

Minutes of FAP Meeting #20 AY2021-22

February 21, 2022

4:00 PM – 5:00 PM

Meeting Held Electronically via ZOOM

Members in Attendance: Tanja Dominko, Joseph Fehribach (FAP Chair), Mike Horan (Executive Vice President/CFO), Joseph Sarkis (FBC Co-Chair), Kris Sullivan (Associate VP for Academic Affairs; Presidential Appointee)

Call to Order. Chair Fehribach called the 20th FAP meeting of the year to order at 4:06 PM.

- 1) D-Term Meetings** of FAP will continue at this time and day and by Zoom.
- 2) Lauren Turner Senior VP** of Talent & Inclusion will likely visit FAP during D-Term.
- 3) Budget and Finance Committee Board of Trustees Meeting Overview.**

Discussion on content and issues presented at past week's Board of Trustee's Budget and Finance Committee were discussed. It was stated that content was largely what Michael Horan presented to FAP on February 14. Major issue by the Board of Trustees was that expenses are likely to increase. Some information related to other school salary increases (i.e. Brown University announced a increase of over 4.25%, highest in 10 years due to inflation (see <https://www.brown.edu/news/2022-02-14/tuition-salary>)).

The Board discussed the 3% planned increase in wages, which may not be enough to offset inflationary pressures – which are at about 5.8%. It was stated that while tuition is a major driver at WPI, it is difficult to maintain affordability while offering compensation. It is clear that they felt that compensation is a priority. One issue is that an outside consultant Maximus will go evaluate WPI's research process and make recommendations based the WPI's growing research profile. Investments such as these will cause any surplus can go away quickly—currently there is a budget surplus depending on reimbursements for COVID testing from the Federal government

The Board of Trustees did not finalize a vote on budget parameters. The vote on parameters will be in May. This expirational discussion resulted in no official amounts or plans. No resolution on budget was approved. One resolution to refinance 2012 bonds was passed.

The Boston Consortium made an audit for the support process for research—they had a number of findings to make it better. What worked 4-5 years ago is not working well. One of these findings is bringing Maximus to consult on the research process. They will interview PI's and support staff and use their best practices to recommend new system and fine tune what we do. They are likely to mostly focus on support structure, different pre-reward, post-reward process and is it appropriately staffed and are the right controls in place.

Intellectual property (IP) will also be investigated and the process of leasing out licenses. There is a question on whether IP management and best practices being followed. Many of the patents and licensing agreements are specialized and beyond the technical expertise of in house council, creating the need for external counsel to consult with WPI.

Discussion on the Retirement Benefits did not occur at the Board of Trustees meeting. It was viewed as an important issue by FAP. The Coache survey showed it was a major issue with faculty. There was discussion and it was stated that a holistic perspective is needed considering all the tradeoffs with compensation, benefits, and other university needs.

The board discussed plans for the cogeneration plant. The discussion although some of it was financial also went in a direction on faculty and students benefiting for teaching and research. The power plant discussion included it use as a "living research lab". It is a 40 year deal there was a cautiousness associated with this decision and the debt financing. There will be a couple faculty and students on the co-generation committee. If this plan does not work, there are concerns of funding Stratton and Kaven renovations.

News was discussed that faculty will benefit with additional hires beyond those approved for this year. There was an agreement to hire 7 additional lines were approved today with a total of 31 lines approved. It is assumed that all positions will start to begin in the Fall 2022. 17 TTT and 4 TRT were originally approved. Growth in student body was part of the reason, but the overall four year number did not change significantly so there was a perspective that it was also investment for the future. There was a concern in the shift of courses taken by students. Incoming students tend take more introductory courses. Thus introductory course requirements have increased significantly—whereas previously students with Advanced Placement (AP) credit would start at upper level courses.

4) Research Spending versus Teaching Spending

This topic of discussion arose from a Canvas comment by a faculty member to FAP. “It would be interesting to know how much WPI spends on research and what should that number be.”

Discussion ensued. One summary was that this number is difficult to measure because of how faculty activity is distributed—for example. Especially, if trying to determine how much salary is assigned to research time spent. There are implications for faculty loading in this situation, but the motivation and reason for this question will need further elaboration.

It was agreed that the Vice Provost of Research can probably talk to this issue at some level. For example, research money from grants and overhead and where it is allocated. There are a number of resources dedicated for research such as facilities and how to allocate these facilities? WPI has tried to get a good balanced faculty making sure that research and teaching experience and expectations exist. How do you quantify these and research productivity of non-capital intensive research?

Overall, some of the complexity arises from blending and overlap teaching, research, and service activities and trying to distill the most appropriate proportions is not an easy task. For example, the research enterprise issues that arise from downstream expenses need to be taken into account. You need to be able to predict what research expenses will occur in the future and make initial investments. For example, lab techs may need to be hired for managing research labs, but their allocation may occur even before research grants are acquired.

It was agreed that more information on the purpose and motivation for this issue will be determined from the question by the faculty member.

5) Adjournment. The meeting was adjourned at 5:03 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Joseph Sarkis

FAP Secretary – ad Interim