

Committee on Governance: Meeting Minutes

Meeting #10: 1 November 2021

Campus Center, Morgan Conference Room

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

Absent: Nancy Burnham (PH); Wole Soboyejo (Provost)

1. Prof. El-Korchi called the meeting to order at 11:25 am.
2. The agenda was approved as distributed.
3. The minutes of COG meeting #9 on October 25, 2021 were approved with modifications.
4. Preparations for the November Faculty Meeting:

Prof. Richman reported that the Faculty Meeting on November 4th will be somewhat unique in that there are no motions or consent agenda items to consider and there are two sets of meeting minutes to approve. One set of meeting minutes is for the October Faculty Meeting, and the other is for the Special Faculty Meeting on student wellbeing that was held on September 30. Two open discussions will be the significant agenda items for Thursday's meeting. For the first discussion, Prof. Cowlagi (Chair, Committee on Information Technology Policy) will open with a brief presentation on IT policies related to the privacy of WPI community members. For the second discussion item, Prof. Richman had considered a focus on the state of affairs and issues for tenure-track faculty (COG Meeting #9). Based on feedback from the invited faculty speakers, the topic was expanded to look at the challenges of academic and home life. Prof. Gillian Smith (IMGD), Prof. Jen deWinter (IMGD), Prof. Pratap Rao (ME), and Prof. Sarah Stanlick (DIGS) will provide an opening presentation to stimulate discussion. After discussions with COG and other faculty colleagues, Prof. Richman decided to conduct the meeting entirely on Zoom to avoid concerns for health safety, and he stated that the decision to conduct in-person or virtual faculty meetings will continue to be made on a month-by-month basis.
5. Updates from Board of Trustees Meeting:

The Board of Trustees met on Thursday and Friday, October 27 and 28. Prof. El-Korchi reported that Prof. Richman and he attended three open committee meetings: Prof. Richman attended meetings of the Academic Planning Committee, Student Affairs Committee, and the Technology Task Force; and Prof. El-Korchi attended meetings of the Budget and Finance Committee, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee, and Economic Impact Committee. Prof. El-Korchi also noted that Prof. Roberts also participated as one of two faculty members on the Facilities and Infrastructure Committee. As Secretary of the Faculty, Prof. Richman also attended the meeting of the Corporation. Profs. El-Korchi, Richman, and Roberts then gave updates on the key issues in the meetings that they attended, and these observations are summarized below.

Budget and Finance Committee (Prof. El-Korchi): CFO Mike Horan presented a model for a 10-year budget cycle that could be used as a planning tool to explore the impact of certain budget stressors.

Facilities and Infrastructure Committee (Prof. Roberts and El-Korchi): The current capital budget contains \$1.2M for new equipment and fit out to support faculty hires, and an increase to \$3M is planned for next year's capital budget. Prof. Roberts questioned whether this level of funding is sufficient to support competitive start-up packages for new hires, and she plans to follow-up with Associate VP Kris Sullivan. Prof. El-Korchi noted that there was a push for new housing, but the proposed new residence hall will not be built. Instead, WPI will lease space within the former Becker College campus at a lower cost and use the townhouses for undergraduate housing. The target is to house about 65% of the undergraduate students, and this includes housing within fraternities and sororities.

Meeting of the Corporation (Prof. Richman): Provost Soboyejo presented the Strategic Plan. It was approved by the Corporation following some questions and discussion.

Academic Planning Committee (Prof. Richman): Dean Jackson (FSB), Dean King (A&S), and Dean McNeill (Eng.) presented on their work with the proposed models for Program Evaluation, Faculty Load, and Budgeting. The Deans of the four schools gave updates on their respective schools. These presentations were followed by discussion on the accomplishments from last academic year regarding a teaching path to tenure and secure contracts for non-tenure-track faculty members. Fifteen members of the TRT faculty were named to the new tenure track as part of a commitment to appoint forty-five TRT faculty to the tenure track over a three-year period. Prof. Richman shared faculty numbers in terms of appointments for last academic year and the current year:

AY 2020-21

Adjunct: 43 (FTE)

Teaching & Research Track (Full-time NTTs): 126

Tenured & Tenure-Track (Dual mission): 262

AY 2021-22

Adjunct: 56 (FTE)

Teaching & Research Track (Full-time NTTs): 128

Tenure-Track (Teaching Faculty): 15

Tenured & Tenure-Track (Dual mission): 266

128 TRT faculty:

1-year contracts: 27

First 3-year contracts: 31

Second 3-year contracts: 21

5-year contracts: 49

Student Affairs Committee (Prof. Richman): Discussions focused on issues of mental health and student wellbeing, and included a presentation by Charlie Morse, Associate Dean/Director of Counseling.

