ACADEMIC SENATE
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

March 9, 2022
Virtual Meeting
2:00 - 4:00 pm PST


AGENDA

Call to order: Tracy Tambascia, Senate President

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

Approval of minutes from the last meeting: Devon Brooks, Secretary General

Secretary General Brooks presented the February 16 Academic Senate meeting minutes for approval.

Motion to approve the February 16 minutes. Seconded and passed: 28 in favor and 0 opposed.

Update from Provost Zukoski

Provost Zukoski expressed how glad he was to be in attendance before offering important updates.

- He announced that we have three new University Professors and two Distinguished professors, and that the new Dean of the Keck School joined the University the week prior.
- With help from Anthony Bailey, Vice President for Strategic and Global Initiatives, the University is exploring how we might respond to the horrendous events taking place in the Ukraine and specifically how to support students and faculty impacted by the events.
- The University no longer requires masking indoors, although there are exceptions; masking is still required in patient care buildings, testing sites, and on public transportation, including USC shuttles. With less than 1% positivity among students and employees, we are in a low risk of transmission category. Faculty cannot require masking in their individual classes, but anyone can wear a mask and we are mask friendly.
Several key searches are underway. The University has contracted with Isaacson, Miller to support our search for the Director of the Shoah Foundation Institute, which Zukoski expects to be a robust one. The search committee has been approved and is comprised of faculty deans, administrators, and trustees. Zukoski will oversee the search and Executive Vice Provost Elizabeth Graddy will provide oversight for day-to-day activities. We are also searching for a dean of the Kaufman School and are down to four candidates. Additionally, we are searching for a dean of the Thornton School. The search committee has identified nine semi-finalists and we are now in the process of narrowing the list. Interviews of the finalists are expected to begin the week of March 28th.

Regarding the resolution on the cost of living increase recently passed by the Senate, the Provost noted that Central Leadership recognizes the fact that the cost of living goes up on a regular and terrifying basis. However, the University has determined it will not be establishing a cost of living increase. Zukoski indicated that addressing salary gaps is his highest priority this year and will continue to be a high priority for him and President Folt. This year, he has sought to understand the University’s financial situation so that gaps in salaries can be closed.

In 18 months, the tool currently being used for tracking student performance and advisement will no longer be supported. A process has begun to identify a single, comprehensive academic advising platform that can be utilized to support both undergraduate and graduate students.

On April 14, with leadership from Andy Stott, the Office of Academic Programs will be hosting an event called ‘What Should a Trojan Know?’ The event will bring together teams from across the University to think ambitiously about core education, with an aim of initiating dialogue about the next iteration of general education at USC.

There will be forthcoming changes to the Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards (SJACS) in response to concerns about behavioral issues among students and the way the University addresses academic integrity issues. We are moving towards a system that is more transparent and supportive than is currently the case. SJACS will be reorganized into two arms: the Office of Community Expectations and the Office of Academic Integrity. The former will focus on behavior and community standards, and fall under student affairs. The latter will focus on academic issues and fall under the Provost’s Office—specifically, under Academic Programs and Andy Stott. Restructuring is expected to begin this semester and to be completed by the fall.

Zukoski closed with a discussion of the Supervisor File Review underway. He explained that the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) informed the University that it is under an order from them to ensure that we have high quality processes in place to address allegations of sexual assault or protected class issues. The OCR would like to give the University an amnesty period, which requires a review of our files to ensure that any allegations that were not reported in the past have now been identified and reported. If in the future it is determined that allegations required to be reported were not in fact reported, there will be serious consequences. All faculty are required to complete the review because of their supervisory role. According to Zukoski, the review is not meant to be a “heavy lift” or a forensic review. Felicia Washington, Senior Vice President of Human Resources, offered additional context for the review. She clarified that OCR was trying to help USC remedy the concerns it found during its directed investigation into the Tyndall matter. Specifically, there were concerns that information regarding reports of sex and gender-based harassment were not in a centralized personnel file but diffused throughout the university in various personal files. The OCR’s directive was for everyone to review their files in the hopes of centralizing how this information is accessible. If personnel documents are not maintained in a personnel file, other records where personnel documents may have been maintained should be reviewed back to 2016.
in order to ensure that there are no unreported allegations.

