GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY
MINUTES OF THE FACULTY SENATE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING APRIL 12, 2021
ELECTRONIC MEETING 1:00 – 3:00 p.m.

Present: Lisa Billingham, Melissa Broeckelman-Post, Richard Craig, Shannon Davis (Chair), Provost Ginsberg, Tim Leslie, Kumar Mehta, Solon Simmons, Suzanne Slayden, Janette Muir (Associate Provost for Academic Initiatives and Services), Charles Kreitzer (Executive Director, Online Operations, Academic Innovation and New Ventures).

I. Approval of Minutes: February 16, 2021 and March 16, 2021: The minutes were approved as amended.

II. Announcements
Provost Ginsberg
• Provided updates on commencement planning and student registrations.
• Updates on Vaccinations:
  o Weekly capacity is approx. 6000 at the Eagle Bank arena.
  o Almost 1500 faculty and staff have been vaccinated at the Eagle Bank arena.
  o Anticipate having vaccination clinics open to students, faculty, staff, and contractors.
  o University considering policy options regarding vaccination requirement for Fall.
• Updates on Fall registration:
  o Approx. 75% of registrations will be for face-to-face.
  o Remaining 25% of registrations will remain virtual to some degree.
• Robinson program:
  o Committee led by Steve Pearlstein and Spencer Crew is exploring opportunity to bring Robinson Visiting Professors starting Fall 2021.
• Shared his concerns about reports indicating 40% of COVID survivors suffer from neurological and/or psychological complications and plans to explore the types of services and resources available to provide support.

Questions and Discussion:
• Senator asked if vaccinations will be extended to dependents of faculty and staff.

  Provost Ginsberg: The decision on who to offer vaccination to is determined by state and county.

• Senator inquired if vaccination mandates will extend to cover staff and faculty.

  Provost Ginsberg: State law mandates all children (PK-12) and students attending public universities be vaccinated. This does not extend to employees. All public universities in Virginia are in discussions regarding policies to adopt for Fall 2021.
III. Progress reports, business, and agenda items from Senate Standing Committees

A. Academic Policies – Suzanne Slayden

Senator Slayden informed that the committee has requested academic calendar for 2021-22 and hopes to have a three-year calendar soon.

Questions and Discussion:
- Regarding new holidays (Juneteenth every summer, and Election day every Fall) – whether decisions will be made and if discussions are ongoing between Academic Policies, Provost’s Office and Registrar’s Office.

Senator Slayden: AP has requested the academic calendar. Expressed concerns about Juneteenth’s impact on Summer calendar because 1-day disruption equals one week in regular semester. Similarly, election day holiday on a Tuesday in Fall has potential to cause significant disruption.

Follow-up discussion:
- Provost Ginsberg noted that the Governor has declared as a permanent state holiday for all executive branch agencies and institutions of higher education and stressed the need to urgently resolve any issues with Juneteenth holiday.
- Senator Slayden noted that many of the state and federal holidays are not observed as academic holidays, and the changes in the calendar were not approved by the Faculty Senate.
- Chair Davis suggested that AP, if possible, bring the issues for discussion at the April 28th meeting of the Faculty Senate.
- Chair Davis shared that there are ongoing conversations regarding creating an omnibus policy to provide accommodation on high holy days for faculty and students to be able to practice their faith. It is expected that some recommendations will come forward to Senate for discussion in Fall 2021.

B. Budget and Resources – Tim Leslie

- Committee has received data on mid-cycle raises for approximately 130 faculty.
- There is now a process for college level data release for finances, including: fund balances, intakes in terms of credit hours and other elements of E&G and revenue.
- Suggested that next year in order to get the access the data, some combination of the Budget and Resources Committee and the Faculty Senate need to invite the deans to their relevant spaces to present the local context for these numbers and then the data will be presented in digital copy for publication.

Discussion:
- There was discussion on: a) how to best engage with the Deans in the conversation, b) venue for conversation, c) role of EXC and Faculty Senate in facilitating the dialogue.

C. Faculty Matters – Solon Simmons

- Faculty Matters committee will be following up on the recommendations that were approved by the Faculty Senate.
Sought feedback on qualitative data of the FEA from EXC and more broadly feedback EXC members may have received from faculty.

Discussion:
There was discussion on earlier timeline for FEA to coincide with annual evaluations. Senator Simmons shared that the committee was meeting to discuss the issue.

D. Nominations – Melissa Broeckelman-Post and Richard Craig
- The ballot for the Board of Visitors representatives closes at 5 pm on April 12.
- Call for University Committees is expected to go out soon.
- Updated on timeline for electing 3 nominees for Board of Trustees which would be finalized on April 28th.

