting and aligning such that if a student wants to change major they coursework they have done can be counted

towards the second major, so they do not have “start again”. Other opportunities include to a) facilitate opportunities for students at all levels to engage in research and creative endeavors; b) reduce the credit burden for completion, especially for students who change degree paths, and c) to improve transfer requirements and procedures. We also want to simplify degree planning for students and advisors, to shorten the time to degree, increase graduation rates and encourage student’s exploration and creativity across disciplines. The plan is also to have increased transparency using shared governance interaction.

Overall, the aim is to promote student agency, flexibility, innovation and entrepreneurial spirit, and to offer students more integrative understanding of core knowledge, skills and awareness. Another opportunity is to develop student’s professional skills so that they can be effective in the workplace, as employers have indicated that many college grads lack important skills in working in teams or critical thinking skills for example.

Questions are how we can work together on this to share ideas and comments. Can we work with specific Senate committees to work on these.

Over the next few months we will present these ideas to various leadership groups and develop a representative task force that will consist of a curricular design group, an operation/implementation working group, and administration and assessment working group and advisory groups. The planned time line is to launch the taskforce in Spring 2024 with the aim of a pilot year in 2026.

Kear: thank you Belkys – this is a very large project. But I think it is important for Pitt to change in this direction.

Scott: Are you benchmarking against other universities? For example, transfers between campuses at Penn State are very easy

Torres: that is because they have the same curriculum.

Keown: what do we actually mean about student success? It is important to have the same definition.

Torres: This is a complicated question that encompasses many things. This about getting them to a place where they are passing their courses successfully, understanding why they are learning what they are learning and how that process can help them understand who they are, and they are availing themselves of the resources.

Kear: Thank you, this is an important project and I have invited Belkys to return to this group to report on progress when she deems it necessary.

7. Announcements

None

8. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 4:25 pm.

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

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

Respectfully submitted,

Penelope (Penny) Morel

Secretary, University Senate

Members attending: Adams, Almarza, Bell, Bircher, Bonneau, Bratman, Burton, Caldwell, Cutsumbis, Damiani, DiCesaro, Dietz, Epitropoulos, Falcione, Ferdinand, Flick, Fort, Glass, Glynn, Hall, Holding, Jacobs, Jenkins, Kanthak, Kear, Keown, Khader, Kohanbash, Lemery, Mahboobin, Massanelli, Mattern, Mauk, McCormick, Melnick, Molinaro, Morel, Morris, Murtazashvili, Paljug, Parker, Pitetti, Salcido, Schmidt, Schuster, Scott, Shafiq, Shephard, Songer, Stoner, Swigonova, Taboas, Tashbook, Wiggins, Zack

Members not attending: Archibald, Balaban, Dallal, Dewhirst, Guterman, Heffernan, Jones, Kaufman, Kovacs, Lewin, Maier, Nguyen Potoski, Reed, Wert, Wood, Yates

*Excused attendance: Bove, Cousins, Good, Tudorascu

Others attending: Bonner, DeVallejo, France, Gabel, Haldeman, Jones, Leibovich, Rai, SantaCasa, Schackner, Torres, Tuttle, Wells, Wilson

*Notified Senate Office