GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY
MINUTES OF THE FACULTY SENATE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING
TUESDAY, JULY 7, 2020
Electronic Meeting 2:00 – 3:30 p.m.

Present: Lisa Billingham, Melissa Broeckelman-Post, Shannon Davis (chair), Timothy Leslie, Bethany Letiecq, Kumar Mehta, Suzanne Slayden

Announcement

Chair Shannon Davis noted the university is working on the federal government’s decision to discontinue visa exceptions for international students on F-1 visas who take all of the courses for the semester online.

I. Check in after meet and greet with Dr. Washington, update on fall plans

Chair Davis: Estimate from GMU-TV of how many people participated virtually will be available soon. No estimates are available on number of views after (recorded version). She provided summary of follow-up conversation with President Washington and Ken Walsh (Chief of Staff – Office of the President) and Paul Allvin (VP, Strategic Communications and Marketing). Chair Davis also provided updates on identifying possible dates/venues for Executive Committee meeting with President and his Chief of Staff.

Executive committee members briefly discussed their impressions of the meet and greet. Members expressed appreciation for his willingness to address questions, his directness as well as transparency, especially with regards to budgetary challenges for the coming year. His willingness to be held accountable was also appreciated. Members also expressed hope to be able to meet with him more and get a better sense of him as a person as well as his leadership priorities.

Chair Davis will meet with Chief of Staff Ken Walsh following this meeting. He is a former Faculty Senator himself at UC- Irvine, and understands the process by which Faculty Senate works with the administration. He has reviewed the Faculty Senate minutes as well as annual reports for at least for the last year.

Other questions to raise with Ken Walsh included:

1. Where and how do we make the ombudsperson request? Should it come from the Faculty Conduct Working Group? Through Lester Arnold (VP for Human Resources and Payroll)? Chair Davis was not sure if Lester has had an opportunity to discuss the ombudsperson issue.

2. Shared Governance: There are so many examples of faculty serving on committees and their voices are not heard, their inputs are not heeded. That is happening on the High-Risk committee. All this work that we did was all just pushed to the side. We were told that our committee was centralized; they were forced to centralize. There is an email where this is being discussed. The directives of that committee have all been driven through HR. Chair Davis: It is actually useful to know which other committees that this has happened on, because certainly one of the key aspects of the summer that Anne Holton was trying to
push was that in fact there were faculty engaged in all of these conversations. She asked that she be informed (with specifics) if anyone becomes aware of similar things happening elsewhere.

Committee members discussed what shared governance means and looks like. Example was cited about the persistent and monumental effort from students and some faculty to bring gift agreement issue to light. The following revisions to the Gift Acceptance Policy. Members expressed desire and commitment to work with administration and continue to build on the shared governance.

- Issue was noted that the Senate and Executive committee has primarily focused on shared governance issues with central administration. There is a need for addressing at more local levels of colleges and departments to make shared governance more consistent and pervasive. That transparency and shared governance would make the most difference to all faculty.
- Members noted that President Washington has expressed keen desire to work collaboratively and that he has previously operated with faculty-centered approach. Senators cautioned that we must not let our prior experience influence how we approach President Washington.
- Senators suggested that our conversations regarding shared governance should include all administration, not just central.

3. Provost Search: Our new provost is going to be very important, because the provost (more than the president) ensures that the deans share governance with the faculty. It is critical that we all be involved in the provost search.

Chair Davis informed the Executive Committee that the provost search is on her agenda for discussion with Ken Walsh.

Is that going to be a public search?

Chair Davis: We are advocating for the same process that was used with hiring (former Provost) David Wu. It was a 15- or 17-person committee with a faculty member as chair of the committee. A search firm was used to help identify candidates. The final four candidates were invited to campus, vetted by faculty, and the president made the choice.

