

FACULTY SENATE COMMUNICATIONS REPORT | 21 April 2016 meeting

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OVERVIEW

The 2015-16 Faculty Senate held its fifteenth regular meeting on 21 April 2016, from 3:45 to 5:35 pm in the Riggle Room of ADUC. For the first time in many weeks, the budget was just one of many pieces of business, although it remains the elephant in the room. At this meeting, the Senate received reports from the Provost and Faculty regent, announcements from the Chair, and a special guest address (see below for more details). The Senate also approved a slate of university standing committee appointments and began a dialogue on student retention.

FOLLOW-UP TO CENSURE VOTE OF 7 APRIL 2016

New information at the PLC: Chair Adams announced that several pieces of information related to long-term enrollment projections and the current-year tuition shortfall were shared at the most recent meeting of the PLC on 13 April. This information is now available on the PLC page (under the Employee Services tab) within MyMoreheadState, and provides some insights into how the present internal budget situation was arrived at.

Executive Council meeting with the President: The Executive Council had a productive meeting with President Andrews on 18 April, which Chair Adams briefed the Senate on. A major outcome of the meeting was a shared desire to have a serious discussion about the current state of governance on campus. The President seemed genuinely interested in better understanding the governance structure, particularly with respect to university standing committees. There was agreement between the Executive Council and the President that certain committees are under-utilized, and could be good avenues for improving faculty participation in shared governance. For example, the Executive Council suggested the Planning committee as a natural candidate to work with the administration on budget issues.

Another major outcome of the meeting was a shared desire to work together on improving student retention, in light of its ever-increasing importance to the future fiscal security of the institution. There was some constructive discussion on potential ideas, and the Executive Council hopes that Senate, and the faculty more generally, can continue to work constructively with the administration on this issue in the months and years ahead. To that end, the Senate devoted a portion of the 21 April meeting to the retention issue (see below).

The Executive Council has already scheduled a follow-up meeting with the President for 2 May, which is the Monday prior to the 5 May Senate meeting, and looks forward to affirming an agenda of cooperation on the major issues above and other paths forward. The President may be invited to attend the 5 May Senate meeting, although it was mutually agreed that all parties would be best served by having him come to Senate only if and when there is a specific agenda item to address with him.

WHAT'S THE BUZZ [PROVOST RALSTON]?

Budget update: The Provost stated that the administration is getting “closer and closer” to identifying solutions necessary to address the impending state appropriation cuts. It is unclear when specifics will be made available. The Provost was asked whether, in light of Governor Bevin’s decision to reduce his 2015-16 fiscal year cut from 4.5% to 2%, the administration might moderate the furloughs/non-recurring salary reductions. He demurred, citing the uncertainty of the ongoing legal battle between the governor and Attorney General Andy Beshear. However, it was noted by some who attended that, when asked a similar question at his open forum, the President essentially said “no.”

Position updates: The Provost broke the sad news that Clarenda Phillips is leaving MSU at the conclusion of this academic year, having accepted a position as Provost at an institution in Maryland. He also provided an update on the search for a new Dean of the College of Science, stating that a shortlist has been arrived at. He also stated that on-campus visits would begin on Monday, 25 April, which came as a surprise to all of the CoS faculty in attendance. The Provost was, in turn, surprised by their surprise, and promised to investigate the lack of communication. [CO note: It later became apparent that there had been some miscommunication, as CoS chairs received an email on Friday, 22 April that the candidate visit for Monday had been canceled, which came as a surprise given that the visit had never been announced to them in the first place. Apparently plans are in the works, though, to bring the shortlisted candidates to campus before the end of the term. Stay tuned.] Finally, the Provost officially announced the hiring of Dr. Shannon Harr as the new assessment coordinator (officially the Director of University Assessment and Testing).

New contract format: Confirming something that had been rumored to be in the works, the Provost announced that new annual contract letters will begin to be utilized for the 2016-17 academic year. This new format will replace the present system of annual appointment letters. These new contract letters will be more detailed, including compensation for the year (plus any supplementary pay) and any reassigned time (specifying how many hours and reasons for), among other things. Faculty will be required to sign these new contract letters, although apparently this signature will be to acknowledge receipt of the letter.

Miscellany: The website redesign and “soft” rebranding (including the long-awaited “much less of ‘Much More’”) effort continues. The contractor (Fuseideas) will be returning to campus soon, and it seems we can expect the new website sometime in the fall. The Provost was asked by Senator Rus May about the prospect of hiring a permanent chair for the Department of Mathematics and Physics, and it appears to be nonexistent for the moment.

WATCH THIS SPACE

The report from Faculty Regent Berglee was mainly focused on the outstanding issue of PAc-22 and PAc-26. The Board of Regents (BoR) subcommittee, mentioned in the previous communications report, to which the PAcS have been referred has not yet officially begun its work. Regent Berglee is still unsure precisely what the subcommittee is tasked with, but hopes for more clarification when the group has its first official meeting this week. Although he has not heard anything explicitly about modifying or weakening tenure protections, he is nevertheless concerned about what the final outcome of this process will be. He also warned Senators that, if any adjustments are made to the PAcS, they will not be seen by Senate prior to BoR approval.

Chair-elect Dobranski urged Regent Berglee to remind the other Regents that the versions of PAc-22 and PAc-26 before the BoR are products of a collaborative reconciliation process between Senate and the administration. Furthermore, the President has already signed off on the documents. During the discussion on this issue, the Provost commented that the current approach to these PAcS is purely BoR-driven, and that the President strongly supports tenure.

