

Minutes of FAP Meeting #27 AY2020-21

April 5, 2021

4:00 PM – 5:00 PM

Meeting Held Electronically via ZOOM

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

Guests: Maureen Deiana (Associate Vice President for Marketing Communications), Olga Klochkova (Director of Financial Planning and Analysis), Rachel LeBlanc (WPI Forward Fellow)

Absent Member: Mike Radzicki (FBC Chair)

Call to Order. Chair Fehribach called the 27th FAP meeting of the year to order at 4:07 PM.

- 1) **Proposed Professional Services Policy being considered by APG.** WPI Forward Fellow LeBlanc introduced Marketing Communications AVP Deiana and Financial Planning Director Klochkova to FAP, noting that AVP Sullivan (and former FAP member Prof. Fabienne Miller) had both also served on the WPI Forward initiative group that had examined possible institutional savings in the area of Professional Services. For a budget item that normally runs \$7-\$8 million in annual expenditures, the Huron group's preliminary analysis had suggested potential annual savings of between \$800K and \$1.2 million if some new policy recommendations were implemented. Director Klochkova affirmed the plausibility of these savings after the WPI Financial Planning and Analysis had completed a review of current practices. The highlights of the proposed policy involve requiring Workday approval and consultation across the institute for possible internal solutions when purchasing any outside professional service that would exceed \$5,000; competitive bidding would be required among any outside professional service providers for projects above the \$10,000 threshold. She also noted that in her study 89% of our professional services transactions fell below the \$5K threshold (and therefore would not be affected by this policy), but that 70% of our total expenditures in this area arose from the 11% of transactions which did exceed \$5K.

FAP members engaged in a conversation with Director Klochkova, AVP Deiana, WPI Forward Fellow LeBlanc, sharing many different anecdotal examples of outside services that have been purchased where someone within the WPI faculty or staff may have possessed the expertise or

capacity to provide that service. We even noted how individuals can sometimes unexpectedly bear resources of these kinds, and suggested that an “inventory-taking” activity would probably enhance the likelihood that consultations across divisions would find capable in-house alternatives.

CFO Solomon reiterated that APG is now trying to engage in advance consultations with the most appropriate faculty governance entities (FAP, in this case) to help identify key concerns and suggest possible modifications before APG moves to preliminary approval, public comment for 30 days, and then a final decision about what the policy will look like once enacted.

2) **Proposed Catering and Dining Services Policy being considered by APG.** WPI Forward Fellow LeBlanc presented this one as another result of the WPI Forward cost-saving investigations, noting that WPI previously had no framework in place at all for determining whether catering costs were appropriate for different types of meetings or events.

FAP members were quick to identify a variety of current practices which would be affected by this policy, including monthly Committee Chairs’ meetings, Department Heads’ meetings, and the many Department and Program faculty meetings which get scheduled during “lunch” times. The conversation focused on how and why externally-facing events and events involving students (like Project Presentation Day, for example) would not be subject to the catering prohibition, which helped a bit to clarify the animus of this proposed policy. In the larger context of the WPI Forward effort, the imperative of enhancing affordability of college for our students translated into policies designed both: a) to provide savings that could be channeled toward heftier aid packages; and b) to eliminate any practices that may appear to give WPI employees a “free lunch” at students’ expense, not to mention the additional irresponsibility of waste (leftover foods from meetings with lower than anticipated attendance).

Various FAP members then offered observations, critiques, and considerations that could be taken back to APG as it works to shape this policy:

- WPI’s agreement with Chartwells as the exclusive caterer might be reviewed, if reducing cost and waste are the objectives here
- Maybe holding meetings during lunch hours is itself a practice that should be discouraged in the interest of repairing some of our overstretched “work-life” balance as employees
- With this policy, a “bring-your-own-lunch” culture could replace the catered meetings expectation, potentially to everyone’s health and taste advantages

- But then a serious investment in expanding food storage/refrigerator/reheating capacity may be needed to ensure that employees in every department and division can practically avail themselves of the option of bringing food at the beginning of the workday for a midday meeting
- Food and drink are typically understood as a form of compensation for service, which is not otherwise compensated at all. These amenities are also significant lubricants for conviviality and relationship building – don't we need to consider the impacts on meeting attendance and meeting effectiveness if they are not provided?
 - Perhaps some relaxation will be needed regarding the prohibition on committee chairs or department heads providing homemade snacks or drinks (out of their own pocket), in the interest of facilitating good thinking and interactions among people at meetings where WPI does not bear any financial responsibility for catering
 - Perhaps people (especially those whose current levels of compensation are not as high) ought to be given stipends for committee service responsibilities that require attendance at meetings which frequently disrupt mealtimes
- The draft policy as initially presented suggests a degree of ambiguity in its application (some special meetings among groups of employees may justifiably be catered for “strategic” reasons ...)
 - One FAP member suggested that the policy could include clearer “objective” criteria for knowing when food and drink really must be provided even to groups that do not include students or Trustees – for example, agreeing to cater meetings above a certain duration of time, or drawing a number of people above some threshold size (calling members of a department together for half-day “retreat” activities really should be seen as a strategic investment and not just regular business)

3) **Approval of Minutes.** Review and approval of minutes from the 26th FAP meeting was postponed, due to the lateness of the hour.

4) **Adjournment.** The meeting was adjourned at 5:10 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

David Spanagel

FAP Secretary