

## **Committee on Governance: Minutes**

Meeting #20: March 2, 2021

Faculty Governance Branch Offices

**Present:** Len Albano (CEE); Kris Boudreau (Chair, HUA); Tanja Dominko (Secretary of the Faculty, BBT); Tahar El-Korchi (CEE); Arne Gericke (CBC); Mark Richman (Secretary, AE); Wole Soboyejo (Provost).

1. The meeting was called to order at 1:19 pm. The agenda was approved on its own recognizance.
2. The minutes of meeting #18 were approved with minor changes to the Custom Margins settings.
3. Motion to Extend the Tenure Clock Due to Covid Disruptions: The committee was strongly in favor of a joint motion from CTAF and COG to extend, due to COVID-related disruptions, the probationary periods of all tenure-track faculty members who joined WPI in fall 2020, with a choice provided to opt out of the extension by no later than May of the year before tenure materials would otherwise be submitted for full review by the joint committee. Subject to final editorial changes, the committee approved the motion.
4. Faculty Handbook Changes Needed to Document Secure Status for TRT Faculty Members: The committee discussed the kinds of changes that would have to be made to Part Two, Section 7 of the Faculty Handbook to keep an open record of the anticipated terms of appointments, reappointments, and protections for Teaching Professors, Instructors and Lecturers, and Professors of Practice. Including these changes in this way will make the terms clear and transparent so that both the TRT and TTT faculty will be able to judge and monitor them for – among many concerns - the security the terms provide, and for the clarity needed in extending full participation in faculty governance to all secure faculty members. COG feels strongly that as fundamental matters of equity and inclusion, new contracts to be issued to all our full-time non-tenure-track faculty colleagues should guarantee them conditions of employment (including for contract renewals) that provide the security faculty members need to act without fear of reprisals in all that they do for the university and its governance.

COG discussed corresponding changes to Part One of the Faculty Handbook that could then be made, as well. These might include a broadening of the definition of the faculty to include all full-time faculty members, an identification of all those full-time faculty members whose security permits them to fully participate in faculty governance, and a mechanism to assure that those faculty members who are secure when the changes are enacted remain secure in the future. Several elements of COG's discussion will remain hypothetical until the administration, the TRT council and COG agree on contract language that satisfactorily addresses the critical issues concerning the level of professional security for our teaching faculty colleagues described above.

Concerns were raised that, although a full month had passed since the TRT Council had forwarded a proposal to the administration concerning specific modifications that would provide the teaching faculty with a desired level of security, no written response from the administration had yet been received by either the TRT Council or representatives of COG.

Consequently, it has been difficult to work on the required faculty handbook changes. Even more importantly, the process to adopt such changes must allow sufficient time for healthy and productive collaboration and for additional discussions - as needed - for all constituencies to be satisfied with the outcome.

5. Name Change of the ME Department: On behalf of the administration, Provost Soboyejo endorsed changing the name of the Mechanical Engineering Department to the Department of Mechanical and Materials Engineering. This change will emphasize the important role of Materials Engineering to the mission of the Mechanical Engineering Department, and it makes logistical sense now that Aerospace Engineering, which had also played a significant role in that mission, has become a separate academic department. COG approved the motion to change the department name, in principle, but will check to see if there are complications because the new acronym (MME) is currently also used by the Master of Mathematics Education program.
6. Process for Appointing Academic Administrators and Opportunities for Faculty Development: Last year, Prof. Dominko and Prof. Gaudette drafted two documents: one that included a proposed set of academic leadership positions that might be standardized and made available specifically to interested and qualified faculty members; and a second that improved the processes we currently use to appoint academic administrators. COG discussed the first document last week. The second document includes a clearer definition of full- and part-time administrative positions; suggests a more uniform set of titles that would clearly distinguish academic dean positions held by faculty members from nonacademic dean positions held by staff members; sets a time limit on interim academic appointments; and describes an internal search process that ensures equal notification to our faculty of all such positions that become available. Confusion could be avoided in the future if we are careful to distinguish (through appropriate definitions and titles) part-time academic positions that require a formal search from smaller professional development opportunities that could be offered to individual faculty by appointment.

The meeting adjourned at 2:46 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark Richman  
Secretary, COG