AGENDA

Call to Order

Academic Senate President Tambascia called the meeting to order at 2:01 pm.

Approval of Minutes

Secretary General Brooks presented the revised December 8 Academic Senate meeting minutes for approval.

Motion to approve the December 8 minutes. Seconded and passed: 30 in favor, 0 opposed, and 2 abstentions.

Update from President Folt and Provost Zukoski; FY ’22 Update

President Folt welcomed everyone and gave important updates.

- The additional week the University added to the winter break was appreciated, particularly by staff.
- Folt’s senior leadership team and the deans have been setting priorities for the first few weeks of the semester and beyond; Folt encouraged others to prioritize as well. Offering competitive compensation, retention, and maintaining quality of our top programs are among her main priorities. Senior leadership is still responding to the Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (REDI) Task Force report and the work of the USC DPS Community Advisory Board (CAB). Folt highlighted the hire of Dr. Errol Southers as Associate Senior Vice President of Safety & Risk Assurance.
The University needs to continue its work on principles of community. Managing social media is difficult and USC, like other universities, has not determined how deeply to get involved in social media. If anything goes wrong, it can influence the way USC is perceived. We have to think about how best to address free and protected speech, online identities and the online atmosphere, all of which will require building on the work of the Culture Committee. Many schools at USC have a code of conduct or behavior that students are expected to read, but very few require students to sign and agree to honor their respective code. This could help students better understand expectations and shape student behavior. Folt plans to work with the Senate, Student Assembly and other student groups to examine and address these issues.

Sexual assault is another community-wide issue that Folt plans to continue addressing. This involves working with our Inter-Fraternity Council and other student organizations.

A Senator asked the President about involvement of faculty in efforts to address sexual assault, particularly among fraternities and sororities. Folt emphasized that there was no intention to minimize involvement of faculty and that she expects new groups to be formed to address these issues in a larger context. Another Senator asked if a date has been set for the dedication of the Dr. Joseph Medicine Crow Center for International and Public Affairs. Folt indicated that a date has been set and that a wonderful weekend of events is planned for the dedication. A final question for Folt addressed her earlier comments about social media. Folt stated that USC faces social media issues, including some that involve serious bullying and harassment of students and antisemitism. These issues could have significant consequences for the individuals involved in them as well as reputational consequences for the University. Folt does not want to control speech, but she does want to make sure that we keep people safe and that we follow the law.

Provost Zukoski began his remarks by expressing his joy of the semester and classes starting. He provided updates on the work of the Interfraternity Council Culture, Prevention and Accountability Task Force and on the Restart Process, as summarized below.

The two charges of the Task Force are to (1) create long-term strategies for improving the culture, enhancing accountability, and addressing systematic challenges within the IFC chapters, and (2) develop short-term guidelines for the resumption of social activities at the IFC organizations. The Provost echoed what the President expressed earlier about needing to work together as a campus and as a community to end sexual assault across our entire campus. He appreciates everyone who brings these issues forward and alerts us of sexual assault or other issues impacting the safety and well-being of our community. Zukoski reminded Senators that in the fall, social activities of all 16 fraternities were paused indefinitely and one fraternity was placed on interim suspension. Since then, three additional fraternities were placed on interim suspension and one on modified suspension pending the outcome of investigations by EEO-TIX. Sigma Nu remains on interim suspension. Currently, the University has placed five fraternities on suspension, which is one of the most stringent actions taken by any university in the nation in recent years in response to the kind of behavior reported last fall. The eleven chapters in good standing have been provided details about actions required under close university oversight and partnership before social activities can resume. IFC chapters in good standing have been allowed to resume recruitment activities and are expected to resume hosting social gatherings by February 3, assuming they meet specified requirements. Academic Vice President Pecchenino asked what constitutes an “event.” The Provost pointed out that our risk analysis involves large-scale parties but some provisions apply to other activities. Another Senator asked for clarification about the Centralized Reporting Directive issued by the University, specifically the requirement to report regardless of how the information is learned—whether from a direct report from a reporting party, from
social media, from a concerned third party, or through any other source, which might include reporting rumors. The Provost confirmed that reporting rumors is indeed expected and that the EEO-TIX office is designed to assist those who report rumors. President Folt shared that this is one of the areas that people are trying to clarify and that we are following the guidelines of the Office of Civil Rights (OCR). She indicated that the University will share with OCR the question posed by the Senator and encouraged anyone concerned about whether to report to err on the side of reporting to EEO-TIX.

- Regarding Restart, the plan is to be back in person on January 24th. Zukoski suggested that we are beginning to move past the peak of the Omicron surge. There have been no outbreaks on campus and we are essentially 100% vaccinated and soon to be 100% boosted, which—along with masking, surveillance testing, and isolating those who test positive—gives us a very high level of protection. Zukoski explained that the University chose January 24 as the return date because it would allow us to re-populate slowly and not overwhelm our infrastructure. We are requiring boosters and the enforcement guidelines will go into effect January 31st. In terms of classroom expectations, our Public Health Policy Advisory Group suggests that we are on the right course and will be able to protect our population with the practices we have in place. Still, we need to consider how to provide continuity of education for our students, especially since we expect to have more students with COVID than we had in the past. This means making content available online, including streaming, recording of lectures, posting of lecture notes, providing handouts, etc. The Provost encouraged Senators to think about how we can make accommodations for students and to reach out to the Center for Excellence in Teaching (CET) for support. For those concerned about ventilation, USC's Office of Environmental Health & Safety (EH&S) maintains the building readiness dashboard on their website. Zukoski is pleased that we will be back in person. We will not be risk free, he points out, but we are navigating the transition from COVID where we had no tools to protect ourselves to COVID that is endemic.