4. Other Position Searches/Reorganization at Central: Has there been discussion about other reorganization?

Chair Davis suggested holding off discussion on other searches and reorganization until the next meeting. The Provost position is critical and directly impacts faculty. There has been conversation about the Vice President for Research vacancy and how to proceed once the transition occurs. Aurali Dade is going to be stepping in for Deb Crawford. All members of Michelle Marks’ office have been reassigned to other roles. With the departure of Julian Williams, Dietra Trent will fill vacancy of the VP for Compliance, Diversity and Ethics. The hiring freeze put into place in April also covered administrative roles and administrative spaces.
II. COVID-19 response updates

If you have not had an opportunity, please go and look at the Safe Return to Campus webpage. The SCHEV report is there. There are still components under discussion. The training is being revamped for all folks. They are making specific training components for students, both residential and student athletes; certain NCAA regulations to meld in with them. There is a push continually from the VA Department of Health. They want to maintain control of the testing and the tracing processes to maintain quality control of the process. That is both good and concerning, because of capacity limitations. They are working with the Fairfax County, Prince William County and Arlington departments of health as well. Unlike the three other institutions in the state that have their own hospital systems who have advocated to be able to do their own testing, Mason does not have that.

There is a conversation happening tomorrow around a very critical issue: face coverings. The issue specifically: will everyone be required to have a face covering when on campus and if one does not, what next? We believe there are about ten students for whom a face covering (of any kind) is a problem. That number is based on disclosures made with the Office of Disability Services and may increase as more students make the disclosure. Is online a reasonable accommodation for those students? What accommodation is feasible and appropriate?

All individuals coming to campus are expected to wear a face covering of some sort. It will be a part of the community norms, just as students are expected to do lots of other things, such as not using inappropriate language in class, not to sexually harass somebody in class, or to not engage in anything that disrupts the learning environment. The faculty member has the right to ask the person to leave; but will not be required to ask the person to leave. There are some folks who are uncomfortable in this space and do not want to put a faculty member at risk in some way, shape or form, a different kind of risk. If someone comes to class without a mask and everyone else is wearing a mask, they may be putting others at risk, violating the community norms. What happens if a faculty member refuses to wear a mask? Who does the student call if they walk into class the first day and their faculty member is not wearing a mask? The group is wrestling with such issues, and have asked for your thoughts on both of these issues.

Discussion:

- Suggestions included using classroom services number and having them route the call. It was pointed out that not every classroom has that number or a phone. Suggestion to call 311 was also discussed.
- Many students have Wave Guardian on their phones. It may be a way they can anonymously report what is happening.
- Adopting practices from businesses where someone at the entrance explains the rules and makes sure everyone has their mask on before entering the premises (no exceptions).
- Gatekeeper in the hallways or in front of the classrooms.
Additional updates:

- Any faculty member that requests a face covering that is not the standard over the ears, will have access to that as well.
- If a student identifies as needing to read lips, accommodation with appropriate PPE will be made for that as well since they will have to be closer to faculty than anyone else.
- When accommodation is requested through ODS, materials will be sent to the faculty informing them of it.
- Faculty returning to campus will be given two masks which will be two-ply cloth coverings unless some other accommodation has been requested.
- Vending machines will also offer inexpensive masks for those who need one for any reason.

Questions asked:
- Is there a plan, a threshold of cases or another event -- what is going to be the decision-making pivot?
- What are the different strategies are should there be an outbreak?
- How are we going to control that?

III. Other policy updates (conduct working group, others?)

Update on the employee conduct policy that was developed by the faculty conduct working group, given to the faculty-at-large. The working group has received a lot of great feedback. As of today, the comments are going back to ensure all of the requests for changes have been made in the penultimate version. The CDE document is being left alone for right now and did not want to tie the two together. Suggestions are being made about who else can be brought into the process in different ways, with the referencing of the liaisons and ombuds as a part of the conversation. Suggestions at this point include duplicating documents in multiple places, to facilitate trust, to ensure the ways in which individuals receive information, everything to be in. Like the gift acceptance policy, the recommendation is that the policy go into effect for two years, with annual evaluations. After two years, the conversation goes back to the Senate to see how it is working, whether changes needed.