Regent Berglee also reminded everyone of the upcoming BoR meeting schedule, which includes a work session, open to the public, on 13 May, and the next quarterly business meeting on 10 June.

RETENTION

As Senator Tim Simpson reminded all, this agenda item was generated by the Executive Council’s recent meeting with President Andrews, with the charge to look at ways of improving retention coming from him directly. As mentioned above, the Executive Council looks forward to Senate working constructively with the administration on such an important issue. Although there was not a lot of specific progress made during this initial foray, some highlights of the discussion will be summarized.

There seemed to be general agreement that increasing the minimum admissions index is an important step in the right direction, and that there should be even more adjustment in that direction moving forward. There was also much said about what “best practices” for retention are supported by current research. In fact, increasing admissions standards is one of two major retention-improving initiatives supported by that research, the other being the “central advising” model recently implemented across the board at MSU. At present, there appears to be some unevenness in the perceived success of central advising across different colleges, perhaps underscoring this as an area where faculty and administrators can potentially work together. Senator Tim Hare referenced the former “core retention committee,” which he was a part of but which no longer exists; he suggested reinstating it as a possible productive path forward on this issue. The Senate intends to continue this work at the 5 May meeting.

GUEST ADDRESS

The Senate received a guest address from Dr. Scott Davison, Professor of Philosophy. Dr. Davison asked to address the Senate, and delivered a message of opposition to the censure of President Andrews. A longer written version of this message accompanies this report, but please note that what follows is a summary of the oral remarks as delivered on the Senate floor. Dr. Davison began by expressing his disappointment in “some of the directions that the Senate has moved,” particularly the recent vote on censure. Dr. Davison believes that the President is having too much blame laid at his feet, and in fact views the President’s tenure as an overwhelming positive for the university. Dr. Davison described the President as “not perfect, not terrible, sometimes pretty good.” He also expressed grave concern that some on the faculty are demonizing the administration,

are espousing an extreme “us versus them” mentality, and that Senate has gone too far in advocating for faculty concerns. He did not seem to believe that Senate is accurately representing the will of the faculty, and was further disappointed that the censure was approved by Senate without asking the entire faculty first. [Note: A few Senators expressed belief that the censure was to go to the faculty as a whole, but no motion to that effect was made at either this or the previous Senate meeting.] He also stated his belief that, when we “lose” President Andrews “in a few years,” the censure vote will be a deterrent to potential replacement candidates.

At the conclusion of his address, a few, namely Senators Eric Jerde, Gary LaFleur, and Wesley White, expressed gratitude and appreciation for the comments. Dr. Davison was then kind enough to field several additional questions and comments. In response to a question about the amount of faculty input in major institutional decisions, Dr. Davison stated that he does not want faculty involved in the budgeting process, and that such things should be left up to the “experts.” Chair-elect Dobranski strongly disagreed with Dr. Davison’s overall take on shared governance, noting that faculty have repeatedly attempted to work through the appropriate channels but have still not experienced meaningful participation in decision-making processes. Senator Tim Hare defied anyone to look at the overall goals laid out in the “ASPIRE” plan and determine that the President’s decisions have actually supported those goals. Senator Ron Morrison argued eloquently and forcefully that academics are not being appropriately prioritized by the President and his administration, highlighting a pattern of budgetary decision-making that reinforces this improper prioritization. Ultimately, Dr. Davison’s address resulted in no motions or other actions, but Chair Adams noted that it would be reflected in and distributed with this report, as well as being made available on the Senate Blackboard shell.

POTPOURRI

AAUP chapter: Chair Adams informed the Senate of a movement to start an official local AAUP chapter at MSU. She and Senator Katy Carlson attended an AAUP conference last month at NKU, and were apparently treated to an excellent seminar on university budgeting delivered by a speaker from the national AAUP organization. Chair Adams was inspired to invite this speaker to MSU, but as it turns out, his services can only be engaged by an official local chapter. There are, of course, other reasons to start a chapter as well. Any faculty members interested in participating are urged to contact either Chair Adams or Senator Carlson; please note that membership in the national AAUP organization would be required, although no additional dues would be associated with the local chapter.

Governance slate: The Senate easily approved the slate of appointments to university standing committees, assembled thanks to the tireless work of Senator Tim Simpson and his Governance subcommittee members. Two minor issues arose during the discussion, both involving the eligibility of an individual to serve on a certain committee (one of which was Senator Simpson himself for the Promotion committee, on which he cannot serve due to his impending attempt at obtaining promotion). Replacements for these two individuals will be identified by Governance and voted on at the 5 May Senate meeting.

Athletics in the news: Senator Kim Sharp raised the issue of the recent news regarding NCAA penalization of the MSU men’s basketball program for failure to meet academic standards. She expressed concern about how this news reflects on the academic mission of the university. She also brought up a recent comment, made on MSPR, by the baseball coach to the effect that practice is better than going to class. In response, the Provost quipped that this comment “was not approved by Academic Affairs.”

Gender equality: During the discussion associated with the Regent report, Senator Jennifer Dearden commented on the relative lack of gender (and other) diversity on the BoR. It is unclear what, if anything, can be done to address this issue, but it is certainly worth noting nonetheless.