ACADEMIC SENATE

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
Meeting of February 19, 2020
Doheny Memorial Library, Room 121
2:00 - 4:00 p.m.


AGENDA

Rebecca Lonergan, Academic Senate President, called the meeting to order at 2:02 pm.

Approval of January Senate Meeting Draft Minutes
Dan Pecchenino, Administrative Vice President, presented the January 2020 draft minutes for discussion and approval.

Chimene Tucker moved to approve the minutes; Jessica Parr seconded. Motion passed with 26 in favor, 0 opposed, and 1 abstention.

Dialogue with President Carol Folt & Provost Chip Zukoski
President Folt began by telling the Senate an announcement will come out tomorrow about increasing financial aid for students whose families are slightly above or below the median income, as these students often do not qualify for other aid. She added home ownership will no longer be included when determining aid eligibility, and that this plan should significantly reduce debt for many students upon graduation. She stated she continues to work with the deans to help raise funds for financial aid, equity, emergencies, accessibility, and inclusivity. They also plan to establish a “First Generation Plus” Center for students who are first generation, transfer, undocumented, etc., in order to have a central location for resources and guidance for these students to ensure an equitable experience. Folt also told the Senate she will create five-year capital plans to establish goals and be able to see progress in different areas. Faculty and staff will be included in determining capital priorities and working with deans on development for needs such as renovating classrooms, employee salaries, sustainability, and more. Finally, Folt stated she continues to work on the request stated in the Senate Resolution 19/20-02 about Misconduct Investigation Reporting.

Provost Zukoski began by thanking the Senate for a great retreat, and for the stimulating conversations around trauma-informed pedagogy and the values journey thus far. He stated he would like to continue thinking about how we can do more to de-stress our students. Zukoski went on to state he has established a new financial process this year called “The Path Forward,” which serves to gain advice on budget needs and priorities in order to establish common goals. He stated he plans to announce an “Executive Sponsors
“Committee” made up of faculty, staff, students, and administrators to discuss how we build budgets, create five-year plans, and other budget planning needs such as having competitive salaries, research, cybersecurity, student wellness, and more. These are areas that they have not built budgets around previously. He stated the budget reform process will be ongoing and budgets will be shared, in order to ensure better alignment with current priorities.

Zukoski brought up the February 18th memorandum to faculty and staff announcing the establishment of a joint committee to review processes and practices related to the Office of Conduct, Accountability, and Professionalism (OCAP). He stated this committee will have representation from Central HR, the Senate, and the Staff Assembly. Their first charge is to post the current OCAP process by the end of this semester, as these are not yet posted online. Their next charge is to make recommendations to the HR Steering Committee (chaired by Felicia Washington, Senior Vice President for HR) about how to improve current processes, while balancing the needs of both complainants and the accused as they have heard frustrations from both sides. Folt added that in her role as Chair of the AAU committee on preventing sexual harassment and assault, they have never seen such rapidly changing rules from the Department of Education and the Office of Civil Rights, but that being on this committee allows her to be at the center of everything that is happening.

Lonergan thanked the Provost for taking action around OCAP and the budget, as these are issues the Senate has been asking to address.

Questions were asked of the Provost about why he did not decide to suspend OCAP, how members of the Joint Committee were appointed, and where OCAP will be housed moving forward. Zukoski stated he felt it was inappropriate to suspend cases in process while reforms are being considered. Zukoski stated the Senate Executive Board, Staff Assembly leadership, and Felicia Washington made recommendations for committee members from their respective constituencies. He further explained the reorganizational process that Central HR is currently going through will help decide where OCAP and investigations will go, but the answer is not clear yet. Folt explained that some steps were taken quickly as they were recommended by OCR to be compliant with the law (e.g., Title IX). Lonergan clarified Devin Griffiths, Senator from Dornsife, is on the committee, not Devon Brooks (as incorrectly stated in the Memo).

