

## University Faculty Council Minutes

Date: Thursday, October 29, 2020

Time: 3:00-5:00 pm PST

Place: ZOOM meeting

### Members in Attendance

**Seaver** = Chris Doran, Matt Joyner, Jennifer Smith (secretary), Hollace Starr

**PGBS** = Mark Chun, Bob McQuaid (chair), Richard Walton

**GSEP** = Veronica Kuhn, Dennis Lowe

**CSOL** = Shelley Saxer, Mark Scarberry

**SPP** = Ted McAllister

**Admin (ex officio)** = Jim Gash, Rick Mars

### MINUTES

*University Faculty Council meetings ordinarily consist of discussion of issues of university-wide importance. These minutes may identify issues that have been discussed and may record viewpoints or opinions held by one or more UFC members. Unless explicitly stated otherwise, these minutes do not reflect the views or opinions of the UFC as a body and do not indicate that any consensus was reached among UFC members.*

1. **Introductions.** Bob opened the meeting with introductions.
2. **Prayer.** Bob provided a brief prayer.
3. **Officer election.** Bob was reelected chair. Jennifer was elected secretary.
4. **Opening Remarks by Prost Marrs regarding Pete Peterson email and petition.**
  - a. **Violations.** No external messages were to go out without IMC approval. The email violates Political activity guidelines 6.6. There had been no proposal and no approval; usually outside agencies are vetted internally. Even if there had been a proposal, general council would not have approved it and neither would have Provost Marrs. Part of the policy is that you can speak as an individual and on a number of matters with Pepperdine University under your name, but you are supposed to make a disclaimer that you are speaking on behalf of yourself and *not* the university. The higher the level of perceived authority, the more frequent and the louder the disclaimer needed to be. This was especially a problem when P. Peterson appeared on the radio shows where he is repeatedly identified as being the Dean of SPP from Pepperdine.
  - b. **Modification of the Pepperdine brand for fundraising purposes.** Pepperdine presents itself as being a combination of Christian Mission + Academic Excellence; whereas this communication alters the Christian mission component to mean conservative and academic excellence as meaning right leaning.
  - c. **Putting the university at risk.** The email and petition jeopardized the reputation of the university, if not harmed it, especially because it could harm rankings. It also appears to criticize the efforts of two schools at Pepperdine, GSEP and Seaver, who see their vocation as educating public school teachers. Suggesting that what they're really engaged in is leftist indoctrination is wrong.
5. **Discussion by UFC Members.**

- a. **Academic Freedom.** There is no University wide Academic Freedom statement aside from the brief statement in the University Tenure Manual. To what extent can a university administrator exercise his/her academic freedom? The university-wide political statements policy (referenced above) does not actually require that you always have a disclaimer. There could not have been an adequate disclaimer in regard to the email, though perhaps there could have been for the radio show; however, some of what P. Peterson said did not seem like a nuanced interview given by an educator. The appearance on the radio show seemed to be as much about fundraising and recruitment as by intellectual freedom, though admittedly, this is also part of what faculty do all the time.
- b. **“Official” Statements by UDC, GSEP, Provost, etc. and Academic Freedom.** These statements, written in response to the Peterson email/petition, contain some untruths and slurs, such as suggesting that Dean Peterson denied the importance of slavery in American history and that he is racist for criticizing the 1619 Project. The statements seem to be emotionally driven, though relatively tame in tone by comparison to the original fundraising email. People have, for example, wrongly inferred that “leftwing indoctrination” necessarily means that the author is also “racist.” These statements also introduce threats to academic freedom and use Christian love as a means to condemn and ostracize others. The UDC Statement problematically claims that all of SPP is in need of remediation. It, as well as the Provost’s statement, seem to suggest that some subjects are off limits, both of which pose a significant threat to academic freedom.
- c. **Internal Impact.** Internally, many faculty members feel like there has been a lack of action by administration out of a desire to exercise Christian charity. There is concern about whether the treatment towards P. Peterson is an example of favoritism or a disparate response for someone in a position of power. People from many different groups have also reported feelings of exclusion—this includes people of color, of different religious affiliation, gender, sexual orientation *and* ideological, say conservative. “Leftist” or “conservative” are also being used as slurs rather than as descriptors.
- d. **External Impact.** There is a threat to our university’s reputation, especially since Peterson is a university leader and there has been a lot of discussion about the Peterson affair in the public but no official response that could be seen by the public. Though concern about rankings and reputation seems to be driving decision making more than wisdom. Moreover, there are many students, probably as many as half who themselves consume media similar to the Eric Metaxas show and/or come from families that do. The vitriolic response to Peterson’s appearances could possibly alienate half of our student body.
- e. **Cultural Competency Education.** How successful has the SEED program been? Some people feel like they are forced into taking it even though they are not. FOC are still reporting that it’s difficult to work at Pepperdine.
- f. **Pepperdine’s Identity and Critical Race Theory (CRT)/1619 Project.** Is Pepperdine’s identity being defined by Critical Race Theory or by the Christian mission because it seems like CRT is the operative system of understanding right now and that anyone who does not agree with CRT ideology (and by extension the 1619 Project, which is politically driven and not historically grounded) is condemned as necessarily racist. This worldview emphasizes social justice over all other forms of justice. Furthermore, not all POC identify with CRT; there are students of color who are also conservative and who feel pigeon-holed by identity politics.
- g. **Civility and Open Conversation.** There is a critical need for open conversation because the entire community has been impacted. Some argue, however, that the overemphasis

on politeness or civility has led to a stifling of conversation, whereas vigorous debate is what is most needed. Civility has sometimes transformed into passive aggressiveness. People are afraid to speak their minds for fear that they will be considered uncivil or otherwise chastised. But the conversation that needs to happen is one based on evidence as opposed to emotion. Engagement with ideas is often perceived as an attack on the person. People are cautious, even in theoretically open, supportive environments like SEED. Others argue that we need to have even more parameters, like an official civility code.

- h. **UFC's Purview.** Advisory rather than authoritative. It requires a supermajority to make an official resolution. In the past, it has worked on shared governance and issues having to do with online teaching. In general, UFC rarely votes, instead preferring to work by consensus.
6. **Closing remarks.** Jim Gash acknowledged the difficulty of the situation and the fact that no one had chosen to be placed in this situation. Does not think it is productive to make an additional public statement or to reprimand the various internal bodies for the statements that they have already made. He will not violate university policy or the law to make personnel decisions public.
7. **Action items.** Jennifer and Mark are going to draft an Academic Freedom Statement to bring back to UFC with the ultimate aim to bring it to each of the schools for approval.
8. **Other Business.** Bob asked us to consider what we would like to focus on in the coming year.

-JatS