

Minutes of FAP Meeting #16 AY2020-21

December 2, 2020

4:00 PM – 5:00 PM

Meeting Held Electronically via ZOOM

Members in Attendance: Joseph Fehribach (FAP Chair), George Pins (RPC Representative), Mike Radzicki (FBC Chair), Jeff Solomon (Executive Vice President/CFO), David Spanagel (FAP Secretary), Kris Sullivan (Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs)

Guests: Rachel LeBlanc (WPI Forward Fellow), Wole Soboyejo (Senior Vice President/Provost)

Call to Order. Secretary Spanagel called the 16th FAP meeting of the year to order at 4:08 PM (just a few minutes before Chair Fehribach arrived).

1) **Topics the Provost wished to bring to FAP.** Provost Soboyejo described how some of last year's WPI Forward investigative and analytical work (that had been conducted by the Huron group) stimulated the formation of three study groups: Faculty Activity, Program Performance, and Budget Models. Each of these groups has been led by one of the current or acting School Deans, and is largely composed of appointed faculty members but also includes selected administrative staff.¹

According to Provost Soboyejo, although the instigation of these three study groups had a potential financial savings implication (consistent with the WPI Forward effort as a whole), the main goal of each group is to look at what we are doing (in that area) and to identify ways we might be able to do it better. In other words, rather than insisting on achieving cost savings as an end in itself, he sees the groups striving to find ways to optimize the performance of our faculty, our academic programs, and our systems of paying for these things; some cost savings should naturally follow if we achieve those more important kinds of improvement.

a) Arts and Sciences Dean Jean King's group has focused on examining how to develop some Faculty Activity model(s) that could both better reflect the diverse and complex realities as well as

¹ For example, WPI Forward Fellow Rachel LeBlanc and AVP for Academic Affairs/FAP member Kris Sullivan have both participated in the meetings of all three committees. Members of the Office of Institutional Research have supported the groups' efforts. Representatives from the Finance and Operations department participated in the Budget Modeling group's work.

acknowledge the value that many distinct faculty activities provide to WPI as a whole. In addition to activities generally falling into familiar categories like teaching, scholarship, and project advising, the Provost also instructed the group to try to build into its model some way to accommodate faculty needs for “free” time to support their growth and creativity, as well as to ensure their ongoing productivity.

- b) Interim Business Dean Steve Taylor’s group has focused on ways of assessing Program Performance and monitoring/adjusting the strategic alignment of WPI’s degree granting programs over time. Knowing how frequently WPI adds new programs, it would be helpful to develop objective means of determining when such programs may require additional resources to help achieve institutional priorities, as well as how to assess when the time may be right to consider either reconceiving a program or else planning for its “sunset.”
- c) Interim Engineering Dean John McNeill’s group has focused on how budgeting practices might establish more effective “stick” accountability and “carrot” incentives to enable high-achieving programs to receive appropriate rewards while supporting all of WPI’s academic unit leaders to be able to exercise greater decision-making autonomy within a framework that still ensures overall alignment with institutional goals and priorities.
- d) WPI Forward fellow LeBlanc shared a slide which featured a Venn diagram showing the overlaps and intersections of all three of these aspects of the “Academic Portfolio Project.” She emphasized that all three groups have regarded both “sustainability” and “transparency” as key criteria guiding their work. Later on in our conversation, she commented on how impressed she was by the energy and passion that the faculty participants had brought to these study groups, and reiterated the consensus view that the results of their work must be “clear, fair, and transparent.”
- e) FAP members posed a number of questions, ranging from asking about details of the fact-gathering and analytical approaches that the groups have engaged in to asking about whether the mindset informing whatever modeling is being done has been more “top-down” or “bottom up.” Provost Soboyejo expressed a preference for the kinds of diversity and contextual sensitivity that “bottom-up” thinking enables. He hopes that the optimization tools that get developed will retain these positive benefits while still providing a firmer basis for negotiating individual accountability within the system as a whole than what we currently have.

f) Provost Soboyejo expects to receive some preliminary results from the groups within the next few weeks. CFO Solomon suggested that FAP may want to invite this meeting's attendees back to regroup sometime during C term, to receive an update and then have a chance to discuss the implications of the study groups' findings and recommendations.

2) **Approval of Minutes.** After making two minor corrections (one supplying a missing word, and one preserving the consistency of how speakers were identified in the draft minutes), Professor Pins moved and Professor Radzicki seconded a motion to approve the minutes of the November 18th FAP meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

3) **Adjournment.** The meeting was adjourned at 5:02 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

David Spanagel

FAP Secretary

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