

Committee on Governance: Minutes
Meeting #23: April 7, 2020
Via Zoom from our respective bunkers

Present: Kris Boudreau (Secretary, HUA), Tanja Dominko (Secretary of the Faculty, BBT), Glenn Gaudette (BME), Mark Richman (ME), and Wole Soboyejo (Provost).

1. Prof. Gaudette called the meeting to order at 2:07; the agenda was approved.
2. The minutes from meeting #22 were approved.
3. Process for creating and revising institutional administrative policies. Prof. Gaudette circulated a letter from President Leshin that he and Prof. Dominko received on April 6, notifying them that she had approved the Process for Creating and Revising Institutional Administrative Policies (PCRIAP). Her message included the PCRIAP policy with an approval date of March 18, 2020.

Prof. Gaudette reviewed the timeline of events relevant to this policy and the closely connected institutional response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Most notable was the discovery that —while faculty governance had been asked for reactions to the “Policy on Policies” shared with the JCC on January 23, and COG had reviewed the policy on February 3, and on March 24 was reviewing a revised version (PCRIAP) sent to COG on March 16— the President had already approved the PCRIAP on March 18 without telling the faculty or Provost. On this same day, WPI administration announced that all D-term courses and projects would be taught remotely. During the next 2 ½ weeks, while the faculty were preparing to teach remotely, three faculty governance committees (CITP, COG, and FAP) were reviewing the PCRIAP to offer feedback to University Counsel Bunis, who agreed on March 19 to wait for this feedback. At its March 24 review of the PCRIAP, COG agreed that it would be more expeditious to meet directly with UC Bunis. On April 6, the President wrote to Profs. Dominko and Gaudette that the PCRIAP had been approved and adopted on March 18.

COG members expressed outrage that their feedback had been solicited after the President already approved the policy. COG members asked Profs. Dominko and Gaudette whether the President offered any explanation for her timing and the long silence before faculty governance was notified. The President’s letter explained her position but not the timing and secretive nature of the policy-making process. COG members noted that UC Bunis had agreed to receive input from CAP, COG, and CITP *after* the policy had already been approved.

The Provost explained that the COVID-19 crisis had put WPI in a state of existential threat and that this process is appropriate. He explained that the original “Policy on Policies” infringed on areas of faculty responsibility, and that he had successfully urged that this policy be changed to a process document. The PCRIAP document provides a needed administrative policy framework that parallels the faculty frameworks and allows the administration to make administrative decisions with faculty input. The Provost

maintained that there had been no attempt to infringe on faculty responsibilities in the process document; rather, it attempts to bring faculty and administration together in a collaborative framework to deal with serious threats we're all working together to address. The Provost offered that he was unaware that the President approved the PCRIAP until she conveyed this information on April 6 to Profs. Dominko and Gaudette, with a copy to members of the JCC.

COG members repeated their concerns that the PCRIAP offers no definition of "administrative policy" to assure faculty that the process wouldn't be used to infringe on matters of educational policy. The Provost promised that as long as he sits on the Administrative Policy Group (APG), he would screen out academic policy issues from being reviewed by the APG. However, COG members reiterated their concerns that 1) apart from the Provost, only two faculty members sit on this committee of 14; 2) the PCRIAP effectively sidelines existing faculty governance committees that include the relevant representatives of administrative branches; and 3) in cases of disagreement over which process (faculty governance or APG) applies to a given policy, faculty are greatly underrepresented on APG, and the President has ultimate responsibility for resolution. In addition, the point was made that the need to take emergency measures to manage the current crisis should not be confused with the imposed PCRIAP, which would be a permanent change in the policy-making responsibilities of the faculty. Furthermore, given that the faculty had demonstrated its agility and its ability and willingness to expedite its processes to address emergency policy issues, there was no need to diminish their role in policy making during the current crisis.

COG set the discussion aside to turn to other business.

4. Motion to provide graduate students with the option to receive Pass/NC grades for graduate courses. COG considered a motion from CGSR that allows graduate students taking D term or spring semester courses to request a grade of P (pass) or NC (no credit) for any of these courses. Students would have until May 21 to request this option, and faculty are not allowed to change grades from P/NC to letters or from letters to P/NC after that deadline. The motion also provides "amnesty" for graduate students on academic warning or probation by extending by one semester the "one semester of course work to raise their cumulative overall GPS." The motion was approved and will go to the April 16 faculty meeting.
5. CTAF motion to revise Department Tenure Committee membership for faculty whose primary responsibilities are to a program. Prof. Deskins (Chair, CTAF) joined COG to respond to COG's questions about splitting votes between a Department Head and Program Director and changing the membership of the Program Tenure Committee (PTC) to include the Program Director in place of the more junior elected DTC member. Prof. Deskins explained that CTAF was reluctant to replace one of the two elected DTC members with the administratively appointed Program Director. CTAF felt strongly that the elected membership should not be weakened in the tenure deliberations.

Prof. Deskins also explained that CTAF opposed a split-vote process for sharing a vote between the Department Head and Program Director because confidentiality can't be maintained under a split-vote process. Rather, CTAF endorsed a process where these two individuals must come to some agreement about how to use their shared vote.

COG proposed a different approach that would resolve the concern of tenure candidates being judged largely by faculty in the home department who may not understand or appreciate a cross-disciplinary research or teaching program. COG suggested that one elected member of the home department's DTC be replaced by a tenured faculty member elected by the Program faculty. In such cases, the faculty members in each program would elect a tenured colleague to serve a 2-year term to participate in the PTC in place of one of the DTC members from the candidate's home department. Prof. Deskins will bring COG's suggestion to CTAF and revise the motion.

6. Associate Dean, Undergraduate Studies. Reminding the Provost that Prof. Weekes has been serving as Interim Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies for this past year, Prof. Gaudette indicated that it was time to conduct an open search for an internal candidate for this position. The Provost indicated that he wanted to go ahead with this search. Prof. Gaudette noted that COG must conduct an election for search committee members. COG discussed how faculty governance might run an online election.

7. The meeting was adjourned at 3:48.

Respectfully submitted,

Kris Boudreau
Secretary, COG