ACADEMIC SENATE

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Urgent Meeting of May 26, 2020
Virtual Zoom Meeting (due to COVID-19)
10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.


Absent: G. Ulkumen

Guests: 768 guests

AGENDA

Rebecca Lonergan, Academic Senate President, called the meeting to order at 10:06 am.

Discussion regarding proposed COVID-19 financial recovery plans
A discussion regarding the COVID-19 financial recovery plans proposed by administration was held.

Lonergan opened the discussion by stating she has received many varying opinions about the budget plan that the Provost presented to faculty on May 24, 2020. Such variance in opinions makes it difficult to reach consensus, so the purpose of this meeting is to try and find themes and commonalities about faculty responses and thoughts. She then asked each school in turn to share general feedback from their faculty.

Senators were asked to refrain from merely reiterating things that were stated previously.

Annenberg’s Senator shared first, stating there is an underlying concern about things their faculty feel were not adequately explained, such as why we are not able to use the endowment, and how to cut the costs related to the growing size of administration. There was a strong desire that any cost reductions be made as progressive as possible, so as to not affect younger or more junior faculty as much. He also stated the Annenber faculty had questions about whether other cut-backs (e.g., travel restrictions) could be made progressive as well, as research or conference travel may be more important for junior faculty. He emphasized the need for more faculty involvement and better representation in key decisions, not just at the school-level, but at the university level as well. He proposed a joint Senate/Provost budget advisory committee be formed and given access to all relevant data including university- and school-level data, and recommended this committee be consulted by administration prior to making decisions. Lonergan stated there is currently a Committee on Finance and Enrollment (COFE), and that administration has shared with him that they plan to put more faculty on the University Finance Committee soon.

The Senator from Architecture echoed the recommendation of putting more faculty on the university finance decision-making body, and reported the faculty in Architecture also wondered about use of endowment funds. He stated there are concerns about the retirement contribution benefit pause being uniform rather than progressive, due to the disproportionate affect this will have on younger faculty. He also stated a desire to clarify what the actual total costs to employees will be, including lack of merit raises,
furloughs, and the retirement contribution pause. Lastly, he stated there are worries about a large percent
of their part-time faculty not continuing next year, and about possible increased faculty loads.

Bovard College did not give a report, as their Faculty Council was constituted only recently.

A Senator from Marshall added that some of their faculty were concerned that some of the university’s
financial situation was due to incurred expenses from previous lawsuits, and that faculty should not bear
the brunt of those costs. Their faculty also raised questions about the length of time these proposed
shortfalls would continue, whether the Chief Financial Officer could itemize the budget line items to be
more transparent, how the retirement benefit cuts would be rolled out, and whether furloughs would
apply to all of the administrative units as well. He also raised concerns about the continuation of non-
essential budgets (e.g., sports programs).

Cinema’s Senator reported getting questions from their faculty about whether adjunct professors have any
job security, if health insurance benefits can be kept if classes are cancelled or jobs are lost, if multi-year
contracts for RTPC faculty would be honored, whether people will still have access to childcare support (on-
ground or reimbursement), and if employees can access their contracts to review relevant language at this
time. She also stated there was strong concern about the proposed furlough and retirement benefits cuts
(how they will take place, if they will be progressive, when they will take place and for how long, and
whether it will get paid back), how much the total lost income will be for individuals due to all the different
proposed cuts, and where the money is coming from to pay for previous lawsuits. She expressed the need
for stronger “rank-and-file” faculty input at the university level about budget decisions. Lonergan stated
the Provost specified in his presentation to faculty that furloughs would be progressive, and that they
would not apply to employees who have income under a certain threshold. She also stated all employees
can access their contracts at all times, and they can ask their school’s HR departments for these.

The Senator from Kaufman reported their faculty, who are mostly RTPC and have performance-based
courses, have worries about workload, furloughs, retirement (as many are younger and just building their
retirement portfolios), and childcare coverage (including on furlough days). She voiced a concern about
faculty morale in general, recalled that the Provost stated USC is not the only university to furlough faculty,
and verified the Senate Executive Board did not agree to or endorse the proposed financial plans prior to
the Provost’s presentation.

A Senator from Dornsife stated that while administration’s sharing of budget information and plans is good,
consultation is meaningless if we are not able to help shape how cuts are being made. He stated the
proposed resolution does not take enough of a stance at this point as it is written. He reported many
Dornsife faculty are upset that much of the budget balancing falls upon the backs of faculty, especially
since most will have the same workload expectations while furloughed. The Senator also stated there is a
perception that this will primarily impact research and teaching faculty, as it was mentioned by the Provost
that clinical faculty seeing patients may be exempted. He emphasized the need to ensure the furloughs will
be progressive, as many faculty are struggling financially already. He concluded by stating their faculty
would like to see cuts to things like purchasing (currently estimated at 3%) that are least comparable in size
to the cuts being proposed to pay.

