

Minutes of FAP Meeting #13 AY2020-21

November 4, 2020

4:00 PM – 5:00 PM

Meeting Held Electronically via ZOOM

Members in Attendance: Joseph Fehribach (FAP Chair), Mike Radzicki (FBC Chair), Jeff Solomon (Executive Vice President/CFO), David Spanagel (FAP Secretary), Kris Sullivan (Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs)

Absent: George Pins (RPC Representative)

Guest: Nancy Burnham (former FAP Chair)

Call to Order. Chair Fehribach called the 13th FAP meeting of the year to order at 4:04 PM.

1) **Review of Trustee Budget & Finance Committee meeting.** CFO Solomon debriefed the committee on how things went with the Trustees last week. He reported that the Trustees do support proceed with Phase II of the Kaven Hall renovations during the summer of 2021, as originally planned, but they felt the Administration's "cash conservation" approach should remain in effect for handling the current year's Covid operating and capital budgets. The committee also discussed need to maintain focus on deferred maintenance budgeting.

CFO Solomon noted that the Trustees heard preliminary enrollment presentations given by VP Amy Morton (regarding undergraduate student recruitment) and Dean of Grad Studies Terri Comesano (regarding graduate student recruitment). The Trustees also heard updates on the WPI Forward projects' implementation status.

2) **Priorities for the Year.** Chair Fehribach laid out a systematic typology for organizing and handling all the suggestions FAP received. Through discussion, in lieu of prioritizing the entire list the committee assigned each proposed item to one of the following categories (as summarized below):

- a) Items that have basically been achieved and/or do not require further work at this time.
 - i) Asking the administration to save money by hiring fewer external consultants and doing more investigations in-house. [CFO Solomon noted that the professional services working group within WPI Forward is preparing a policy to go to the Administrative Policy Group, who may then issue a directive that operationally embodies this recommendation.]

- ii) Making sure that all financial analyses keep COVID-19-related issues separate from WPI Forward-related issues.
 - iii) The possibility of adding a wider variety of investment opportunities within WPI's retirement benefit program. [CFO Solomon and Professor Pins both noted that Fidelity already provides WPI employees with a self-directed brokerage option which enables its users to manage their retirement investments to include all kinds of funds not included in the institutionally-managed Retirement Plan.]
 - iv) Looking for ways to increase revenue rather than having to cut spending. [Nobody on FAP questions the consensus that this is a desirable general approach.]
 - v) Investigating the possibility of WPI saving money by asking faculty to take year-long sabbaticals. [While several FAP members expressed skepticism about the net desirability of encouraging more full-year sabbaticals, AVP Sullivan noted that we already know exactly the degree to which sabbatical leave savings partially fund adjunct coverage for the missing faculty members' teaching and project advising responsibilities.]
- b) Items that cannot be achieved, or which have already escaped FAP's capacity to affect at this point in time.
- i) Evaluating whether or not WPI should be hiring a new Dean position (for the Global School), and conducting searches to replace other interim deans in the current challenging environment.
- c) Items **to be referred to the Fringe Benefits Committee** (FBC) for further consideration and potential recommendations back to FAP.
- i) Following-up on the proposed flexible summer hours program.
 - ii) Reviewing WPI's health insurance offerings. [FBC conducts annual reviews of the options that we currently offer, and periodically oversees a more comprehensive evaluation of potential competitors and/or categories of coverage that we may want introduce or reconfigure.]
 - iii) Consider expanded mental health care coverage? [Professor Burnham clarified that this suggestion was linked to a person's experience of limited health plan coverage as well as some frustration with their flex spending account's capacity. CFO Solomon noted,

incidentally, that people should also be aware of and consider utilizing the Employee's Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP exists to support any employee struggling with unusual financial burdens or other personal challenges, and it provides access to some counseling, coaching, discounts, and avenues for legal and financial assistance. Awareness of anyone's consultation with or use of the EAP is kept confidential.]

d) Items that other entities at WPI are currently undertaking, but which **FAP plans to monitor** closely.

