ACADEMIC SENATE

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
Special Meeting of the Academic Senate
December 10, 2018
McCarthy Honors College Multipurpose Room
4:30 – 6:30 p.m.


AGENDA

Yaniv Bar-Cohen, Academic Senate President, called the meeting to order at 4:40 pm.

Bar-Cohen noted the purpose of the special meeting today was to discuss what actions, if any, the Senate should take regarding the recent decision by Interim President Austin to end Dean James Ellis’s (Marshall School of Business) term early. It was stated that we may not be able to discuss whether the decision was right or wrong as we do not know all the facts, but may instead need to focus on this event from a shared governance standpoint.

The Executive Board met with the Marshall Faculty Council just prior to this Senate meeting, and a draft resolution will be presented to the Senate during this Senate meeting to get input.

Discussion regarding the early termination of James Ellis as Dean of Marshall

A timeline of the events was reviewed, and results of a survey conducted by the Marshall Faculty Council since news of Dean Ellis’s early termination was reported (210 faculty members responding in 48 hours). Faculty in Marshall were described as being very upset; Dean Ellis is very well-liked by many faculty members, but Marshall faculty are most upset with the lack of transparency in this process and with the way the decision was handled. It was clarified that Marshall Faculty are in favor of culture change, but they are concerned with the process, fairness, and shared governance. This was stated to have impacted feelings of trust within the Marshall Faculty community.

It was debated how much involvement faculty should have in leadership changes. Some argued faculty input in every leadership decision may not be necessary, as some leaders may need to be terminated due to very clear circumstances. However, a statement was also made that decision-makers genuinely need to hear and understand the Faculty point of view in order to have legitimate shared governance.

The legality of sharing certain types of information and how that can be balanced with transparency was discussed. It was suggested that we can and often do use small groups of faculty
representation (committees, Faculty Councils, Senate, sanctioning panels) to promote accountability without complete transparency to the greater community. This type of representation would have been beneficial in the early termination of Dean Ellis.

The impact of this decision and previous events on the culture and working environment at USC was discussed. It was argued that the stifling of information can have the opposite effect on the culture change that we are trying to enact, as people in other schools are now concerned that leadership in their own schools may change drastically as well.

The roles of the Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) and Human Resources (HR) in these investigations were discussed. Questions about reasonable, process-based, non-arbitrary decisions were raised in regards to how conclusions and sanctions are decided.

Discussion regarding possible Senate resolution
A discussion was held to determine if and when a resolution from the Senate would be made, and what the contents of such a resolution would be. There was general consensus that the resolution needed to be voted on at this meeting.

There was discussion of the wording of the Resolution as well as a synopsis of the messages being conveyed with the resolution.

First Point: “We support the University of Southern California in its effort to improve the institutional culture, including in diversity, equity and inclusion.” It was discussed that the intent of this phrase is to convey our general support for improving our culture in ways that include valuing diversity, equity and inclusion.

Second Point: “We recognize that Wanda Austin, as Interim President of the University of Southern California, has the right and responsibility to advance this cause, including by appointing and removing Deans.” It was discussed that the intent of this phrase is to support Wanda Austin in her right as Interim President to be the primary decision-maker in removing James Ellis as Dean. Specifically, it emphasizes that as Interim President, she has the power and obligation to make decisions regarding appointing and removing Deans. It also emphasizes that neither the Board of Trustees nor outside donors should be making these types of decisions.

Third Point: “However, we agree with the Marshall School Faculty that the decision concerning Dean Ellis lacked shared governance and transparency as to the process.” It was discussed that the intent of this phrase is to support the Marshall Faculty in their concerns regarding the process of Dean Ellis’s termination. The language was chosen to focus on governance and process as areas of concern, as opposed to whether the decision was right or wrong because we did not have sufficient information to assess the merits of the decision. The phrase “as to the process” was added due to concerns that asking for “transparency” implied a wider release of confidential information. There was no consensus that this can be demanded (or whether something effective could be sent out broadly that did not violate confidentiality).

Original Fourth Point: was amended during the meeting via friendly amendment. “It is critical moving forward that faculty consultation occur in the decision-making process, and this is essential to trust, accountability, and a well-functioning university.” This point focuses on the need for better processes going forward to include faculty in such decision-making that impacts USC (such as a small group of Faculty set up to hear and discuss privileged information
about a potential Dean termination).

**Vote on friendly amendment to Fourth Point**

A friendly amendment was proposed to add “now and” to the sentence above. The addition of these words was suggested to emphasize that, despite there not being a process already in place for including the voice of Faculty, the lack of faculty input in the process of terminating Dean Ellis was considered to be inconsistent with the significant conversations and messaging around the importance of shared governance in recent months.

*Friendly amendment passed with 16 in favor, 12 opposed, and 1 abstention.*

Final sentence for resolution was therefore as follows:

“It is critical now and moving forward that faculty consultation occur in the decision-making process, and this is essential to trust, accountability, and a well-functioning university.”

**Vote on Resolution 18/19-04**

*Motion was made by the Executive Board of the Senate; passed unanimously with 29 in favor, 0 opposed, and 0 abstentions.*

**Adjournment**

Meeting was adjourned at 6:16pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Ashley Uyeshiro Simon
Secretary General of the Academic Senate