IV. Committee charge review/updates

Gift Acceptance Committee: We have drafted a first version of what our yearly evaluation will look like. We will be implementing that evaluation. It will be presented to the faculty probably at the second meeting of the Faculty Senate as one of the agenda items.

Faculty Equity and Inclusion Committee (FEIC): Discussion on whether to elevate committee from a university standing committee to a Faculty Senate standing committee. If we made the FEIC a standing committee of the Faculty Senate, it also expands the Executive Committee to include the chair of FEIC. FEIC would provide reports like other Faculty Senate standing committees at each Senate meeting and also provides the chair a direct line to setting the agenda. That is a really important space to effect change in systems and structures and would always provide FEIC an opportunity to be present in every conversation.
Point was raised about ability for broader group of faculty to qualify for serving on university committee as opposed to a committee comprised of senators only. The challenge: can we change policies or structures to have more people (other than senators) engaged in the committee but still have representation on the Executive Committee?

An alternate suggestion involved connections with the Faculty Matters Committee. Should the chair of FEIC be part of Faculty Matters? Should the chair of the Salary Equity Study Committee be part of Budget and Resources? Various suggestions of trying to broaden the involvement as well as not overly burden individuals.

The FEIC have been trying to push all kinds of recommendations. If we say we value equity and inclusion, we also have to think about how to structure things differently. Having someone on the Faculty Matters Committee and also chair of the FEIC would be a heavy burden. It is a lot to coordinate a committee and serve on another committee, particularly a busy one like Faculty Matters.

Every Senator basically has to sit on one or two committees, possibly both Senate and university committees. Every university committee must have at least one Senator. There are other opportunities available for faculty and senators to serve, concern about overloading Senators to serve.

Last year Academic Initiatives did not have an easy grasp where to reach into the institution to get things done. The Salary and Equity Committee came to Budget and Resources and asked how do we get the salary numbers? If there is a way to build things where there is some coordination between the groups, that would be very beneficial for all the committees.

Chair Davis supports the idea and sees a challenge and an opportunity simultaneously because what it does is ask five Senators, not just five faculty, to step up into the space. This is a critical time in history, it is a critical time for the Senate to act. It responds to what our faculty and graduate students of color have clearly said -- they need to see action. The initiatives that Dr. Washington mentioned at least one, the ADVANCE grant that we are working on right now is very focused on intersectionality and STEM and the notion that we need to think hard in ways that gender, race and sexuality are playing out in STEM and are not playing out in STEM, particularly here at Mason.

It was decided to begin thinking about this, whether we should make this change. Such a change would need approval by the Senate. We would want to lay it out in ways that prepares everyone for it, prior to the fall. I am also very interested, quite frankly, in the Senate voting to do this in a public way as it would be a powerful statement.

That current charge of FEIC has been revised recently and that is a space where the committee raised a lot of concerns about action. Suggestion was made to empower Bethany (Faculty Matters) and Lisa (Organizations and Operations) to work on this together to have the proposal come from Organization and Operations.
Suggestion was made to consider envisioning a university standing committee maybe with an advisory group or advisory body that would include a broader constituency of faculty so that you do not lose as university committee? Alternatively, consider structuring a committee having a council component?

Chair Davis: Encouraged ongoing discussion and exploration on how to make this committee to be robust, to be consistent with the charges of the other committees, to lay out the specific components of the work that gets done in this space. Organization and Operations will have to ensure to distinguish between the various other committees. That also reinforces the validity and need for this as a Senate level committee.

There was discussion of organizing, reorganizing, and delineating the charges of various committees and about making one committee that addresses the entire gamut, whether it is gender, race, equity across spectrum, and make the committee more powerful in its charge.

Chair Davis: If we are going to talk about systemic change, then we need to connect the charge with systemic issues. She highlighted work done prior to the pay equity resolution as an example of what can be done and the issues that can be highlighted. She invited the Executive Committee members to email her to set up an opportunity to discuss ways in which collaboration can occur across a variety of groups to further the objectives of equity and inclusion.

Respectfully submitted,
Kumar Mehta
Secretary