A statement was made that RTPC faculty in some schools feel unfairly burdened, that there is concern about the merit system in general, and that there should be a standard pay raise for all faculty, separate from the merit process to aid with cost of living increases. Zukoski responded by stating salaries and methods of paying faculty are very heterogeneous across schools, making this issue more difficult. Pay increases are needed, especially for RTPC faculty. The five-year plan (with staggered changes each year) will deal with these salary issues, but there are no details yet as this requires a lot of conversation. Regarding the merit process, he is currently learning how this works, and recognizes one challenge is the need to balance limited budgets against the high and increasing cost of living in Los Angeles while still being able to award exemplary behavior. Folt added that when she worked on this issue at Dartmouth as Provost, they worked service contributions more purposefully into the merit process to ensure all faculty are rewarded for all of the work they do. She stated we need to think about what we are trying to achieve, then fix the process in order to get us to those goals for different types of faculty.

Strengthening the roles of school Faculty Councils was raised, in order to help deans understand and better address issues. Zukoski stated the roles of Faculty Councils was being discussed currently.

A question was raised about whether the tuition-exchange benefit program could be reconsidered to be less cumbersome and more valuable for employees. Folt stated this program costs well over $150M due to the large size of the University, and the extent to which this program is used by people across the income spectrum. She stated reviewing the way the funds are spent in this program is a good idea, and
acknowledged this benefit is one of the reasons some employees choose to work at USC.

A final question was posed about whether the university is considering divestment from investments in anything related to fossil fuels. Folt clarified the Board of Trustees have met with students about this, and she is in conversations with the Board as well. She stated new investments in the fossil fuel industry have been halted since 2018, but the Board has not decided whether to divest current holdings.

**Presentation regarding the Presidential Working Group on Sustainability**

Dan Mazmanian, Chair of the Presidential Working Group on Sustainability which looks at sustainability in education, research, and operations, presented the group’s recommendations for sustainable education. Mazmanian stated the group is made up of 21 members and contains faculty, students, and staff including Lonergan, Adler, and the Provost, with representation from HSC and UPC, and from many different schools. Their charge was to develop recommendations for building a more sustainable USC, the first step was to look at the educational experience for our students, and the group recommended a focus on the existential threat of sustainability through the prism of every different school as a way to incorporate this issue into students’ learning. They are proposing a mandatory course, as well as an experiential learning course, as they felt it was essential to change the whole University.

Regarding research, they are looking at the key thematic areas that they would like the University to focus on, that also allow USC to be recognized for this work. Financially, Mazmanian stated there are already many things in place such as courses and operations that have not been brought together, so the funding for some of these recommendations would not start from scratch. Folt stated it will take a lot to get this plan in place, but that there is great interest in funding these efforts already.

A question was asked about how these recommendations would overlap with the Interdisciplinary Environmental Studies Program. Mazmanian stated they are not yet in the implementation phase, but will start discussing rollout of these recommendations with the Provost on Friday. A comment was made that the interaction of this educational initiative with General Education courses could create problematic incentives within schools, and thus it would be important to consider what the reactions of students may be when they are deciding which courses to take. Mazmanian clarified that any other schools and deans who request to join the committee are able, and those requests should be from the deans to the President’s office.

A question was asked about how much is being devoted to capital investment. Mazmanian stated there is a 2028 plan in the works now, and the group is working closely with investment to ensure carbon neutrality and zero waste planning are being incorporated into the plans. He added part the working group is recommending the creation of a Chief Sustainability Officer, whose job will be marketing, communications, and outreach to get people excited about and involved in this effort.

**Discussion regarding OCAP proposed resolutions**

The “Open Letter” from the Dornsife Faculty Council, as well as the Resolution proposed by the Gould School of Law Faculty Council were discussed. Lonergan stated the joint committee to review OCAP processes is something she has been continually asking for, so she is glad this is now in place. She reiterated the first charge of the committee is to post current OCAP procedures, then afterwards decide if OCAP should continue with changes to its processes, or if it should be replaced by something else.

A Senator from Dornsife clarified the “Open Letter” was also co-signed by Dworak-Peck and Annenberg, but that they did not finish putting this forward as a resolution yet.