Comments from the chat were summarized, mostly echoing what senators already stated. There were
many questions regarding the impact of recent lawsuits on finances, athletics spending, a decreased ability
to recruit faculty due to these changes, and continued confusion about why we are unable to use more
funds from the endowment.

Ostrow’s Senator stated most issues of concern had been raised already, but there were still questions
about what furlough days will mean for clinical faculty who see patients, the timing and duration of
furloughs and retirement pauses, and why we are unable to use more endowment funds. She emphasized
the importance of impressing upon the Provost that each school’s faculty representatives need to be
involved in school-level decisions with the deans, and that faculty are central to maintaining academic
excellence.

The Senator from Dramatic Arts echoed concerns about the multiple proposed cuts to employee income,
especially since their school is very small and the budget is tight already. She also reiterated the previous
call to add more detail to the proposed resolution, and restated how furloughs do not make sense for
many faculty who need to complete their job duties regardless of how many days they are not going to be
paid.

Rossier’s Senator stated their faculty had a meeting with the Provost which engendered a good discussion,
plus there will be a townhall today to talk about unit-level budget cuts. He stated there are some questions
about the proposals, but there was also generally an attitude among Rossier faculty of acceptance of the
proposals, although concerns were raised about the pause in retirement benefits (on top of merit freezes
and furloughs). He suggested the Senate advocate for measures to offset the total pause on retirement,
such as a partial pause. He also agreed with the suggestion from Annenberg’s Senator to ask for a financial
advisory group with meaningful consultation, as these may be somewhat prevalent around the country.

A Senator from Viterbi reported there was widespread concern and some anger about these budget cuts
from their faculty, and most people want more information and details about what the costs will be. The
biggest concern was about retirement benefit cuts due to the long-term impact and tax law limitations on
individual contributions. He reiterated the suggestion of drawing on the unrestricted endowment funds
instead of requiring large sacrifices from employees, and suggested possibly having school cuts be varied as
opposed to universal. He noted a wide distrust of administration driven by scandals and the current crisis,
and recommended administrative “bloat” be cut first as faculty are responsible for the University’s core
mission and generate most of the revenue. He proposed explicitly naming administration in the resolution
in calling for progressive cuts to ease some distrust, as well as having all offices go under regular budgetary
review to find cost savings. The other Viterbi Senator offered the idea of structuring the retirement cuts as
a loan or bond from the faculty to the University, to be repaid sometime in the future.

The Gerontology Senator proposed the possibility of progressive retirement benefits changes with match
levels based on salary, or potentially dipping into each school’s endowments. She stated the faculty want
more clarity about why Keck faculty may not be taking furloughs, how furloughs would work with NIH
funding, and whether there should be so many staff dedicated to fundraising if our mission is to generate
knowledge.

The Senator from the Chan Division reported their faculty are feeling the multiple-level cuts to employees,
with particular concerns around the compounding effects of retirement benefit cuts and how furlough days
will be implemented as 40 of their 100 faculty are involved in clinical practice. She posed a question about
whether people could be compensated for the extra time and work they have had to put in, and echoed
previous questions about endowment funds. She also stated concerns about these cuts in contrast with
cost-of-living in Los Angeles, and stated the UC schools and Cal Tech did not seem to be making these types
of cuts. Finally, she reported faculty feeling a lack of transparency about what the savings from all these
cuts would be used for, and recommended administrative cuts for those with much higher salaries.

The Gould Senator stated there was general support from their faculty for the underlying principles of
progressivity, as well as for solidarity between faculty and staff. Regarding compensation, she reported
their faculty want more evidence to support the decisions that are being made, proof that these cuts to
employees are truly a last resort, and more information about how furloughs will be calculated as faculty
are on 9- or 12-month contracts. Other areas of concern were not wanting to lose sight of our long-term
academic mission as decisions are being made and issues of safety for faculty and their families. She closed
by stating all concerns can be addressed through truly meaningful faculty consultation and representation,
and that people would be able to lend more unified support towards these cuts if they knew more about
what was being done.

