

University Faculty Council Minutes

Friday, October 01, 2021

12-1:30 pm

ZOOM meeting

Members in Attendance

Seaver = Chris Doran, Maire Mullins, Jennifer Smith (chair), Hollace Starr (secretary)

PGBS = Mark Chun, Augus Harjoto, Richard Walton

GSEP = Dennis Lowe, Veronica Viesca

CSOL = Mark Scarberry (vice-chair), Sukhsimranjit Singh

SPP = Ted McAllister

Admin = Jim Gash, Jay Brewster, Seta Kharjarian

Absent

None.

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. **Jim Gash provided a brief prayer.**

2. **Election of officers.** Chaired by Mark Scarberry, Jennifer Smith was elected chair. Jennifer Smith assumed role of chair. Mark Scarberry was reelected vice chair. Hollace Starr was elected secretary.

3. **Assignment of members to serve as liaisons to other university level committees and councils.** The following committee members volunteered to be liaisons to university level councils or committees:

- a) the UAC—University Academic Council—Mark Scarberry
- b) the UMC—University Management Committee—Augus Harjoto
- c) the UPC—University Planning Committee—Maire Mullins
- d) the UTC—University Tenure Committee—Mark Chun
- e) the UDC—University Diversity Council—Sukhsimranjit Singh
- f) the ASLC—Advancement of Student Learning Council—Jennifer Smith

It was noted that liaisons are not required to attend committee and council meetings but rather than to facilitate reporting between the UFC and the various bodies.

4. **Brief presentation by Seta Khajarian, Associate Provost for Institutional Effectiveness.**

- a) **The reaffirmation of the university with WSCUC takes place this fall.** There are various meetings throughout October.
- b) **October Meeting Attendance.** It was suggested that one representative from each school attend the WSCUC meeting, but there was interest among committee members for all UFC members to be present. Plans were made to "save the date" so that all available UFC members can be in attendance on October 20 at 2:45pm.

After this discussion, Seta Kharjarian left the meeting. As this was the first meeting of the academic year, committee members introduced themselves.

5. Discussion of draft of new academic freedom policy.

- a) **Update.**
 - i. **Background.** Currently, there isn't a university wide statement about academic freedom. Rather, the current statements are tied to tenure and promotion and exist within that manual.
Last year, the committee settled on adopting the AAUP statement and adding framing language specific to Pepperdine. This is a common practice at other universities, including among our peer and aspirational institutions.
 - ii. **Purpose.** The policy would address a generalized fear on our campus about speaking openly; it would also protect minority points of view.
 - iii. **Academic freedom vs. freedom of expression.** The drafted statement is geared toward academic freedom rather than freedom of expression, which can be taken up at a future point.
- b) **Comments about this policy draft and the UFC charter.**
 - i. Questions were raised about why an advisory body with no power crafting such statements and how this falls within the charter. AAUP might take up this matter. It was discussed that UFC charter is open-ended and organic in nature and that taking up academic freedom is a legitimate use of the UFC charter. It was also noted that the academic freedom statement wouldn't be imposed on faculty. It will be brought to groups within all five schools, the provost, the president, and the board, and this process aligns with peer institutions.
 - ii. The topic of academic freedom will need further discussion. The value of a statement will be to affirm that at a Christian university, we actually have more freedom, both academic and spiritual, contrary to popular opinion. It was decided to table the conversation in order to move on to pressing issues related to the pandemic. New members of the committee will need time to read the draft of our statement before we can reach consensus.

6. COVID issues Topic A: Possible renewal, in light of COVID variants, of the expired COVID teaching modality appeal process.

- a) **The appeals process.** It was created for those who were unable to reach agreement regarding teaching modality, but when all classes moved online, it was never utilized. It was argued that the process, developed in June 2020, is no longer relevant because of the vaccine. After some discussion, it was decided that the appeals process is not longer applicable and will be dropped.
- b) **The need for an across-the-board process for faculty who desire modality flexibility.** We now need an across-the-board policy for faculty who need to change modalities because of immune-compromised situations. Individuals should not be having to work out deals with their deans.
 - i. It was raised that the Medicaat misreporting has raised concerns among faculty over 65 and parents of young children who cannot receive the vaccine. While some 600 unvaccinated students are permitted to adjust their exemption requests, faculty are not given similar

- flexibility in terms of teaching modality. It would likely be very few faculty who would request flexibility.
- ii. It was raised that faculty might use the current system for proposing an online class, but this would not be the proper method considering the rapidly changing situation with Covid.
 - iii. The challenge of making modality optional for faculty is it gets at the very goals of Seaver College which is an on-ground program. We do have cases that Dean Feltner has been dealing with. We do want to manage safety, we are encouraging the vaccine, we are encouraged by the numbers re: testing. Faculty who are disappointed need to connect with the dean.
 - iv. It was discussed that many faculty would not feel comfortable going to the dean with a problem of this kind. Female faculty needing to engage the dean on a child care issue are concerned that it will undermine them. There are fears of repercussions in the tenure process. This is why a policy is needed rather than the current, case-by-case basis approach.
- c) **GSEP Regular online vs. Covid online.** There is a disparity in GSEP between courses that are online classes in design and those that have moved online because of Covid. Online teaching is worth half of what in-person teaching is worth. Two classes of "official" online courses don't match two classes that have moved online.

7. Topic D: Discussion of the need for a speedy process for clarifying the university COVID policies when there are inconsistencies or problems.

- a) **Inconsistent masking policy/HIPPA rules at PGBS.** Unvaccinated students are required to wear masks, but faculty are not allowed to discriminate based on vaccination status so there is no way to meaningfully implement the masking policy. Faculty on the Irvine campus don't see their health being protected as it is at other campuses. Irvine faculty need to know what to do while waiting for administration to work this out.
 - i. The policy in Irvine was established in August to align with Orange County masking policies. The administration has learned that Irvine faculty would prefer alignment with the rest of the University, which would mean a fully masked facility. The administration will move forward with masking at all California campuses.
 - ii. Is there a process for resolving issues such as these? This issue appeared to get stuck at the school level from quite some time.
 - iii. Provost Brewster learned of the issue from the Deans, and in consultation campus leaders determined to align the Irvine campus policies with those of our other California campuses. This decision was made within 3 days of notification by the Deans of PGBS and GSEP.
- a) **Other issues.**
 - i. It was raised that there are greater goods than safety and masking is not actually safer for everyone, nor is online teaching fair to student. Vaccine policy conflicts with universal policies, and prudence shouldn't be the only value. Some people have mask exemptions for medical reasons and the current culture of reporting and policing does not take into account such individuals who are receiving harassment. Decisions should be left to individual schools.
 - ii. There was discussion about personal choice and its place in these decisions.
 - iii. What about the vaccine exemptions? What is the process for those? Have any exemption requests been rejected?
 - iv. Community members may request exemptions on medical, religious, and philosophical grounds. Some are being rejected, but then those who have been rejected are permitted

to reapply for exempt status. This process was created by UMC. There were various opinions, but it was heartening that the committee came to agreement. It's not a perfect policy, and it hasn't been easy to come up with one.