The Provost then took questions from the floor. Tambascia asked the Provost if he could talk more about the deliberation that took place among Central Leadership around the cost of living issue. Zukoski suggested that the debate on cost of living increases turns on guaranteeing salaries when the future is unknown. He further suggested that when it comes to the closing of the salary gaps being impactful, there is a floor on the salaries that the University has aggressively increased and will aggressively increase again this year. That floor is always moving up, which gives rise to salary compression that then has to be dealt with through the monies that the deans have and are able to generate and that, of course, will vary from school to school. The heterogeneity from individual to individual, school to school, and department to department is large across the campus from what Zukoski says he is able to see. He asserted that there is no evidence to support that everyone’s salary is behind aspirational peers and he expects that gap closing efforts will not be uniform.

A Senator suggested that the Provost’s indication that the OCR review is not forensic is at odds with the details called out in the FAQs that Washington referred to in earlier comments. The Senator expressed deep concerns about being directed to execute a detailed review of voluminous files, with the threat for some, of punishment up to and including termination. He further suggested that faculty have been asked to attest to the fact, not that they have not identified any circumstances of sexual or gender-based harassment, but that they actually reviewed these files. The Senator asked the Provost if he was sure the review is not forensic because it appears to be. The Provost replied that the review is not meant to be forensic, but a best faith effort. Washington added that the Provost was suggesting that the review is an opportunity to think about where relevant information might be maintained. If the information is in the personnel file, then that is the only place to look and that is what should be indicated. However, the personnel file does not have to be the individual faculty member’s, it can be the personnel file of the department. If the habit and custom is for the department to maintain information in its personnel files, those are the records that need to be reviewed.

Regarding the salary gap, another Senator expressed worry that communications are left primarily to the dean or the individual faculty member who may not know that they are underpaid, and he asked for more clarity on how these issues could be addressed. Zukoski indicated that this needs further study and that he would like to convene a group to examine it further. The Senator expressed his willingness to be part of such a group and went on to argue for a process that engages faculty, not just deans and associate deans, in the decision-making process, given the uneven access to information and the privileges that existed historically based on factors such as race and gender. Zukoski pointed out that the University is required by law to ensure that there are no institutional biases and that two years ago an external auditor found no evidence of institutional bias. The Senator then asked about the relationship between the Office of Community Expectations and the Office of Academic Integrity that the Provost had discussed earlier. The Provost clarified that the offices are designed to ensure that there is joint linkage and oversight over cases, and that a triage process is in place to ensure that both sides are aware of individual cases.

A Senator asked if the Provost could elaborate on ‘What Should a Trojan Know?’ and who would be invited to participate. Zukoski recommended that the Senator reach out to Andy Stott. Another Senator asked about processes for the current dean searches. The Provost explained that last year, the searches dragged out well past the end of the year, which was disappointing for everyone. He expects the current searches to be announced in the next two weeks. Still another Senator noted that the cost of living in Los Angeles went up 7.5% in the past year and 1.5% the
year before. Yet for those in his school who are making $100,000 and above, increases over the past two years have been zero percent. The Senator shared his concerns about whether the disparity between increases in the cost of living and no increases in salary increases can be made up in the future. Zukoski said he did not know if it could be made up and that it depends on the finances and revenue stream of the University, and inflation. The Senator suggested that the notion that the only place increases in faculty salary can come from is increases in tuition pits students against faculty, and that is troubling given that the University’s endowment rose 43.2%. Zukoski maintained that the endowment is tied to contracts and cannot be put into salaries if salaries are not designated in contract.

Another Senator asked the Provost for examples of the ways the SJACS process was adversarial. The Provost offered that memos to students sometimes stated that the student was under investigation and memos sometimes sounded like they were written by a lawyer. Finally, a Senator asked, given the circumstances of the war in Europe, whether USC had given any thought to reviewing its endowments or any Russian owned assets and divesting from them. Zukoski replied that he did not know the answer to the question and that he had not heard any conversations on the topic, but he suspects that divestment would be a natural outcome of a scan that revealed Russian owned assets.

Tambascia thanked the Provost and conveyed to him that she thinks there is quite a bit of disappointment about his message about the cost of living resolution. She encouraged him to continue having conversations with the Senate, the deans, schools, and Faculty about salaries and compression, and she stressed her belief that cost of living increases remain an extremely important topic to faculty. Zukoski agreed.

