

Committee on Governance: Meeting Minutes

Meeting #23: 21 February 2022

Faculty Governance Branch Offices

Present: Len Albano (Secretary, CEE); Nancy Burnham (PH); Tanja Dominko (BBT); Tahar El-Korchi (Chair, CEE); George Heineman (CS); Mark Richman (Secretary of the Faculty, AE); Susan Roberts (CHE); Wole Soboyejo (Provost)

1. Prof. El-Korchi called the meeting to order at 10:04 am.
2. The agenda was approved as distributed.
3. The minutes of COG meeting #22 on February 14, 2022 were approved with modifications.
4. Leadership Transition Update:
COG members extended their congratulations and well wishes to Provost Soboyejo on his election by the Board of Trustees to serve as interim WPI President.

Provost Soboyejo gave an update on the leadership transition, stating that he will meet with President Leshin on a regular basis to maintain continuity during the transition. There will be no major changes in direction until the next WPI President is appointed, and he will work with Faculty Governance and the faculty in their ongoing initiatives. Provost Soboyejo wants to place the welfare of the students at the center of our attention and will encourage faculty and staff to engage in activities that place students at the focus.

Provost Soboyejo also considers the process to identify and recommend an interim Provost to the Board of Trustees his most serious job in the short term. He expressed his assurances to the Committee that he will consult with the faculty, Faculty Governance leaders, Department Heads, and Deans, emphasizing that this position needs an advocate for the faculty who understands the work of the faculty. COG members suggested several ways in which the faculty can give input.

There was also some discussion on the outreach process and listening sessions that have been conducted by the Board of Trustees. Prof. Richman commented that these activities were intended to obtain preliminary feedback on the presidential search before the Board meeting on February 17, especially for the next WPI President and the search process. Lauren Turner (Senior VP of Talent & Inclusion) asked Prof. Richman to provide a list of eighteen faculty members for these listening sessions, and he responded with a list of thirty-two names as a diverse pool of faculty, considering gender, departmental and school affiliations, tenured and tenure-track faculty, nontenure-track faculty, etc. All thirty-two faculty were invited to participate in three listening sessions, and we have assurances that all faculty will be able to participate in listening sessions before any final decisions about the search process are made.

5. Debrief on the February Faculty Meeting:
Prof. El-Korchi thanked COG members for their work on the two motions to modify the Committee's membership to guarantee representation by nontenure-track (NTT) faculty and to establish the

Committee on Teaching and Research Faculty (CTRF) as a formal *ad hoc* Committee of the Faculty. These changes are a major milestone for Faculty Governance and part of the ongoing cultural change, and they reflect good collaboration with the NTT faculty. Prof. Richman appreciated that the faculty passed the Committee on Academic Policy's motion to establish a temporary *Pass/NR* policy after considerable discussion. This temporary policy should contribute to relieving student stress. It was noted that Chat within Zoom has become a channel for parallel discussions, but these exchanges are not part of discussing and debating motions. It would be worthwhile to clarify this point at future meetings.

6. Sexual Misconduct Policy Update:

Provost Soboyejo asked the Administrative Policy Group (APG) to extend the public comment period for the interim Title IX and Sexual Misconduct Policy (dated August 2021) to 45 days, recognizing the mental health and wellbeing issues faced by students, faculty, and staff. The APG voted to approve this extension at its February 9th meeting.

COG discussed how to address the interim Policy, focusing on both the nature and extent of the changes and the process for obtaining faculty approval. COG members recognized that WPI must have a Title IX policy in place that complies with federal regulations, but not all sexual misconduct cases are Title IX violations. One approach would have been to revise the existing Sexual Misconduct Policy to reflect relevant changes in Title IX requirements and to establish a separate Title IX policy. In contrast, the interim Policy uses the changes in Title IX as a starting point and significantly revises the existing Sexual Misconduct Policy. Provost Soboyejo responded that he has urged the APG to provide simplified versions of the policy changes with schematics that the Office of General Counsel (OGC) can use to make a presentation to the WPI community.

On the subject of the process for gaining required faculty approval, as in the past the faculty will expect the proposed Sexual Misconduct Policy to come from COG in the form of a draft at one faculty meeting after COG has vetted the policy thoroughly, and in the form of a motion at a second faculty meeting after COG has incorporated the faculty's input. This was the process used during the 2017-18 Academic Year to approve the last sexual misconduct policy. Given the campus climate, COG does not believe that the faculty currently have the bandwidth to approve the Policy by the end of the academic year.

Provost Soboyejo asked COG to provide him with a recommended time frame for the faculty to address and approve the revised Policy. The consensus within COG was to postpone this process to the next academic year. Provost Soboyejo agreed to convey this time frame to the APG.

7. Updates from the Board of Trustees Meeting:

The Board of Trustees (BOT) met on Thursday and Friday, February 17 and 18. Prof. El-Korchi and Prof. Richman were not able to participate in many sessions because the BOT meetings on Thursday conflicted with the Faculty Meeting. Prof. Richman noted that his participation was also impacted by time conflicts between certain sessions. For example, the meeting of the Academic Planning Committee (APC) was concurrent with the meeting of the Budget and Finance Committee, and the meeting of the Student Affairs Committee coincided with that of the Facilities and Infrastructure

Committee. At the meeting of the Corporation, the Chairs of the BOT Committees reported out from the respective meetings, and it was announced that Provost Soboyejo will serve as the Interim President.

Provost Soboyejo attended a number of sessions, including the meetings of the APC and the Economic Impact Committee. At the APC meeting, Provost Soboyejo's recommendations for tenure and promotion were acted on. Provost Soboyejo was pleased to inform COG that that in recent years an equal number of female and male faculty are being promoted as an outcome of the new criteria for promotion, which recognizes the range of faculty contributions to the success of WPI. The meeting of the APC included the following presentations:

- Findings and recommendations of the Mental Health and Well-being Task Dean King and Prof. Demetry (MME; Director, Morgan Center for Teaching and Learning),
- Outcomes from the 2021 COACHE Survey by Prof. Demetry,
- Overviews of the four schools by the respective Deans, and
- Draft Strategic Plan for the Global School by Dean Sheller.

The meeting of the Economic Impact Committee included presentations on innovation and value creation, potential links to research, and the presence of WPI at the Seaport in Boston.

Prof. Roberts is a member of the Facilities and Infrastructure Committee. She reported that WPI is entering into a partnership with an energy company to provide sustainable energy for the campus. This partnership will include opportunities for student projects and faculty research.

Following these updates, Prof. Heineman asked Provost Soboyejo whether there was any discussion on the incoming class size. Provost Soboyejo responded that he did not attend any discussions on class size, but the effort is to err on the low side. There is also increasing awareness that rising inflation will also impact the incoming class.

8. The meeting was adjourned at 11:28 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Leonard Albano
Secretary, COG