

Committee on Governance: Minutes
Meeting #26: April 5, 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), and Wole Soboyejo (Provost).

Guest of Honor: Jim Doyle (Chair, CTAF, SSPS)

1. Prof. Boudreau called the meeting to order at 12:16; the agenda was approved.
2. Elections for COAP, COG, and CTAF. Prof. Dominko reported that the ballots are ready to go out. Because of the rising caseload on CTAF and COAP, she has asked the administration to offer one course release to each faculty representative to COAP and CTAF in the fall. The Provost indicated his support, saying he would have an answer within the next two days. One member suggested that COG hold the elections for CTAF and COAP in the fall, given that course releases announced in spring would upset the course-scheduling process. COG and the committee chairs will review this request.
3. Discussion of a two-year tenure clock extension for TT faculty because of COVID. CTAF Chair Professor Jim Doyle joined COG at 12:30 to discuss potential unintended consequences of the 2-year covid extension for early-career TT faculty that COG approved several weeks ago. Professor Doyle mentioned emerging empirical evidence (including interviews with some of WPI's tenure-track faculty) that clock extensions can have unequal consequences, including gender-related differences. Noting that the tenure clock extension is a blunt instrument that was necessary during the spring emergency, he suggested that WPI now has time to respond more carefully with a combination of changes (administrative policies and Department Head actions in addition to faculty governance extensions).

The concerns raised by junior faculty in interviews include worries that departments are requiring particular quantities of work rather than being flexible in response to COVID-related circumstances. COG and Prof. Doyle emphasized the importance (COVID or no COVID) of relying on established criteria spelled out in the Faculty Handbook rather than introducing new ones at the program or department level.

All agreed that the first tenure-clock extension last spring was necessary but not sufficient. Next steps will be to 1) invite Kimberly LeChasseur, who conducted the interviews with tenure-track faculty, to the May 26 faculty meeting to present her findings. COG, CTAF, and the Provost would like to encourage a broader response to the difficulties faced by TT faculty because of the covid lockdown, tightened budgets, and eclipse of research activities by teaching demands; 2) CTAF will discuss whether to pursue the motion granting a 2-year extension; and 3) Provost Soboyejo will devote part of a Department Heads' meeting to addressing other steps the departments can take to support junior faculty. The Provost will invite Prof. Doyle to this meeting.

Prof. Doyle left the meeting at 12:55.

4. Academic Administration & Faculty Leadership.

Professor Dominko shared a document she and Professor Gaudette had brought to COG in December, 2019 containing proposed changes to the Faculty Handbook that would clarify some ambiguity concerning academic administrative positions and offer formal ways for faculty to gain administrative experience. COG discussed Part One, proposing guidelines for appointments of Academic Administrative positions. The document is motivated by the need to clarify who is and who isn't an Academic Administrator, given that these academic classifications have implications on eligibility for different kinds of service. The proposal before COG would help to answer questions like the following: What does it mean to say that one's primary responsibility is in administration? How do we advertise eligibility internally for academic administrative positions? Who is eligible to serve on which committees? How should faculty governance be involved in the formation of new academic administrative positions? Can we more accurately describe existing positions? Can we add a clear account of what we consider "interim" appointments and the maximum length of such an appointment?

Part Two of the proposal addresses part-time academic administrative positions. These proposed positions, concerning very specific tasks or responsibilities, would offer opportunities for internal professional development of WPI faculty interested in eventual transition into administrative roles.

Part Three describes a third mechanism for faculty development, Presidential and Provost fellowships, designed for the President and Provost to define and recruit faculty members to perform smaller academic or non-academic tasks for a defined period of time.

A discussion of the proposal followed. COG members appreciated the work and clear thinking that had gone into the proposal. Some of them questioned whether the search process described for Deans should be limited to searches for full-time Deans. Could the process for selecting and appointing part-time Deans be more streamlined?

Turning to Parts Two and Three of the proposal, Provost Soboyejo indicated his support for the idea of pathways to administrative work for faculty. He suggested that COG discuss the proposal with the Deans before pursuing it. Others expressed support for the proposal and asked for a clearer distinction between temporary projects that won't lead to administrative development and part-time administrative positions. COG also discussed the method of making these appointments, calling for a transparent process rather than ad-hoc appointments. Finally, some COG members wondered whether the inclusion of part-time academic administrators was necessary, or whether the proposal should instead focus on project-based positions. What would we call the people undertaking those projects? One suggestion was to merge Part Two, the part-time academic administrative positions, with Part Three, the fellowships. COG agreed to resume discussion at a later meeting.

5. Review of academic administrators. According to COG's established schedule of reviews, the Academic Deans and the Vice Provost for Research are due to be reviewed this year. In general,

administrative review surveys are sent out in the spring. COG took up the topic of survey fatigue. The committee agreed to postpone this spring's reviews until A term, then resume its regular schedule next spring, so that two sets of administrators are reviewed next academic year.

6. Faculty Handbook revisions for security and inclusion of nontenure-track faculty members. In advance of the COG motions to revise the Faculty Handbook (to be discussed at the April 8 faculty meeting), Prof. Boudreau reported that she has heard from the Chair of COAP (Prof. Gennert) and the co-Chairs of FRC (Profs. Bullock and Tao), who indicated their committees' informal approval of the two relevant parts of the motions. The aspects relevant to COAP are extending all appointments of Professors of Practice (PoPs) to 5-year terms and, in parallel with other secured nontenure-track faculty members, restricting the grounds for disciplinary action or termination of PoPs during the term of any appointment to clearly defined "just cause." The aspect relevant to FRC is the expansion of the scope of the FRC's appeals to include non-renewals or terminations of NTT faculty members.

COG also noted that if the Faculty Handbook redefines the WPI faculty in a more expansive way (to include all faculty beyond just those responsible for the governance of the faculty), then it will have to be made clear that any reference to individual faculty members serving or acting in governance capacities and to the faculty in its duties and responsibilities for faculty governance refers only to those responsible for governance of the faculty, as defined in Part One, Section One of the Handbook.

COG members thanked Prof. Richman for the huge undertaking of writing these motions.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:46.

Respectfully submitted,

Kris Boudreau
Acting Secretary, COG