Academic Senate
Meeting of February 20, 2013
University Club, Scriptorium Room
University Park Campus

MINUTES


Guests: M. Levine, S. Loh, D. MacInnis, M. Yoshimura, C. Zachary

President Patti Riley called the meeting to order at 2:08pm:

Lucinda Carver is on tour and therefore we will be receiving January minutes at a later time.

Provost Garrett is ill and sends her regrets. Presentation on Strategic Transformation by Debbie MacInnis who will represent Provost Garrett. Save questions for the provost for next month.

Meeting on Faculty Evaluations report: Sandeep Gupta’s task force met Tuesday to discuss faculty evaluation process. A 4-point memo by committee of 6 chaired by Jeremy Kagan was discussed: 1) Colleagues are dissatisfied with the numerical evaluation system. 2) Many units do not have one on one meetings (example of confidential information left on chair in envelope). 3) Teaching evaluations are weak since they rely solely on student evaluation questionnaire which is not a reliable metric. 4) The process lacks transparency. In many units it is unclear who is on the merit evaluation committee? In other units the question is whether or not there really is a committee? The task force decided to address teaching evaluations first as the other issues are handled differently in different schools. Four members of the Academic Senate’s subcommittee on NTT Affairs joined on the premise that evaluations matter the most to NTT teaching faculty. The task force brainstormed and took inventory yesterday. Emerging ideas include classroom evaluation for feedback purposes, not evaluation. This would require a great deal of effort, so the question would be how often to do it. A pilot program is suggested as conversations with faculty indicates that active buy-in needed. So a pilot program would alleviate fears of having their autonomy infringed upon etc. Also the course packet and what students produce are not typically included in teaching evaluations for most schools. Teaching innovation, pedagogy, etc. are only indirectly taken into account. The task force would like to incorporate that information more rigorously. Proposals are forthcoming and feedback from committee members will be collected. Then the task force will deal with the other 3 questions. For example, the 5
point rating scale needs to be examined on every level. For what period is that rating
assigned? Is overall career trajectory considered, or is it relative to rank? In some
schools it could be pegged to rank, so in one school assistant professors would only be
rated in lower categories to show that there is room for growth but in other schools the
assessment is more along the lines of, “for where you are, you are outstanding.” These
produce very different numerical outcomes for two similarly fine assistant professors.
These vary dept to dept as well as school to school.

There is also the issue of assistant professors who can be ranked at the top of ranking for
3 years yet denied tenure. Promotion is based on what senior researchers in the field
think of you. This merit evaluation system is about counting numbers of papers etc.

Jeremy: We have amassed material across campus—there are federal and state issues.
State issue: qualitative vs quantitative data; one on one meetings; transparency; student
evaluations. You should have first 3 if you don’t have them and want them you may put
them into practice right now. The 4th issue, student evaluations—we have not yet figured
out how to improve them. So the idea is that the faculty can at least have the first three if
they don’t like numbers.

The purpose of a numerical evaluation is that it is easier to transcribe on a spreadsheet.
Without having to talk to people, the numbers indicate: You are doing better, or not as
much, or you are doing what you should do. There are outliers, so there’s 5 levels. We
think words are the best way to communicate this, not numbers.

There is a myth that departments are commanded to use a bell shaped cure or that you
can only have a certain number of people at the same level.

If you believe that conversations with faculty can be formative and developmental, then
helpful mentoring needs to be a separate conversation from judgmental reviews that
affects salary, etc. In other words you are going to have to have two important systems.
Depts. are going to have to figure out a way to do both. Have one developmental
conversation so that people can be better teachers and then in some other process
administrators will take into account teaching effectiveness for high stake evaluations.

Question: In some schools these myths are considered mandates though, so central
administration may not think so but doesn’t it end up being so?

Gupta: The college and depts. need to know how to do this and chairs need to be trained
as to how to have these conversations.

Question: At federal level, whether numbered or not, aren’t those rankings supposed to
mean the same thing across the university, not bell curve in one unit, seniority in another,
per point in career in another?

Answer: These practices are written down; the senate had a committee on evaluation,
their recommendations became university policy. Lloyd Armstrong spent a whole senate
meeting discussing it. The numerical ranking system went from 3 levels to 5, adding 2
above the highest. There are definitions for these. We are a decentralized place. There can be another discussion with the deans of faculty about this.

The school of engineering has an 8 point policy document so these documents could be collected to see what has been done in the past. We can ask the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs to talk with the Vice Dean for Faculty Affairs, but also the councils and senate should share documents and practices. We are looking at creating a repository of pointers, maybe there should be a faculty group that carries this forward on a long-term basis to get word out—the task force will make a recommendation.

