ACADEMIC SENATE
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Meeting of January 20, 2021

Virtual Meeting

2:00 - 4:00 pm PST


Absent: J. Dophide, T. Sandmeier


AGENDA

Call to Order

Academic Senate President Adler called the meeting to order at 2:02 pm.

Approval of Minutes of December Senate Meeting

Academic Senate Secretary General Brooks presented the December 2020 minutes for discussion and approval.

Motion to approve the December minutes. Seconded and passed: 34 in favor, 0 opposed, and 3 abstentions.

President Folt and Provost Zukoski

President Folt made a brief appearance to comment on the historic nature of the day (Inauguration Day), sharing that the day was deeply personal and hopeful for her. She noted the alignment of themes expressed during the inauguration and those of the university.

Provost Zukoski also commented on the historic nature of the day and of Martin Luther King Jr. Day. He noted that we are still struggling as university to achieve our aspirations of equality for all. Zukoski highlighted our 5th Annual Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Week, which will take place virtually March 8 - 12. For the remainder of his remarks, the Provost focused on the business of the new semester.
• Spring enrollment remains strong, down only 2 to 2 ½ % compared to last spring, which Zukoski suggests is a good outcome and a testament to what faculty have done to build superior and desirable educational programs. In comparison to last year at this time, undergraduate enrollment is flat, while graduate enrollment is down about 2.2%, due mostly to a reduction of international masters and professional doctoral students who have trouble getting into the US. We had a record number of first year applications for the fall 2021 semester. First year applications were up 20% over last year and 6% over 2019, which was an historical high. The 2021 pool is diverse and competitive.

• The Provost invited Ginger Clark, Director of USC’s Center for Excellence in Teaching and a Professor in the Rossier School of Education, to join him in a discussion about academic integrity and student learning in our online educational programs. Zukoski convened a group to study what we have learned from our time online over the past year. He sees this as an opportunity to reconsider fundamental assumptions about teaching and learning and to build better pedagogical cultures across the university. As an example, proctored exams are a traditional style of assessment that translate poorly to online modalities and may be outdated for in-person teaching as well. Due to fairness and privacy concerns, the University will discontinue the use of online proctoring tools such as Respondus. While there have been no incidents raised at USC in relation to these tools, we have heard concerns from elsewhere and from the working convened to address these issues. Respondus’s Lock-down Browser tool, however, remains acceptable. Zukoski will work closely with the Senate around these issues. In collaboration with Senate President Adler, he will form a joint Provost/Senate Task Force to review options for better assessing student learning outcomes, fairness and equity in both ground and online courses.

• Andy Stott, Vice-Provost for Academic Programs and Dean of the Graduate School, presented his plan for a review of the university’s PhD programs, aimed at prompting departments to self-assess how well programs are meeting their stated objectives. This will be a collaborative effort between the Provost’s Office and the Deans, with considerable faculty engagement. Stott imagines that the spring will be spent developing the model, metrics, and report template, the summer on data collection, and the fall on data analysis. Ultimately, the review will be student-centered and aim to identify ways the university can support programs so that they can better prepare students for the opportunities they are most likely to face post graduation.

• Zukoski concluded with updates on the COVID vaccination program. Currently we are in Phase 1A, which means we are vaccinating frontline healthcare workers and personnel in healthcare environments, including faculty, staff, students, residents, and fellows. We have a USC COVID 19 vaccine rollout page on our COVID 19 Resource Center Website, which Zukoski encourages Senators to bookmark and review regularly. Details are available here and questions can be emailed to covid19@usc.edu.

Resolution on Senate Representation (2nd Reading and Vote)
The Senate then proceeded to a second reading and vote on the Resolution on Senate Representation, which details new procedures for determining the number of Senators to be represented from each school. Based on the total number of Tenure/Tenure Track and RTPC faculty currently working at USC at least 50% time, the new procedures leave unchanged the number of Senators in 16 schools and increase the number of Senators for 5 schools/units:
Motion to approve the Resolution on Senate Representation. Passed: 26 in favor, 0 opposed, and 3 abstentions.

Open Discussion

Adler opened the floor for discussion about issues the Senators would like to see addressed in future Senate meetings. Suggestions included: a follow-up discussion on the implications of enrollment numbers for salary freezes, reduced pension contributions, and the FY22 budget; clarifying the nature of the restrictions on endowments’ restricted funds; more Q & A with the Provost and more open floor discussion in general; and discussions about strengthening shared governance in general and in the Faculty Councils in particular.

SVP Felicia Washington and Professor Manuel Pastor: REDI Task Force report

Felicia Washington (Senior Vice President Human Resources, Equity, and Compliance) and Professor Manuel Pastor shared a PowerPoint presentation and described key results emanating from the work carried out by President’s and Provost’s Task Force on Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (REDI). Pastor began by describing the history and framing the issue of racial equity, diversity and inclusion at USC. Washington then discussed the charge and organization of the REDI Task Force. Washington and Pastor highlighted key results and recommendations organized around themes that were addressed by Task Force workgroups. These include (1) recruitment and retention, (2) programs and curriculum, (3) research and evaluation, (4) culture and values, and (5) support and resources. Adler opened the floor for discussion. The Task Force’s full report will be available shortly.

Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned at 4:01 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Devon Brooks

Secretary General of the Academic Senate