- i) Following-up on and ensuring transparency in faculty review process. [The "Overview of the Faculty Performance Management Process" document was sent to COG in AY'2019-20. FAP will be interested to see what COG does with this.]
- ii) Understanding the financial implications of granting tenure to TRT faculty. [COG is currently shepherding a proposal for general faculty consideration. There will surely be follow-up steps required (where FAP's input may be helpful) to guide or inform implementation of whatever new TRT policy gets approved by the Faculty, the Administration, and the Trustees.]

e) **Items that FAP plans to take up directly in the course of its work this year.**

- i) Reviewing WPI's health care insurance program for graduate students. [The Trustees are even aware of this issue, having mentioned it in their Student Affairs Committee meeting last week.]
- ii) Consider proposing a policy for academic year time buyout. [Professor Gaudette had asked "When faculty buy out of teaching a course, is this good or bad for WPI? If good, then it should be encouraged (e.g. give bonus \$ or prof development funds for this); if bad, then we need to reduce our expectations for external funding because this requires faculty time and effort."]
- iii) Reviewing the recent faculty early retirement program. Was it good for WPI? Did the Institute save money? Should WPI offer more early retirement options?
- iv) Routinely reviewing the financial efficacy of all academic and non-academic programs. [CFO Solomon noted that some of the data gathered by Huron Consulting to support the WPI Forward conversations may be useful for FAP to include in its conversations. AVP Sullivan outlined the various program evaluation efforts and metrics currently being studied by a WPI Forward subgroup under the leadership of Interim Business School Dean Steve Taylor, as well

as projections of revenue and costs for new programs that are already being done within the Provost's Office to help assess and anticipate break points for program growth trajectories. Provost Wole Soboyejo and WPI Forward Fellow Rachel LeBlanc will be invited to meet with FAP to update us on these matters.]

v) Equity issues surrounding the distribution of TA's on campus. [CFO Solomon noted that these are included in work being conducted by another WPI Forward subgroup, under the leadership of Interim Engineering Dean John McNeill. Provost Wole Soboyejo and WPI Forward Fellow Rachel LeBlanc will be invited to meet with FAP to update us on these matters, as well.]

vi) Continuing discussions about the details of WPI's faculty salary benchmarking process. [CFO Solomon noted that the Trustees' Compensation Committee is interested in this work. Talent and Inclusion VP Michelle Jones-Johnson will be invited to meet with FAP to discuss this and other matters.]

vii) Issues surrounding WorkDay (both in its impacts on already overburdened faculty and academic departmental staff members; and looking ahead to challenges and changes that the implementation of WorkDay Student in 2021 portends). [Change Management and Training Manager Veronica Brandstrader and Information Technology CIO VP Patty Patria will be invited to meet with FAP to discuss these matters.]

viii) Faculty Workload models. [Professor Burnham noted that a simultaneous meeting of WPI's AAUP chapter was at that very moment voting on a statement both supporting, and recommending the terms and conditions that should guide, the development of Faculty Workload models at WPI.]

3) **Other questions.** Professor Radzicki asked if partial restoration can be expected of the retirement contribution, post Covid-budgeting. CFO Solomon responded that the WPI Forward group formulated target ranges (based on benchmarking) which in all likelihood will result in a recommendation to bring WPI's annual retirement contributions back above the emergency 8% level (where they currently are), but not all the way back to the old 11%.

4) **Approval of Minutes.** The minutes of the October 28th FAP meeting were read and minor corrections were noted. CFO Solomon moved and Professor Radzicki seconded a motion to approve the minutes as corrected. The motion passed unanimously.

5) **Adjournment.** The meeting was adjourned at 4:54 PM.

Respectfully submitted.

David Spanagel

FAP Secretary

DRAFT