Technology Task Force (Prof. Richman): This Committee is transitioning to a standing committee of the BOT. The goals of the Committee were discussed. One issue is the balance between reducing risk and the impact on daily operations and privacy. Prof. Richman also noted that there was some discussion of distributing a user satisfaction survey across the WPI community.

Economic Impact Committee (Prof. El-Korchi): VPR Bogdan Vernescu gave an overview of activities within the Research Solutions Institute and the Office of Technology Commercialization. Considerable discussion was devoted to Battery Resources, a startup that offers a unique process for recycling Li-ion batteries. The firm has been attracting angel investing and there are plans to build four recycling plants to meet the demand. Sia Najafi, Executive Director, Information Technology, gave a presentation on the computational support that is available for academic and research activities.

Following the updates, there was some discussion on whether the faculty members on the Trustees' committees would be able to report back to the faculty. Historically, the Secretary of the Faculty gave a briefing to COG. Later, when membership of faculty on the Trustees' committees was introduced, summary reports were distributed to the faculty, but this has not happened in recent years. Prof. Roberts responded that she felt that there was an expectation from the Board that the participating faculty members would update the faculty. Prof. Richman will give this question some consideration for an upcoming faculty meeting.

6. Proposal for Administrative Searches (continued from COG meeting #4):

Prof. Dominko distributed a revised version of the proposed changes to Section 1.I of the Faculty Handbook which addresses searches to fill academic administrative positions. The proposed changes are intended to clarify the definitions of academic administrators and to establish a transparent process for the selection and appointment of academic administrators. Clarifying the definition of an academic administrator is important because these appointments impact a faculty member's participation in faculty governance and other types of service. For transparency, the proposed changes would also make clear that anticipated vacancies in existing or newly created academic administrative positions will be announced to the faculty to promote wider awareness of available opportunities and more internal applicants.

Revisions to the document since COG meeting #4 included defining an academic administrative position as a faculty appointment in which the responsibilities require 50% or more time commitment and restrictions on faculty members who are eligible to be elected members of search committees for filling academic administrative positions. Appointments that require less than 50% time commitment would be task related and considered professional development opportunities. Prof. Dominko presented a draft of a table that provides examples of appointment titles, and for each title, information is given on the time commitment and eligibility for faculty governance ballots for election to COG, COAP and CTAF, FRC, and search committees.

One concern raised was whether the proposed changes are consistent with the practices at other schools. For example, would these changes negatively impact the ability of a Dean to appoint an Associate Dean that they can work with? Prof. Dominko indicated that the proposed changes are based on review of postings for academic administrators at other schools. Although Prof. Dominko has not yet discussed the proposed changes with our Deans, she expressed the desire for agreeing on and articulating a process in the Faculty Handbook that works for WPI.

A second area of discussion dealt with distinguishing the titles and appointment process for full-time (75-100% time commitment) versus part-time (25-75% time commitment) versus other types of professional development opportunities (time commitments of 25% or less). For example, a full-time appointment would involve a more elaborate search process to identify and select a faculty member than that for a part-time appointment. Appointments requiring less than 25% time commitments may be defined as Faculty Fellows. Prof. Dominko agreed to revise the document based on this feedback.

7. Communication with Faculty Governance Committees and Feedback on Accommodating All Voting Faculty:
Looking ahead to next spring's election cycle for Committees of the Faculty, Prof. El-Korchi announced that he will be contacting the Committees to solicit feedback on accommodating all voting faculty within their respective committees. He will ask each Committee to discuss whether there should be membership limitations or membership guarantees for TRT faculty.
8. Prof. Heineman reported that the recently formed Work on Workday (WOW) group, which was announced at the October Faculty Meeting, has answered 10 queries.
9. The meeting was adjourned at 12:45pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Leonard Albano
Secretary, COG