E. Organization and Operations – Lisa Billingham
- Committee is meeting to finalize charge for the Grading Process Task Force.

IV. Other Committees/Faculty Representatives
- Chair Davis provided updates on conversation regarding revising charge for Faculty Success Initiative to address broader conversation regarding composition of the faculty.
- Senators discussed the merits of calling a special meeting on April 21st to complete the remainder of business from April 7th meeting of the Faculty Senate.

V. New Business, Updates, and Discussion
Janette Muir and Charlie Kreitzer (Instructional Continuity Working Group)

Appendix A: Distance Education Policy 3014 (Draft)

Charlie Kreitzer presented a draft of the distance education policy from the Policy Management Group (PMG). Associate Provost Janette Muir noted that as part of preparing self-study for SACS, is to develop clear policies and update existing policies. The Distance Education (DE) policy is one that is being updated to provide clarity.

Questions and Discussion:
- Senator expressed concerns about definition of LMS and potential implications for faculty being considered compliant with the policy.
- Senator expressed concern about policy being very restrictive and precluding any experimentation.
- Senators suggested possible changes to reflect the intent of policy more appropriately without causing concerns.
- Further feedback on revisions was requested by email.

Discussion and Reminders – Shannon Davis
- Reminded EXC members on upcoming informal meeting with President Washington.
EXC members discussed various issues of importance that they would like President Washington to share his thoughts on including dependent tuition benefits, follow up steps from ARIE task force, and Master Plan.

VI. Agenda for FS Meeting April 28, 2021

• Special Orders: Election of Faculty Senate Chair AY 2021-2022

• Committee Reports:
  A. Faculty Senate Standing Committees
     o Coffee and Connect with Faculty Senate Executive Committee April 30 9-10 am.
     Academic Policies
     Budget and Resources
     Faculty Matters
     Nominations
     Organization and Operations

  B. Other Committees/Faculty Representatives
     Annual Reports from University Standing Committees
     Updates from Individual Faculty Reps rec’d.

• New Business

• Announcements
  o Provost Ginsberg
  o SVP Kissal
  o Update: Faculty Compensation – Lester Arnold, Vice President, Human Resources/Payroll
  o Update: Short and Long Term Planning – Aurali Dade, Interim Vice President for Research, Innovation and Economic Impact

• Remarks for the Good of the Faculty

• Adjournment

Respectfully submitted,
Kumar Mehta
Secretary
Appendix A

Policy 3014: Distance Education

Responsible Office:
Office of the Provost

Procedures:
N/A

Related Law & Policy:

George Mason University’s Quality Assurance Guidelines for Online Courses
34 CFR 600.2 (as amended 7/1/2021)
Virginia Administrative Code 8VAC40-31-10
“Distance and Correspondence Education: Policy Statement” from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC)
University Policy 1308 – Information and Communications Technology Accessibility
University Policy 3004 – Verification of Student Identity in Distance Education
University Policy 3005 – Faculty Credential Evaluation and Documentation
University Policy 3011 – Credit Hours
Mason Faculty Credentialing Manual

I. Scope

This university policy provides institution-level standards for the George Mason University’s distance education programs and courses, broadly outlining expectations for academic quality and student engagement. This policy applies to all for-credit undergraduate and graduate courses, both fully online and hybrid, at George Mason University.
The goal of online education at George Mason University is for all students to have the opportunity to learn from a world class, R1 institution by providing access, flexibility, and equity students need to excel.

II. Policy Statement

The University defines distance education in accordance with the requirements articulated by the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) in 34 CFR 600.2 as amended, the Commonwealth of Virginia (8VAC41-30-10) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC).

“Distance education” is the delivery of online teaching and learning activities using University-approved technologies within the Learning Management System (LMS) to deliver instruction synchronously or asynchronously to students who are in different locations from faculty.

The LMS is used to,
1. Support regular and substantive interaction between students and faculty;
2. Verify student identity (University Policy 3004);
3. Provide instructional continuity; and
4. Ensure course accessibility requirements (University Policy 1308).

To be considered an online program at George Mason University, all courses required for program completion, including any required general education courses, shall be offered in the fully online delivery format outlined below. Additionally, courses must be offered frequently enough to enable online students to progress through and complete the program in a timely manner. Any on-campus requirements must provide added educational value that cannot be achieved online. Information regarding any required face-to-face, on-ground work (e.g., internships, residencies, practicums, specialized laboratory work, etc.) must be made available to students prior to enrollment.

