

Committee on Governance: Meeting Minutes

Meeting #7: September 30, 2021

Faculty Governance Conference Room (SL 225)

Present: Len Albano (Secretary, CEE); Nancy Burnham (PH); Tanja Dominko (BBT); Tahar El-Korchi (Chair, CEE); George Heineman (CS); Mark Richman (Secretary of the Faculty, AE); Wole Soboyejo (Provost)

Absent: Susan Roberts (CHE)

Invited Guest: Andrew Palumbo (Assistant VP for Enrollment Management & Dean of Admissions & Financial Aid)

1. Prof. El-Korchi called the meeting to order at 12:10 pm.
2. The agenda was approved as distributed.
3. The minutes of COG meeting #6 on September 23, 2021 were approved as distributed.
4. **Special Faculty Meeting to Discuss Student Well-Being:**
Prof. Richman discussed some of his considerations for this important meeting. He worked with Prof. Scott Barton, the Chair of the Committee on Advising and Student Life (CASL) to have a simple agenda to maximize the time available for open discussion. Prof. Richman will open the meeting and give an overview, Prof. Barton will then speak on behalf of CASL and plans for going forward after this meeting, and then Charles Morse, Associate Dean and Director of Counseling, will share his perspective from the Student Development and Counseling Center. The meeting will then move to open discussion for faculty to share ideas on the actions that faculty may take to support students and the kinds of support that faculty may need. Prof. Richman added that the faculty will not be acting on any motions, and in order to promote open discussion, minutes will be aggregated without attribution.
5. **Preparations for the October Faculty Meeting:**
Prof. Richman updated COG that the October 7th meeting will include two related presentations and a discussion period following each presentation. As noted in previous COG meeting minutes, Assistant VP Andrew Palumbo will make the first presentation, addressing trends in WPI admissions, financial aid, and incoming class sizes. Then, Prof. Joseph Fehribach (Chair, Committee on Financial and Administrative Policy) will make a presentation on WPI's response to the larger-than-expected Class of 2025 in terms of the decision-making process and the allocation of resources. These presentations will be preceded by two COG motions on department name changes.

Prof. Richman asked for committee input on whether to conduct an in-person or remote faculty meeting. Given the significant drop in positive COVID cases on campus since earlier in the term, the consensus among COG members was to plan for an in-person meeting, but advise the faculty that the final decision will be made on Tuesday, October 5th.
6. **COG Visitor: AVP Andrew Palumbo:**

AVP Palumbo shared information on the Class of 2025. He noted that the college search process for this class began in Spring 2019, just as WPI shifted to virtual recruiting in response to COVID. In addition, campus visits by admitted students have been a significant indicator of yield, but WPI did not have these traditional visits in Spring 2021. Consequently, there was considerable disruption in the normal recruitment and enrollment activities, which created much uncertainty as to whether the budgeted class of 1335 ± 30 students would be met.

AVP Palumbo reported an incoming class size of 1417 students, and he explained that the projected summer melt did not occur. Based on an upward trend in melt in recent years and the reliance on virtual campus visits, the anticipated melt was about 9%, but the actual melt was only 5.2%. The 5.2% melt was not only unanticipated, it was also a 5-year low. AVP Palumbo commented that across the country, the melt for STEM schools was low, and the melt was also low for schools that were already test-optional before the widespread adoption of test-optional admissions in response to COVID. WPI is among the 32% of colleges who made their class by the May 1 deadline. As a percentage of class size, the Class of 2025 has increases in women, underrepresented students of color, and Pell-eligible students.

The larger than expected class size brought approximately \$3.6M in additional revenue. From this pool, just under \$1M was dedicated to cover the added housing and to provide supplemental funds for student learning and support, including two counselors. The remainder of the additional revenue will be used to support COVID costs for FY22.

AVP Palumbo was asked about the discount rate and its impact on the yield. He reported that the discount rate for the Class of 2025 is 47.2%. It was budgeted for up to 48% in order to compete with our peers and to attract a diverse group of students. For comparison, the discount rates for the Class of 2023 and 2024 were 44% and 46%, respectively. AVP Palumbo did not have data readily available to discuss trends in discount rates and yields over time, and a plot of this information was suggested for the upcoming presentation at the October Faculty Meeting.

The discussion then transitioned to the impact of this year's large first-year class on recruitment and admissions for the Class of 2026. AVP Palumbo indicated that the financial aid model for the Class of 2026 is still being determined, and this is important to promote broader access to WPI. He also stated that WPI needs more clarity and better communication on its 5-year plan for enrollment. The plan is to be student centric and use what families actually pay to drive the budget. AVP Palumbo agreed that the final enrollments for the Class of 2026 cannot overshoot the target. As a result, there will be a more conservative approach to projecting the summer melt and in the use of the waitlist to complete the class. He cautioned, however, that use of the waitlist to help fill the class will reduce diversity because of the traditional composition of the waitlist.

In addition to the 1417 first-year students, about 82 transfer students (from a pool of about 250 applications) entered WPI in A term. Typically, there are 30 to 35 transfer students each year, and this has not been a significant source of students. From the perspective of revenues, AVP Palumbo felt that there may be opportunities to bring in more transfer students each year without incurring the

costs associated with the freshman year. The challenge with transfer students, though, is the transition from another school.

Prof. El-Korchi thanked AVP Palumbo for his presentation and the subsequent discussion.

7. The meeting was adjourned at 1:30pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Leonard Albano
Secretary, COG