ACADEMIC SENATE
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Meeting of September 15, 2021

Virtual Meeting

2:00 - 4:00 pm PST


Absent: P. Cardon, K. Carlson, E. Collins, M. Crowley, M. Karp, F. Liley, D. Milstein, A. Motamed


AGENDA

Call to Order

Academic Senate President Tambascia called the meeting to order at 2:03 pm.

Establishing Quorum

Academic Senate Secretary General Brooks established that a quorum had been met for the September meeting.

Approval of Minutes

Brooks presented the May 12 and August 11 Emergency Meeting minutes for discussion and approval.

Motion to approve the May 12 minutes. Seconded and passed: 26 in favor, 0 opposed, and 3 abstentions.

Motion to approve the August 11 minutes. Seconded and passed: 33 in favor, 1 opposed, and 1 abstention.

Conversation with President Folt and Provost Zukoski

President Folt thanked everyone for their attendance and hard work. She expressed her hope that Senators are aware of how grateful students, parents, and alumni are for their efforts. Other updates included:

- The university tests 9,000 people a day for COVID-19 and is seeing compliance with its vaccination policy.
Fall enrollment is expected to be the highest, strongest, and most diverse in USC history. Folt suspects that our in-person return contributed to the high enrollment.

We are recovering financially and having a pretty good year in our endowment. We also increased financial aid to students and continued offering free tuition to students from families earning less than $80,000 a year, which we have no intention of backing away from.

We doubled mental health services for students and provided more psychiatric help than in past years. We will have 107 health providers and we have significantly increased education and sexual violence prevention services, adding nine new staff members.

Advancement finished significantly ahead of our goal of $450 million at over $520 million.

Folt then took questions from Senators before handing the floor to Provost Zukoski.

Zukoski offered brief updates:

- Steve Shapiro was installed as the university’s first Senior Vice President of Health Affairs and the Keck School of Medicine (KSOM) leadership team is being solidified with the selection of a new dean. Three deans will be installed later in the fall: Emily Roxworthy (School of Dramatic Arts), Dana Goldman (Sol Price School of Public Policy), and Thanassis Rikakis (love and Young Academy). Robert Cutietta is stepping down as dean of Thornton School of Music and Glorya Kaufman School of Dance (positions Zukoski expects to fill by the end of the year).

- Recommendations made by the Racial, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (REDI) Task Force will be implemented over this academic year. Workgroups are currently being assigned; those workgroups will consider each recommendation and develop timelines for their work.

- The PhD outcomes assessment being carried out by Andy Stott, Vice Provost for Academic Programs and Dean of the Graduate School, is ongoing. Data from programs are due October 1 and will be analyzed by a faculty committee that will make recommendations on improving PhD outcomes at USC. Stott also surveyed undergraduate and graduate students about their advisement preferences. Results from the survey will be used to develop high quality advising programs for students.

- Ishwar Puri has joined the university as the Vice President for Research. The Office of Research awarded about $4 million in seed funding this year (as it has done in past years) and built infrastructure to support large-scale grants.

- Nominations will soon be sought for University and Distinguished Professors. These are the university’s highest honors for faculty. The Provost would like to see more diverse representation in the nominations, reflecting growth in diversity of our faculty.

Zukoski stated that the university is in remarkably good shape and thanked Senators for their efforts. He then took questions from Senators.

**Welcome back and working together as a Senate**

Tambascia welcomed returning and new Senators. She then discussed how the Senate conducts business and how Senators will work together this year. She reminded senators that Senate meetings generally follow Robert’s Rules of Order in managing business and that voting matters are handled after establishing quorum and via motions. Faculty Handbook and Bylaws changes take place over two Senate meetings. Meeting minutes are posted online. Tambascia asked that Senators raise their digital hand to participate in discussion (in virtual meetings) and that discussions taking place via the chat function retain the same level of collegiality and respect as the comments voiced to our colleagues and guests. She also asked Senators to reach out to colleagues within their schools and programs and to bring concerns to the Senate meetings, and encouraged those who tend to be quiet to please make the needs and concerns of their faculty known in Senate meetings, to her or the Executive Board, or some other way.
EBAC presentation (Paula Cannon and Patti Riley; guests Greg Condell and Alice Chen)

On behalf of the Employment Benefits Advisory Committee (EBAC), Patti Riley, Alice Chen, and Greg Condell gave a presentation and answered questions about benefits and open enrollment (October 25 – November 8) changes for 2021. A similar presentation will be made to the Staff Assembly, and virtual seminars will also be available. Riley, Chen, and Condell took questions from the floor.

Return to campus and start of the academic year conversation: FC survey responses & topics

The meeting ended with a conversation facilitated by Tambascia about issues and concerns related to our return to campus and start of the academic year. The conversation considered responses to a survey sent out by the Executive Board in the previous week asking questions about teaching and learning experiences, teaching modalities, and about communication within the schools. Responses revealed challenges with hybrid instruction and concerns about classroom conditions. Responses about communication within schools were mixed, with some reporting good communication from deans and leadership and others reporting inconsistent or a lack of communication. Tambascia invited Senators to share their experiences and concerns. Senators expressed concerns about availability of PPE, improper masking, and misuse of Trojan Check. Others shared that classroom space has not been available, that there continue to be technology issues, and that there is angst and confusion about continuity of education expectations and messaging, particularly as it relates to hyflex instruction. There was also discussion about how these issues might impact student and faculty wellness, student evaluations, and faculty workload and compensation. Another Senator expressed frustration about the Provost’s response when safety issues are raised. Tambascia indicated that the information shared will help with communications with the Provost and she encouraged Senators to continue trying to address issues through Faculty Councils and school leadership.

Adjournment

Tambascia thanked everyone and adjourned the meeting at 4:01 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Devon Brooks

Secretary General of the Academic Senate