

Committee on Governance: Meeting Minutes

Meeting #19: 24 January 2022

Faculty Governance Branch Offices

Present: Len Albano (Secretary, CEE); Nancy Burnham (PH); Tanja Dominko (BBT); Tahar El-Korchi (Chair, CEE); George Heineman (CS); Susan Roberts (CHE)

Absent: Mark Richman (Secretary of the Faculty, AE); Wole Soboyejo (Provost)

1. Prof. El-Korchi called the meeting to order at 10:10 am.
2. Prof. El-Korchi opened the meeting with the sad news of a student death over the weekend. Upset over this tragedy, we set aside the agenda for a time and engaged in an open discussion of options for responding. Ideas included hosting in-person listening sessions for students and faculty within the departments and programs; hosting in-person events for parents and students within the schools; pausing classes and providing space and time for people to gather and connect; conducting exams outside of the classroom and adding flexibility in grading; helping students develop resilience; and looking at other aspects of student pressures, such as financial and housing conditions. Prof. Roberts learned of the student's death prior to the meeting and had already scheduled an in-person listening session for the Chemical Engineering Department on Tuesday. She volunteered to encourage this idea among the department chairs and program directors. Prof. Heineman is a member of a Facebook group "Parents of WPI Students," and he reported that a sub-group "WPI Strong" is holding a Zoom meeting on Tuesday evening in response to this latest death. Prof. Heineman will share any additional information with COG.
3. The minutes of COG meeting #18 on January 12, 2022 were approved with modifications.

4. Debrief from Discussion at the January Faculty Meeting Concerning the Motions to Modify the COG Membership and Election Procedure and to Establish the Committee on Teaching and Research Faculty:

Questions were raised at the Faculty Meeting concerning: removing the current eligibility of tenure-track faculty to serve on COG; reducing the number of names on the final election ballot; and permitting the Committee Chair to serve two successive terms. A representative of the TRT Council expressed the Council's support for the two motions, acknowledging the collaboration with COG to develop the draft motions.

COG members discussed ideas for addressing the concerns that were raised. Prof. El-Korchi closed discussion with the statement that COG will continue to consider these items as we go forward and prepare final versions of the motions for voting at the February Faculty Meeting.

5. Recommendations from the Mental Health and Wellbeing Task Force:

Dean King (Co-Chair of the MHWB Task Force) and Prof. Demetry (ME; Director, Morgan Center for Teaching and Learning) met with Prof. El-Korchi and Prof. Richman to give an update on the initial findings and recommendations of the Task Force, prior to the release of the progress report to the WPI Community. The role of Faculty Governance Committees in addressing Task Force

recommendations to relieve academic pressure on students was discussed, including a mapping between recommendations and Committees of the Faculty. Prof. El-Korchi indicated that the goal is for collective action by the faculty, based on good practices, and respect for the process needed to gain buy in. On the broader topic of campus well-being, COG members expressed support for aligning the proposed Faculty Activity Model with campus well-being; holding the noon hour open to promote interactions and community activities; and holding open certain days of the week for no meetings.

6. The meeting was adjourned at 11:25 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Leonard Albano
Secretary, COG