A Senator from Keck stated their faculty support the proposed resolution, desire more time to look over
the proposed budget cuts to avoid rash decisions, feel unanimously that faculty need to be more
meaningfully involved as decisions are being made, and feel more transparency at the administrative and
bureaucratic level is needed. Keck is unique in number and diversity of faculty (e.g., clinical, research, those
based at LAC+USC or CHLA who derive their salaries separately), and the hospitals are also part of a
medical group, so enacting universal cuts such as the ones proposed by the Provost is very challenging. He
stated the Keck Faculty Council has been meeting weekly with the dean, and the dean, Tom Jackiewicz, and
the Provost will all be meeting tomorrow as well. Common faculty concerns include layoffs or furloughs for
those working on the front lines of this pandemic, NIH grant issues, childcare, and whether keeping staff
who were underperforming pre-COVID is worth furloughing other very productive people. He also raised an
issue of Keck’s revenue from clinical and research faculty being taxed and used to support the UPC budget
which is meant to cover some benefits that are now being cut, and this has led to questions or whether the
tax should be reduced.

The Senator from Biokinesiology and Physical Therapy reported in addition to topics raised previously, their
faculty had additional questions about how exactly central funds are being spent, if the savings from
furloughs can be kept within the units and potentially be used to lower central taxes, and whether the
University should be rethinking our sponsorship of athletics so those funds can instead be used to support
our main mission of education.

Thornton’s Senator stated health and safety are their faculty’s primary concerns, as their jobs require high-risk interactions (e.g., singing, playing wind instruments) and many faculty also depend on outside
performance engagements. She reported concerns about shared governance, as many Vice Deans who also
hold faculty appointments are asked to serve on committees to represent the faculty voice. In addition,
there are concerns amongst the many part-time and RTPC faculty about being asked to do more labor
despite pay and benefits cuts, which is creating a feeling of resentment and speaks to a need for the
consideration of well-being. Thornton faculty also preferred a progressive retirement cut if possible, or
even reduced (but not eliminated) rates of 1-2%, as there is skepticism about whether these benefits would
ever return to normal. Lonergan stated the health concerns stated by the Senator should be addressed in
Project Restart plans, and that she was told there is already a subgroup looking into the concerns about
voice and wind instrument courses.

Comments from the chat were summarized, including how the budget analysis should look beyond fiscal
year 2021 (possibly to 2025), the Provost should get the Senate Executive Board’s approval before going to
the Board of Trustees (with the ability to withhold this approval if applicable), there is curiosity about how
much is being spent on President’s sustainability initiatives, and whether the President’s former mansion
can be sold to generate revenue. Concerns were also raised about the indirect costs from NIH funding
being diminished if faculty choose to leave, and that the overall outreach about these cuts has not been
very compassionate.

The Senator from Pharmacy agreed with issues that were already raised, and also reported that most of
their faculty concerns are focused on retirement benefit cuts. There was a question of whether merit raises
might be maintained to properly recognize those who have worked hard this year, as well as concern that
sweeping decisions are being made too quickly without truly meaningful faculty input.
The Retired Faculty Association Senator stated he did not feel that he had contributions to make that would be useful at this time.

Dworak-Peck’s Senator stated their school has had these types of discussions over the last couple of years, and that their biggest concerns are about school-level changes on top of University-level cuts, which will place even more burden on faculty. The proposed retirement benefit cuts were also the most significant concern for their faculty, but there were also concerns about how much the Board of Trustees is driving some of these decisions, and whether these decisions had business or academia as the first priority.

The Senator from Price stated their faculty feel it is difficult to provide meaningful feedback when all the specifics are unknown. They are concerned about precluding the possibility of taking out loans – which would achieve the same stated goal as the pause in retirement benefits to avoid loss of current income – seems to be short-sighted. They are also concerned about the extent to which these cuts, which are being imposed to solve a temporary problem, could become permanent (e.g., merit freeze versus merit deferral). He also suggested that administration should promise faculty and staff they will be made whole again should the actual budget deficits not reach the currently projected levels which these cuts anticipate.

The USC Libraries Senator stated faculty are concerned about furloughs and retirement benefit cuts, as well as about contract librarian contracts not being renewed and unrealistic work-load expectations for others. She stated the Libraries do not create revenue like other schools, but are simultaneously expected to maintain a level of service to the entire University, so many of their faculty felt it did not make sense to subject them to the same level of cuts as other units. Many of their faculty signed also a letter to urge administration to include more faculty in making financial decisions.

