ACADEMIC SENATE

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Meeting of April 21, 2021

Virtual Meeting

2:00 - 4:00 pm PST


Absent: M. Crowley, G. Giuliano, F. Liley, T. Wattenbarger


AGENDA

Call to Order

Academic Senate President Adler called the meeting to order at 2:02 pm. He apologized to Senator Jim Moore because the last Senate Newsletter unintentionally mischaracterized Moore’s question to the Provost during the March Senate meeting. The official March minutes are more accurate.

Approval of Minutes of March Senate Meeting

Academic Senate Secretary General Brooks presented the March 2021 minutes for discussion and approval.

Motion to approve the March minutes. Seconded and passed: 39 in favor, 0 opposed, and 3 abstentions.

Provost Zukoski: Budget Update

The Provost began his remarks by sharing good news. Numerous indicators suggest this was a highly successful year in terms of teaching and applications for next year are strong. We had 70,000 freshmen applications for the fall, representing all states and 88 countries. Approximately 14% of admits are international, 20% will be the first in their family to attend college, and 72% will be students of color.

Zukoski then provide important updates about our planning for the summer and fall. We will start the 1st summer session mostly online and move into the 2nd summer session with as many in-person activities as possible. Although the Administration is still figuring out testing policies, we
should expect to return in-person in the fall. Trojan Check will continue to be used to verify if
people are vaccinated or have positively declined. The University has not yet decided whether to
require vaccinations for the fall, given the legal and ethical implications for those not willing to be
vaccinated.

According to Zukoski, while USC remains a residential university for our undergraduates, in
considering graduate programs and how to help students who cannot return in person due to visa
or health reasons, on-line options may be appropriate. The choice of on-line versus in-person
teaching should be made through the curriculum committees within each school. In our in-person
classes, we should continue exploring how on-line resources can complement and enrich the in-
person experience.

Zukoski then reflected on the spring Joint Provost/Senate Retreat and how discussion from the
retreat might influence how the university moves forward. Topics included liberal education and
General Education courses; teaching effectiveness, including whether it is better to teach online or
in person; changing modes of certifications for degree and non-degree programs; and PhD
education, including the quality, quantity, and content of degrees, expected outcomes, and what
we are trying to accomplish as we think about the world we are in—a post-pandemic world,
where we address issues of social justice and sustainability. In thinking about what things might
look like when we return, we must consider our goals. We want to be recognized as the strongest
private research university on the west coast. We expect our students to be leaders, professionals,
and engaged citizens who will change the world. We also expect to change the world through
research and scholarship—through new ideas, technologies, therapies, narratives, and arts. We
will continue embracing LA, and to expand our partnerships to sustain a vibrant, sustainable, and
equitable culture and economy in our local community. As part of this process of thinking about
how to take the mission of USC as written 150 years ago and modernizing it for the 21st century,
Zukoski and President Folt are working with the deans to identify programming that might fall
between the cracks, as it is not discipline specific. This will require more coordination between
and among disciplines and schools.

To meet our expectations and the needs of our students and society, the Provost explained that
the University is going to invest resources, including money, time, and creativity. As a campus, we
have a large base. We are a $6.5 billion dollar operation, $3 billion of which is on the academic
side and the remaining is in the health system. We will end this year with an operating deficit that
is within the expected bounds, about $170 - 200 million. That deficit would have been
considerably larger without the cost-saving and revenue-generating measures that were
implemented. For FY22, he anticipates pre-pandemic levels for student enrollments, auxiliaries,
and patient care, and thus for revenue. There will continue to be COVID related costs (e.g.,
testing) which we expect to decline over time. We expect to have a tight budget, but we are not
expecting an operational loss for next year. Merit pools have been approved and in January 2022
the university’s contributions to retirement will be fully restored. Hiring will be limited, but there
will replacement hiring and hiring in priority areas.

Zukoski then discussed the Tyndall settlement, which along with the pandemic, impacts our
budget situation. He stated that the University believes the settlement is fair, equitable, and in
accordance with our principles. It is a large settlement, in part because of the number of women
and patients that were impacted. Money will be paid in August 2021 and in August 2022. The cost
of the settlement will be paid from five sources: (1) slowing capital expenditures; (2) selling
unused assets (e.g., fraternity buildings); (3) revenue in litigation reserves; (4) insurance returns
(which are substantial but will not cover the entire amount of the settlement); and (5) operational
improvements (i.e., increased revenue and decreased cost). Zukoski discussed the implications of
the settlement for our ambitions and our aspirations of continuing academic excellence. We will slow capital expenditures, but we will have funds to renovate as needed, and there will be some investment in new capital construction projects. Zukoski does not expect the settlement to diminish the quality of USC education, research, and clinical care.

Before taking questions, the Provost offered a reminder about the forthcoming Wellness Day and that there should be no classes, assignments, or tests. He asked faculty to be mindful that we are using Wellness Days as a replacement for spring recess, which we eliminated to reduce risk and stress.