Chuck: The nominating committee met Feb 4. Openings this year are for Academic VP, 4 at large members, also Administrative VP. We have begun to contact individuals who would be good in these positions. Timeline: deadline for submission including write-ins is April 6. We will present the slate at the April Senate meeting on April 17 where the candidates will present themselves. Ballots will be distributed on April 18; voting ends May 3. We will announce the results on May 6.

Debbie MacInnes: Heads the Committee on Strategic Transformation for Provost Garrett. The document is a call to action. The Strategic Vision is meant as call to make USC one of the premier institutions in world. This is being done to address significant challenges in our world. Our core values connect with solutions to these challenges. We are looking at the paths going forward that can activate our values to achieve outcomes centered on transforming, creating, and connecting. The committee is charged with how to move the university forward in concert with administrative and academic units. We have had to look at what to do and not to do as a committee. Provost does not want the committee to decide how the university should be “fixed” or tell academic units or the administration what to do. Instead we are to initiate collaboration on a massive scale.

The committee interfaces between the Provost, administration, and academics. The committee first looked at documents from the strategic planning subcommittees as there were several years of good work that generated excellent ideas. We wanted to make sure we did not lose those excellent ideas. So we identified those pertinent to this part of the Strategic Vision and created a category system. Next we looked next to see how the vision is being implemented in various schools, for example, what Marshall is doing and how does it align with what the university wants to do and what progress have we made. Marshall’s Strategic Plan is pretty well aligned with University’s Strategic Plan. There are elements in Marshall’s plan that are not in the university’s Strategic Vision. There’s a school perspective, but every school is different and not necessarily active in every category at once. Not every unit has a Strategic Plan. A strategic plan means different things to different folks; the name can be intimidating. So schools without a plan are asked to focus on articulating their high level initiatives--what they see themselves focusing on. This way we can see overlaps for collaborative purposes.

The committee’s charge was discussed: Resources, conduits, need to coordinate, advise, keeping abreast of what is happening across the university, and ongoing adjustments as needed. The committee will also be an ongoing process; members will come and go as needed. The idea is to concentrate on strengths. Help form vision into ideas. The
committee has met once, next meeting members will be a dialogue about what professional challenges, schools, etc. are having and what they are doing to move forward. Then subteams will focus on the vertical categories from matrix and serve as resources to the academic units. Phase 2 will be about synthesis. The website is a repository for information and ideas. Committee member Eduardo Molina is thinking thru metrics.

Question/Comment. The influence map is a good idea. Faculty energy can get wasted if not recorded. There was a pre-strategic plan process under Provost Nikias. Did those reports get into the new vision?

Mark: Besides lofty ideas, what is the actual strategic plan? Need to discuss environment and competitive environment in which USC finds itself. There needs to be an organized analysis of threats. If our goal is to be one of the universities that survives as a residential university, then we need to be cognizant of the threats. The SV lacks the fact that other schools with which we compete are not sitting still.

Answer. As a member of one of the subcommittees of the SV, I know the discussion of competitive threats was done. The issue of a plan vs. a vision was discussed; the choice after vigorous debate was to create a Vision.

Patti: This committee will hear presentations on competitive threats. These concerns have been heard.

Comment: I support these goals. I am being constructive when saying this commendable effort is not the SV that I heard presented today. This seems more like a managerial document to establish proper ways to achieve certain goals. A SV is a much broader approach to key issues that may face USC in next few decades--3 or so, no more, that affect our placement in the world. This seems too detailed and does not serve the purpose of a SV. We are busy professors. Unlikely the document will be read through. How can it be absorbed?

Debbie: The SV is only 7 pages, quite short. There was a reason not to do a Strategic Plan. Our role was not to come up with the SV. Robin Romans and Michael Quick did most of this writing. Our role is to follow up on the SV, which has been declared. How do we activate it, with focus on facilitating collaboration? Is our role to work on the SV? No. Our committee is about helping coordinate the implementation. Activities coming out of this committee need to be prioritized in terms of what is happening in world. We need to be cognizant of threats and transformational opportunities each threat brings. And a focus on dissemination: there are many potential avenues forward. A factor in our favor, if the Provost is working through the deans that information will flow thru deans and deans will have to develop activities that flow through their depts. There will be other avenues for diffusion as well. Suggestions are welcome as to how to make the process more well known.

Jeremy: You mentioned sustainability. Where does that stand in this effort?
Debbie: That’s a challenge in our world. Where can we add value to that challenge? Do we have the capability in place to add significance to that challenge? Perhaps. We want to identify activities right now but also people who might be relevant?