Mason categorizes types of distance education as follows, which are based in part on guidance from SCHEV:

- Fully (100%) online course: A course in which 100% of the learning activities must occur within the LMS. Therefore, face-to-face sessions such as orientation, laboratory, exam review, and/or in-person exams shall not be required as part of a student's graded activity. Fully online courses are taught through two delivery modes:
  - Synchronous Online: Synchronous courses specify a required time in which faculty and student meet live, in-real-time. Courses have a set time in which students must participate each week. Synchronous courses allow for real-time communication, providing space for faculty and student-led discussions and interaction. Synchronous courses must include the required meeting time at the point of student registration.
  - Asynchronous Online: Asynchronous courses do not have a required time in which students and faculty must meet; though, asynchronous courses may include optional, live meetings or office hours. While there are weekly deadlines, schedules are flexible. Information regarding proctored exams and/or the use of webcams must be outlined in the course syllabus.
- **Hybrid course**: A course in which a majority (more than 50% but less than 100%) of the planned learning activities occur within the LMS, when the students and instructor are not in the same place. Mandatory face-to-face sessions shall occur between 2% and 50% of the planned instructional time.

Courses which meet face-to-face for more than 75% of the planned instructional time are categorized as "on-ground" or "in-seat" courses and not as distance education.

In accordance with 34 CFR 600.2 as amended, the university defines “substantive interaction” as predictable and routine interaction that is “engaging students in teaching, learning, and assessment, consistent with the content under discussion,” and includes, but is not limited to, the following:

1. Providing direct instruction;
2. Assessing or providing feedback on a student’s coursework;
3. Responding to student questions; and
4. Providing information, content, and asynchronous activities through announcements, e-mail, media, and/or other relevant technologies.

Other interactions that may be considered “substantive” include:

1. Leading and facilitating discussion forums or group discussions; and
2. Providing and engaging in other instructional activities outlined by a program’s accrediting agency.

In alignment with The Glossary of Education Reform and standard practices in higher education, the University adopts the following definition of “direct instruction”:

**Direct instruction** refers to instructional approaches that are structured, sequenced, and led by qualified instructors and/or the presentation of academic content to students by those qualified instructors. See [University Policy 3005](#) and the Mason Faculty Credentialing Manual for information regarding instructor qualifications.

Examples of direct instruction include intentionally sequenced modules occurring within the LMS, instructor-created or instructor selected videos, and synchronous class sessions.

### III. Responsibilities

Faculty have primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of the curriculum, regardless of instructional modality. In conjunction with faculty, department chairs, school directors and college deans, the Office of the Provost is responsible for coordinating the development and implementation of distance education at the University, working with program leadership in maintaining compliance with federal, state, institutional policies, and regulations related to distance education, identifying new distance education opportunities, and coordinating with units to ensure quality and continuous improvement.

The Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning provides support for faculty members engaged in distance education courses. Support may include training and development, centrally managed learning resources, instructional design, and other support services and resources. The center also provides Online Course Quality Assurance guidelines for online courses and provides course reviews and recommendations to faculty and academic units.
As with all teaching modalities, faculty are responsible for delivering course-accessible content and must meet the qualifications for instruction established by the University for on-campus courses, as required by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, University Policy 3005, University Policy 1308, and Mason’s Faculty Credentialing Manual. Faculty who teach distance education courses are selected in the same manner as those teaching on-campus courses. These faculty shall be responsible for acquiring the skills necessary to effectively teach course content and related material in an online learning environment. Faculty shall engage students on a regular and substantive basis per 34 CFR 600.2, as amended.

In each distance education course, faculty must provide regular and substantive interaction (as defined above) with students. This interaction should be instructor-driven, frequent, and consistent throughout the semester. Faculty should use a variety of instructional strategies and resources to facilitate collaboration with students:

IV. Compliance

College/school-level administrators will ensure compliance with this policy through existing processes, including:

- Analysis of student course evaluations;
- Annual faculty evaluations;
- Academic Program Review; and
- Alignment with George Mason University’s Quality Assurance Guidelines for Online Courses

The Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning provides Quality Assurance guidelines, professional development, and course development support to ensure high quality program design.

The Office of the Provost is responsible for ensuring availability of student services in programs that use technology to serve the University’s distance education students.

V. Forms

N/A

VI. Dates:

A. Effective Date: May 31, 2021

This policy will become effective upon the date of approval by the Provost and Executive Vice President.

B. Date of Most Recent Review:

May 31, 2021
VII.  Timetable for Review

This policy, and any related procedures, shall be reviewed every three years or more frequently as needed.

VIII. Signatures

Approved:

_________________________   ___________________
Provost and Executive Vice President  Date