The Provost addressed questions and comments related to the plan to return to campus on January 24th. He indicated that he is sympathetic about concerns about exposure, but believes our campus is protected. The positivity rate is lower on campus than in the community. He pointed out that Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (DPH) would have allowed us to return in person on January 3rd and that there are no DPH stipulations limiting our ability to return. A Senator suggested that January 31 might be a more appropriate return date than the 24th since the 31st is the date by which everyone is required to have received their booster shot. Zukoski expressed his appreciation for the suggestion and reiterated his belief that the University is following the best available public health guidelines.

In response to several questions about teaching, the Provost indicated that hybrid teaching is not expected (though those who choose to do so, may) and that the rules that were in place last semester are the rules in place this semester. He also affirmed that there should be no penalties for teaching remotely when doing so has been approved by those responsible for such approvals (e.g., curriculum committees, deans, chairs, etc.).

A Senator asked if there is an official position on whether students should resume face-to-face meetings when engaged in research in K-12 settings. Zukoski replied that yes, there is an official position but that it will vary depending on the nature of the activity. He encouraged the Senator to reach out to Ishwar Puri, Vice President of Research or Sarah Van Orman, Associate Vice Provost for Student Health, for additional guidance.

As we transition out of COVID, another Senator offered observations about how well we are managing continuity of education, and rigor and expectations of our educational system. He asked
the Provost if there is a plan for getting standards back on the table so that the education we offer is rigorous and valuable. The Provost indicated that he has heard similar concerns and shares them himself. His expectation is that we will return to having high standards and that it will take time to think through how we do that. The Senator also pointed out the need to consider the possible impact of imposing tougher standards on student evaluations, on which RTPC faculty and pre-tenured faculty rely heavily. The Provost agreed and suggested that these types of conversations should continue.

Tambascia closed the conversation with the Provost by summarizing comments made by Senators in the Zoom chat: several Senators would like to see another week of online instruction, either at their discretion or in consultation with their dean; aligning the return date with the booster deadline date of January 31 might reassure faculty that their concerns are being addressed; some faculty face childcare issues due to school closures and disruptions; the mental of faculty is important.

Resolution, FRR Bylaws Changes, Second Reading

Tambascia presented for a second reading Resolution 21-22-04 resolving to amend the Academic Senate’s Bylaw 18 to reflect the following:

Bylaw 18: Composition of the Committee on Faculty Rights and Responsibilities.
The co-chairs of the Committee on Faculty Rights and Responsibilities shall be one tenured professor and one full-time RTPC associate professor or professor (or equivalent ranks). The committee will also have other members.

Upon opening the floor for discussion and receiving none, Tambascia called for the vote.

Motion to approve Resolution 21-22-04. Passed: 41 in favor, 0 opposed, and 2 abstentions.

Faculty Awards Nominations: Julie Nyquist, Chair of the Faculty Awards Committee

Julie Nyquist, Chair of the Senate Awards Committee, announced the Call for Nominations for the Distinguished Faculty Service Award, which honors faculty service related to governance through a life-time of service (typically 10 or more years) and the Walter Wolf Award, which is bestowed on a USC faculty member for defense and advocacy for academic freedom or other manifestations of social conscience. Nominations are due March 4.

Open Discussion Related to Spring Semester Restart & School FC Priorities for the Semester

Tambascia facilitated an open discussion on the Spring semester Restart and school Faculty Council priorities for the semester. Among the Restart topics discussed were those related to lack of availability of IT support; concerns about safety; students’ expectations for faculty to teach in a hybrid format despite lack of faculty and institutional capacity to support hybrid teaching; confusion around the concept of continuity of education and challenges of ensuring continuity of education; vulnerability of part-time and adjunct faculty; trauma and anxiety experienced by faculty and overall morale and well-being of faculty; heavy workloads and the impacts of heavy workloads on staff and faculty; compensation, COLAs, and merit increases; lack of communications from administration to faculty and students regarding learning and attendance expectations; roles of the Senate and Faculty Councils; the desirability and logistics of the Senate formulating formal positions and offering them to senior leadership; confusion about university-wide versus school-level expectations, guidelines, and flexibility around online instruction.

Before opening the floor for Senators to discuss priorities of their Faculty Councils, Tambascia presented Executive Board (EB) priorities (shared governance; building faculty leadership capacity; faculty well-being; and faculty salary and compensation) and described several initiatives to
support the priorities, including the convening of a Task Force on Faculty Councils (co-chaired by
Elissa Grossman and Morgan Polikoff) and a Task Force on Merit and Annual Review (co-chaired
by Jessica Cantiello and Larry Picus); formation of a Faculty Leadership Fellows program; and
development of a Faculty Service database. Among the priorities shared by Senators were faculty
governance, compensation, faculty recruitment, and Deans Review policies and processes.

Adjournment

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

Respectfully submitted,

Devon Brooks
Secretary General of the Academic Senate