Questions for Provost Zukoski

Before field questions from the floor, Adler expressed concern that the Senate has not done more to encourage faculty to address student stress.

- A Senator asked about our plan for accommodating international and other students who may be unable to return to campus in the fall. Zukoski indicated that a team is examining these issues and guidance is forthcoming, although it will be specific to schools and dependent upon faculty.

- Another Senator asked if members of central administration received bonuses this year. They have, replied the Provost, when contractually obligated as part of compensation packages.

- On behalf of faculty who submitted questions ahead of time, Adler shared concerns about McKinsey, including those related to the impact of our association with McKinsey on our reputation; how much we are paying McKinsey; whether McKinsey is providing recommendations to leadership about the future of our core mission; and the Strata Consortium. Zukoski affirmed that McKinsey is not directing or giving advice on the core mission of USC. Those decisions are made by President Folt, Zukoski, the deans, and faculty; McKinsey provides potentially useful data and background material. There is an ongoing conversation about all expenditures, including those associated with McKinsey and other consultants. McKinsey convened and supports the Strata consortium, of which USC is a part. Consisting of 30 to 40 colleges and universities, the consortium examines post-pandemic higher education opportunities and best practices. A faculty guest pointed out that our faculty have significant expertise in higher education issues and wondered why we do not rely more on them. She also asked about McKinsey’s scope of work and deliverables, and she expressed concerns about alleged unethical and corrupt behavior. Zukoski pointed out advantages of having external consultants like McKinsey (e.g., they can devote time undiluted by other responsibilities, such as teaching and research, to answer specific questions). He further noted that Administration does involve our faculty, whom he agrees have considerable expertise in these areas. McKinsey’s scope of work has evolved and the contracts are winding down.

- In response to questions about Varsity Blues, Zukoski stated that USC was a victim of illegal activity and that substantial changes have been put into place to mitigate the chances that it will be repeated, including how we recruit and accept student athletes. Outcomes of 33 student cases that were reviewed range from no violation to expulsion. The law firm representing us in the government investigation has not produced a summary report, but information on the issue, including root causes, is available on our change.usc.edu website. More information on root causes is forthcoming.

- A final question was asked about consequences of not being vaccinated for those required by USC to be vaccinated. Zukoski replied that we are still exploring the various issues involved, as well as options and implications.
Zukoski closed by acknowledging how difficult the semester has been, and by congratulating and thanking Senators for all their good work and resiliency.

**Community Advisory Board Report: Professors Ange-Marie Hancock Alfaro and Erroll Southers**

The Community Advisory Board (CAB) was convened by President Folt in the summer of 2020 to conduct a thorough examination of USC’s public safety practices, including hiring, finances, accountability, and bias training. Professor Ange-Maria Hancock Alfaro, previewed recommendations as part of the CAB’s co-design process. Hancock Alfaro provided an overview and timeline of the CAB and co-design processes before describing the data that were reviewed and what was heard from participants. In total, 8 pilot conversations were held with community stakeholders, 11 co-design public safety sessions were held, and 659 people participated (a quarter of whom were community members with no affiliation to USC). Two general recommendations were previewed: (1) create a permanent USC DPS oversight institution and (2) re-envision public safety. Also previewed were recommendations relating to and organized around four pillars, including accountability, alternative armed response, community care, and transparency. Hancock Alfaro then invited feedback from Senators before taking questions from the floor. Those interested in attending or reviewing a CAB report presentation can contact Alejandro Maldonado (armaldon@usc.edu) and those who would like to provide feedback can email dpscab@usc.edu.

**Handbook Changes – 1st Reading**

Adler introduced for a 1st reading a motion to make changes to the University Faculty Handbook. Proposed changes and a guide to the changes were prepared by the Handbook Committee and distributed prior to the April Senate meeting. The proposed changes are non-substantive, aiming to reorganize the text of chapters 1-5 and 9. Further changes will be needed to address the outstanding substantive issues posed by outdated language in Chapters 6, 7, and 8. Adler explained that there was some urgency to changing those chapters because our Handbook is not consistent with either law or USC policy. While we are moving forward with the misconduct review and Handbook revision, the legally mandated EEO-TIX policies and procedures currently in place will govern protected class matters. New draft language for those chapters will come to the Senate in the Fall. Handbook Committee co-chairs, Profs John Matsusaka and Alison Wilcox, presented additional background before leading a short discussion about the proposed changes and their rationales. A Senator recommended that we seek out legal advice from independent counsel about issues addressed in chapters 6, 7, and 8. Adler encouraged Senators to share the proposed changes with their colleagues, particularly those serving on their School’s Faculty Council.

**Candidate Self-Introductions**

Senate Academic Vice President and Nominating Committee Chair Tambascia provided an overview of the Senate election process and ballot. The meeting concluded with brief self-introductions from each of the candidates standing for election.

**Adjournment**

Meeting was adjourned at 4:11 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Devon Brooks
Secretary General of the Academic Senate