Jeremy: So we would approach you?

Debbie: If there’s opportunities to leverage expertise we can approach the provost and seek to build on their expertise.

Student presentation on Winter Break: Sarah Loh and Michael Yoshimura. The student government is requesting a break during Fall in order for students to de-stress. Presented results of student survey showing that a majority favors such a break.

Howard: We already added a day to Thanksgiving. That’s going to creep—means a lot of students will already take that whole week off. This will let you study harder? And yet you say it lets you go home and see your family? These seem contradictory.

Answer: This is to give a break in October.

Howard: How did you conduct the survey? Is it representative? Please go over the methodology.

Answer: We send them out in the newsletter, have representatives take surveys to organizations, going to campus centers, have tables, etc. We also have numerical data from an earlier survey on GE course evaluations. About 40% did not support this. But it did not have the depth of information we wanted so UGS did this additional survey.

Question: Increasingly we have students from beyond LA, nationally and internationally. To have breaks both in middle and at Thanksgiving would be difficult. Why have two breaks rather than consolidate them into one? Also you mention the stress peaking in the middle of the semester. They seem more stressed at the end. Is there data to support that stress peaks in middle?

Answer: I believe we have a survey for stress. We could get you the data. Re the students from outside LA, we wanted a break in the middle, if students choose to leave earlier during Thanksgiving week that’s their choice. Ours is a different break, as de-stressor.

Question/Comment: Congratulations on the point about arriving at beginning of year with early orientation. That’s cogent. Friday or Saturday a good idea. Invest in this deeper. During orientation we do micro-seminars for Trojan Values, acclimation, so this question might be your fulcrum to make it happen.

Question: We have Spring Break. Is there evidence of less stress and improved academic performance following that week?
Comment: I think it is a good idea to move “move-in day” up. Research on the break shows that it’s a bad idea. The stress is when they need to be around faculty and on campus not be encouraged to leave.

Comment: With respect to the validity of their survey methods, have you ever tried to survey your colleagues? It’s hard to get responses.

Comment: I want to reinforce idea that students will add days. Big absenteeism problems around holidays. So if you want to ask for 3 days, ask for a whole week.

Comment: stress is not necessarily bad. And why not argue for a whole week of Thanksgiving instead? There’s more support for that.

Comment: Move-in day needs to be earlier. That’s a great idea.

Patti: I hear an emerging consensus that the faculty body feels Thanksgiving might work better. Think about how to get students behind it rather than October. Explain that starting earlier means that staff would have to be back by about August 10 in order to make that happen. That’s probably a non-starter. We are all interested in having you come back to see us after student government discusses this further.

Update on the Technology and Learning retreat: We are waiting on summaries of breakout groups from Joan Getman. We will go over those when they arrive. Of note are 2 outcomes: We have had a lot of conversations about new technologies in the classroom. John Silvester is chairing a task force committee to look at these issues. Also we are continuing to update the retreat website with information about business models, new technology, etc. Resource inequities emerged from the retreat discussion. Classrooms are not all set up, and not all buildings are Smart Rooms. Dornsife seems particularly affected. Others, e.g. Viterbi, Marshall and Annenberg seem more updated. But ideas that were shown at the retreat cannot be done by all units. Also there are pockets of people working on issues they are interested in. Susan Metros and Joan Getman have volunteered to meet with Tom Lee from CHLA and Patti to keep this interests in online teaching up and moving. What other committees or concerns should be discussed?

Comment: Human support is needed as well as tech support. Some colleagues can do it themselves, others need people to help them transform their content and execute it for them.

Comment: I have used IML and there used to a be a program called MacMultimedia across the college and the resources were there, need trained IML people to be in the classroom helping to facilitate the technology.

Comment: I would like us to be keeping up with software and apps that are coming out.

Question: Has anyone ever asked the Center For Scholarly Technology for help?
Question: Isn’t there a difference between creating courses for Distance Learning degrees and creating supplemental technology for extant courses on campus? The vendor should create support for the Online courses.

Question: As technology has changed, the staff has not necessarily been updated at the same time.

Question: training for TAs should include technology, tools being used in the department.

Question: Joan Getman and Phil E. chaired a task force on technology and did a survey.

People are trying to do video technology.

Question: Who does the committee report to?

Answer: Ilee Rhimes.

Update on electronic student evaluations. The evaluations will be done in the classroom at the same time as paper in the upcoming pilot program. There will perhaps be one question to do after the class is totally over but not the overall evaluation.

Reminder to read the announcements.

President Riley closed the meeting at 4:00pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Diane Blaine

Member-at-Large of the Academic Senate