The Senator from Roski reported their faculty are also against a wholesale cut to retirement benefits, and share the concern expressed by others that information about where central administration can save funds (e.g., outside consultants) is not being shared transparently. Although their faculty feel it is reasonable that there be some cuts and that pain will be shared by all, Roski is a very small school and asked for consideration of making cuts to schools progressive as well. They also shared the need to get back on campus soon, but with a lot of safety precautions and thoughtfulness for this process. She concluded by emphasizing that there is already existing disparities in salary and labor (in both Roski and across the University), as well as faculty’s desire to participate in the specifics of budget planning.

Iovine and Young Academy’s Senator stated their dean has not had a conversation with faculty about budget cuts, so he had nothing report at this time.

**Discussion regarding Proposed Resolution 19/20-08: Key Shared Governance Principles**

Paul Adler, Academic Vice President, introduced Resolution 19/20-08 (attached to the meeting agenda), proposed by the Executive Board. He stated faculty should be involved with both school- and University-level budget issues, and that this Resolution was to articulate principles to guide faculty engagement with that process at both levels and across the schools, without stating specific demands which could vary widely. He posited that the budget proposed by the Provost should be seen as a “restart” budget focused on operational continuity and minimizing damage, and the Executive Board’s Resolution addresses the issues posed by this budget, as distinct from the issues we will need to address in the future when we will likely see new budgets aimed at “reshaping” of the University and when we will need to address issues such as administrative bloat and academic programs that need investment or downsizing.

Viterbi’s Senator restated his previous suggestion to modify point 3 by adding “and including university administrators.”
Annenberg’s Senator proposed an amendment to replace the first two items in the Resolution to specify and strengthen the demand for faculty participation, which he read to the Senate. The first change was to ask for the immediate inclusion of faculty representation in budget decisions, and the second was to ask for a jointly appointed faculty budgetary advisory committee to be formed and consulted prior to making budget decisions. He also responded to Lonergan’s previous point about using existing committees (such as COFE) for this purpose, arguing that this is a special circumstance which requires the formation of a different type of committee.

A suggestion was made that a report from such a proposed committee should be made every 4-6 months. Recommendations were also made to strengthen the language by replacing “should” with “shall,” “must,” or “will.” Other senators supported the idea of forming a financial budgetary advisory committee, to make more of a specific recommendation to administration.

Concern was stated about the prioritization of endowment, construction, or other material things over protecting employee interests right now, which may then cause faculty to leave for other universities that do not penalize them as much during these times. A suggestion was made to add a new point about prioritizing the protection of human resources, and to recommend cuts to compensation be proportional to cuts in procurement and other material investments. Adler stated this idea would be difficult to support without sufficient financial data that has not been shared. An argument was made that the urgency with which budget decisions are being made may preclude the Senate from waiting to take a concrete position until such detailed information is shared.

A statement was made that these principles seemed to apply beyond the COVID situation, and a recommendation was made to have both a set of principles that are enduring, and another set of “asks” which are an immediate response to the situation. Other suggestions were made to mention progressive burdens when specifying “equity” in item 3, and to add “for discussion and shared decision-making” at the end of item 7.

The meeting was then closed to Senators only for the vote. Lonergan stated the vote and attachments will be posted for all faculty to review. A first vote was held regarding the adoption of amendments proposed by Larry Gross (Annenberg).

**Motion made by Larry Gross to amend the proposed Resolution by replacing items 1 and 2 with:**

1. Faculty must have a leading voice in decisions concerning the educational and research mission of the university, as well as their working conditions. A representative or representatives of the Faculty must be included immediately in the making of decisions having profound impact on their lives, livelihoods, and the academic mission of the university of which they are principal stewards. At a minimum, this means the immediate inclusion of the President of the Academic Senate in the decision-making bodies having responsibility for developing the University’s strategy for addressing the budget crisis.

2. The Senate and the Provost shall jointly appoint a Faculty Budget Advisory Committee that will have access to all relevant data, including sufficiently detailed university-, school-, and unit-level budget data. The Faculty Budget Advisory Committee would be consulted by the senior administrators before making or modifying decisions in response to the financial crisis created by the COVID pandemic.

**Motion seconded by Rebecca Brown. Motion passed with 35 in favor, 2 opposed, and 1 abstention.**

A second vote was held regarding the adoption of Resolution 19/20-08 with the above amendments.

**Motion made by Paul Adler; seconded by Todd Brun. Motion passed with 36 in favor, 1 opposed, and 0 abstentions.**
Lonergan stated if there is further follow-up needed, another meeting will be called.

Adjournment
Meeting was adjourned at 12:25 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Ashley Uyeširo Simon
Secretary General of the Academic Senate