

Committee on Governance: Minutes

Meeting #8: October 30, 2023

Faculty Governance Office

Faculty Governance Conference Room, SL 225

4:00 pm – 5:30 pm

Zoom Link: <https://wpi.zoom.us/j/95482156236>

Members: Mark Claypool (CS), Althea Danielski (HUA), Tanja Dominko (Secretary, BBT), George Heineman (Chair, CS), Art Heinricher (Interim Provost), Stephen Kmiotek (ChE), Mark Richman (Secretary of the Faculty, AE), Diane Strong (President's appointment, WBS), Karen Troy (BME).

1. The agenda was approved.
2. Minutes for meetings #6 and #7 were approved as amended.
3. Meeting of the Board of Trustees between 26th – 27th of October, 2023

The COG Chair and the Secretary of the Faculty have standing invitations in the Faculty Handbook to attend the meetings of Board of Trustees' committees: Academic Planning, Budget and Finance, Facilities and Infrastructure, and Student Affairs. These committees also include Board-appointed faculty members. All faculty participants are bound by confidentiality which limits the scope of discussions that can be shared with the faculty community. The ongoing trustees' practice of scheduling the Academic Planning and the Budget and Finance committee meetings at the same time, and scheduling the Facilities and Infrastructure Committee and the Student Affairs Committee meetings at the same time prevents our elected faculty representatives from attending all the meetings.

Student Affairs committee presentations and discussions centered on student mental health and wellbeing and risk management strategies developed for early identification and mitigation of student distress. Discussion highlighted the importance of student dashboards and CARE Reports that continue to be effective tools for timely intervention. The committee was alerted to significantly lower participation of women in pledges to sororities on campus.

Facilities and Infrastructure committee discussion were led by VP Eric Beattie and EVP Mike Horan. Among other topics, the committee discussed the capital budget in FY2024; the progress on the Stratton Hall renovations, preliminary plans to build a new residence hall by 2027, the relatively lean custodial staffing on campus; and a plan for drilling of 390 geothermal wells and installing solar panels on campus to offset much of WPI's energy needs. VP Beattie presented a roadmap to carbon neutrality and indicated that significant progress could be made to reduce our carbon footprint within the next 4-5 years. He also discussed progress being made since May 2023 in developing the facilities and infrastructure master plan with input from the community and overseen by an outside consultant.

During the Budget and Finance committee meeting EVP Horan discussed plans for this year's operating budget. He discussed plans for continued gradual growth of undergraduate student population and he indicated a much more aggressive approach with respect to graduate student enrollments, with an immediate emphasis on recruiting of M.S. students from India. Such an approach would go hand-in-hand with providing more on-campus graduate housing opportunities.

Chair Heineman attended the meeting of the Academic Planning committee and presented a draft of the motion to define formal procedures for resolution of cases alleging violations of academic freedom. The committee raised a number of concerns and provided feedback that will be addressed as the motion continues to be developed for faculty consideration. Trustee and the Chair of the AP committee, Marni Hall, will meet with COG Chair Prof. Heineman and SoF Prof. Richman for further discussions of the specific provisions of the motion. The final motion will also include feedback received from CTAF after their review and discussions, which may not be available until C term due to the committee's responsibility to complete recommendations for tenure in B term.

COG member Prof. Kmiotek updated the APC on the status of the work of Mental Health and Wellbeing task force and subsequent Implementation Team. More than 100 recommendations of the Task Forces have now been implemented, including publication of advising guidance by CASL; widespread use of lecture capture and other flexibility provisions by faculty for students who are out sick; and implementation of a set of new HUA courses specifically designed for First Year students that include wellness topics. The current work is focused on further developing systems to identify students at risk earlier in term; currently, faculty are encouraged to submit CARE reports for students who they are concerned about. Even longer term, the focus is on helping build resilience and helping students redefine success, relying less on grades and the number of student activities and developing a more balanced measure of success.

4. COG continued discussing and clarifying the language of the latest draft of a motion to define formal procedures for academic freedom cases and considered several points of concern received during the AP meeting by the Board members. Topics included: timeline for handling cases, confidentiality throughout the process, informal resolution procedures and their outcomes, investigation and decision procedures and their outcomes, and resolution steps including recommendations and follow-up. COG will incorporate CTAF recommendations when they are formulated in C term.
5. The meeting was adjourned at 5:45pm.

Respectfully,

Tanja Dominko
COG Secretary