A question was asked about whether the Provost would be willing to share the joint committee’s recommendations with the Senate and Staff Assembly for comments, prior to Provost approval. Lonergan
stated she believed this would be the case, but that timing could be an issue as the end of the academic year is soon.

Stephen Rich, Senator from Gould, stated Gould’s Faculty Council is willing to withdraw the resolution given the creation of the new joint committee, unless other Senators would like to move forward.

A concern was raised about the Senate process by which people are nominated to serve on committees such as this joint committee, and the absence of opportunities for conversation prior to taking action. Lonergan stated staffing the many Senate, joint, and University committees is one of the main tasks of the Executive Board.

A concern was raised about the request in both the resolution and letter for the re-examination of all previous OCAP cases and sanctions, as well as to suspend all OCAP investigations. A countervailing concern was raised that suspending OCAP would harm victims of harassment, who had no office to turn to prior to the establishment of OCAP. An argument was made that the biggest issue now is urgency, as neither the current processes nor suspension are ideal, so the priority should be to fix the process as soon as possible.

It was argued again that OCAP should be suspended anyway due to its precipitous establishment and poor process, which unfairly impacts faculty. A suggestion was made that if OCAP were suspended, the University could go back to using its traditional HR processes to handle the pending cases. Concerns were raised with this proposal regarding leaving these types of decisions about past misconduct within the schools.

A statement was made that having better knowledge about what goes on in the investigations and publicizing anonymous aggregate data would be helpful. Lonergan stated the Provost supports putting out anonymized data so people can see overall trends.

The Cinema Faculty Council stated it was strongly in favor of keeping OCAP but reforming its processes. Keck also was in favor of keeping OCAP, as they felt this was key in helping victims have a place to turn for help. Rossier was in favor of putting energy into holding the joint committee and Provost accountable for a reasonable timeline and actual changes made to OCAP, as opposed to suspension. A comment was made that suspension may mean putting employees back under their supervisor where there is potential abuse and/or toxic environments. Another statement was made that we should not do away with a process that is helping victims.

Annenberg endorsed both the “Open Letter” and the proposed resolution, and also stated concern about not reviewing previous decisions that were made under a faulty process. Dworak-Peck ultimately decided to support the letter due to the desire to reexamine previous decisions and increase shared governance.

Marshall supported the spirit of both documents, but had concerns about what the alternative to suspension would be, and wanted more details of current procedures and data before co-signing anything. Viterbi also did not reach a conclusion.

A statement was made that suspension and reexamination are two different courses of action, and that if we did not suspend OCAP we could still examine previous findings (specifically if the reexamination demonstrated that the previous processes were inappropriate), and this rule could apply to cases currently under investigation. A comment was made that of the three issues presented in the letter and resolution (creation of shared governance to review the process, suspension, and reexamination of cases), there is more information, data, and background needed to make an informed decision about suspension and reexamination. However, people can bring ideas to the members of the new joint committee, who will have access to this information and be able to make informed recommendations.
Marty Levine, Vice Provost and Senior Advisor to the Provost, clarified that prior to OCAP, non-protected class issues went to the Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) for investigations, but OED prioritized protected-class cases which consumed all of their time. In regards to reexamination of cases, there have been eight findings of Faculty Handbook violations; these then went to a committee of faculty who had experiences with sanctioning who received a detailed file of information, and who could ask for more information if they chose. If the accused wanted to appeal, the appeal went to a different faculty committee for a full review.

A friendly amendment to the proposed resolution was proposed by Devin Griffiths, Senator from Dornsife, to strike the third bullet point only. The friendly amendment was accepted by the mover, Stephen Rich, Senator from Gould.

Stephen Rich (Gould School of Law) proposed the resolution with friendly amendment; Todd Brun (Viterbi) seconded. Motion passed unanimously with 39 in favor, 0 opposed, and 0 abstentions.

New Business
No new business was raised.

Announcements
(a) March 2: deadline to receive nominations for the Distinguished Faculty Service and Walter Wolf Awards
(b) Next Senate meeting March 11

Adjournment
Meeting was adjourned at 4:07 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Ashley Uyeshiro Simon
Secretary General of the Academic Senate