**Nominating Committee; timeline for spring elections: Dan Pecchenino, Senate Academic Vice President**

Senate Academic Vice President Pecchenino provided an update on the nomination process and timeline for spring elections. The Nominating Committee is preparing the ballot for elections of next year’s Executive Board, which will be presented at the April 20 Senate meeting. As indicated in the Senate’s bylaws, the Nominating Committee prepares a ballot, but nominations can also come from the faculty at large. Pecchenino explained that nominations require prior agreement from the nominee that they will serve if elected and endorsement of a minimum number of supporting faculty. For nominations for officer positions, the number of endorsements that can come from any one school is capped. The deadline for nominations has been pushed back to April 1. In response to a Senator’s question about the benefits of serving on the Executive Board, Past President Adler suggested that benefits of serving on the Executive Board be shared in a memo. Pecchenino indicated that the information could be included in the memo being sent out about the nomination process.

**Culture Journey Presentation: Patrick Cates, Director of Organizational Change – Ethics and Culture**

Patrick Cates, Director of Organization Change - Ethics and Culture, provided an update on the culture journey. He reminded Senators that the culture journey began in 2017, with the work of the Task Force on Workforce Standards and Employee Wellness that was prompted by a series of painful scandals at the University. The Task Force identified five culture focus areas to begin addressing in 2018: (1) Addressing Concerns of the USC Community; (2) Well-Being; (3) Professional Development; (4) DEI; and (5) Values. In 2019, input from over 24,000 faculty, staff, student leaders, and members of governance led to the identification of six unifying values. Subsequently, the University has been working to integrate those values into the five focus areas.
Cates then elaborated on the focus areas and some of the work underway in each area. He noted ongoing work to develop partnerships with schools and units and that new committees on Measurement and Reporting are working to define culture metrics and publish a Culture Report to the community.

**Update from Senate Committees: University Libraries Committee and Committee on Information Services**

Trudi Sandmeier, Co-chair of the Joint Provost/Academic Senate Libraries Committee, reported on the work of the Committee. This year, the Committee’s charge revolved around working with faculty and staff of the USC Libraries as they engage in a three-year strategic planning process. To inform this effort, the Committee encouraged and helped facilitate implementation of a survey sent initially to faculty and subsequently to staff. The survey sought feedback on three items: (1) What do you rely upon most? (2) How can we collaborate to better support your work? (3) Share a useful program or service from a non-USC library. Sandmeier suggested that a key take away from results of the survey is that faculty and staff do not appear to know what the libraries do and what kinds of services they offer, as many of the things that were suggested are already available. This highlights a bigger issue involving communications and how to effectively get the word out about what is available through USC Libraries. Although the survey was also sent to students, the response rate was poor so it will be administered again given that students are a large constituency of the USC Libraries. Over these past months, faculty and staff of the USC Libraries have drafted components of a strategic plan. Sandmeier discussed each of the draft components, including the mission, vision, values and definitions, and themes for goal developments. The draft components have been presented to the Library Committee, the Board of Counselors, and other user groups and constituencies of USC Libraries.

Els Collins and Patrick Crispen, Co-chairs of the Joint Provost/Academic Senate Committee on Information Services (CIS), updated the Senate on the work carried out this year by the Committee. Collins explained that the Committee advises the Senate, the provost and the Chief Information Officer on a variety of issues related to academic technology infrastructure, technology-related policies, and information resources and services of the university. Membership of the Committee varies each year, but this year’s membership reflects eight Schools; it also includes representatives from the Academic Senate Executive Board, USC Libraries, and the Provost’s Office. Each year, the CIS begins with a survey of committee members to determine issues that will be addressed for the year and subcommittees are formed around those issues. This year’s subcommittees addressed: (a) technology-enhanced teaching, learning and advising; (b) classroom and educational technologies; and (c) academic integrity. The CIS has been involved in technology-enhanced learning and disaster preparedness and recovery for several years. In 2019-2020, the Committee launched a pilot study of online learning/instruction. Results of the study informed some of the recommendations sent to ITS through the Center for Excellence in Teaching (CET) and to the provost as part of the March 11 through the 13th mandatory online teaching at the beginning of the pandemic. The CIS helped prepare a memo sent to the Senators, Faculty Council Chairs, and the Provost on advancing information technology services and equipment equity. The Committee engaged in numerous other activities and developed other resources, including a guide on teaching with Zoom, a location-based taxonomy for post-pandemic technology-enhanced didactic instruction, and Tech Share Live sessions.

**Adjournment**

Tambascia thanked everyone and adjourned the meeting at 4:02 pm.
Respectfully submitted,

Devon Brooks
Secretary General of the Academic Senate