

Minutes of FAP Meeting #23 AY2020-21

March 1, 2021

4:00 PM – 5:00 PM

Meeting Held Electronically via ZOOM

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

Guest: Tanja Dominko (Secretary of Faculty)

Call to Order. Chair Fehribach called the 23rd FAP meeting of the year to order at 4:02 PM.

1) **Proposed Travel Policy being considered by APG.** FAP Chair Fehribach reviewed some key features of the proposed new travel policy that APG has begun to discuss, including the employment of a travel management company, Workday pre-authorizations for all college-related travel plans, required use of a college P-card for air and hotel purchases, and requirement of receipts for out of pocket transaction payments above \$25 (down from the current threshold of \$75), no longer permitting travel fare upgrades out of professional development funds. CFO Solomon contextualized how this draft policy was another outgrowth of the WPI Forward work which had been aimed at containing travel costs to realize some savings for the college—the working group had conducted retrospective studies of actual travel expenditures and estimated that WPI could save something on the order of \$300,000 a year by implementing this package of policy changes. In particular, reimbursements for canceled trips can be much more easily credited and reused to support WPI travel if all reservations are made on WPI-owned P-cards.

FAP members asked several questions. One member was curious about any prior experience with institutionally-designated travel agents. A brief exchange of memories ensued, the gist of which traced how the old-fashioned travel agency model for planning trips withered during the first decades of the 21st century as online self-directed travel planning outcompeted those service providers.

Another FAP member asked: a) whether the use of the travel management company, the pre-authorization requirements and reimbursement thresholds would also apply to grant-funded travel?; b) would the travel management company exercise any restrictions on hotel chain affiliations?; c)

might this policy conflict with federal granting agencies' guidelines?; and d) how would undergraduate or graduate student conference travel participation be paid for since they would not be eligible for P-cards? CFO Solomon answered as follows: the policy would also apply to grants; no preferences or limits would be imposed on particular carriers or hotels; the policy should not interfere with any federal guidelines; and the travel management company would be given a designated WPI "Other" P-card account number to cover all travel reservations made on behalf of any WPI-affiliated folks who have not been issued their own P-cards.

Several FAP members expressed support for the idea of saving WPI money (and even the convenience of trip planning being coordinated by a travel management company), but they warned that the proposed policy (as it currently stands) would inject Workday even more oppressively into our existing processes (a new layer of travel pre-approval on top of what departments already do, and having to keep track of many more transaction receipts). Such duplicative and fine-grained oversight could actually discourage faculty from engaging in some scholarly and professional travel opportunities, or compel them to have to pay entirely out of pocket for some professional activities, simply due to the logistical headaches and time burdens involved in complying with this policy.

CFO Solomon reminded us that APG policies typically undergo a period of deliberation (considering possible modifications) before preliminary approval, after which public comment by the entire community will be welcomed for a 30-day period, prior to any final decision about the what the policy will look like once enacted. SoF Dominko urged CFO Solomon and FAP Chair Fehribach to bring FAP's concerns directly back to APG. She also noted that FAP is the appropriate faculty governance body where such financial and administrative policies should be discussed and developed in the first place. AVP Sullivan attempted to summarize FAP's views in this way: that "faculty do not want to be told how to travel, but they are generally willing to work within a system that saves WPI money on college-subsidized trips." FAP members indicated that they did not object to Sullivan's characterization, but added that it is important to "reduce the layers and burdens of authorization," both to signal respect for faculty as responsible professionals and to facilitate their success in activities that require travel.

- 2) **Engineering Dean Search.** Professor Pins reported that the Engineering Dean search has been launched and it will be an open search for internal candidates. The search committee is co-chaired

by VPR Bogdan Vernescu and Prof. Mike Timko. Provost Soboyejo hopes the position may be filled by the end of May, 2021.

- 3) **Approval of Minutes.** Minutes from the 22nd FAP meeting were unanimously approved, as distributed.
- 4) **Other Topics the Committee Wishes to Discuss.** SoF Dominko will return to a future meeting to discuss the Faculty Compensation Discussion item (which we did not have time for today). She also encouraged FAP to specifically revisit the announced delay of the effective date for ordinary salary increases from July 1 to October 1 in 2021 (and subsequent years). Chair Fehribach noted that such a shift should at least enable also shifting the faculty annual report process to the end of the academic year.
- 5) **Adjournment.** The meeting was adjourned at 5:03 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

David Spanagel

FAP Secretary