Minutes of the Dornsife Faculty Council Meeting (Mar 7 2018)

Date: March 7, 2018

Room: Irani Hall, Rm. 321

Present (17): Brian Bernards; Iva Bozovic; Rebecca Broyer; Jessica Cantiello; Robert Chernoff; David Crombecque; Shannon Gibson; Assal Habibi; Michael Hadjidaniel; P.T. McNiff (secretary); Dan Pecchenino (vice-president); Geraldine Peters; Gioia Polidori; Carolina Sitnisky-Cole; Trisha Tucker (president); An-Min Wu; Emily Zeamer

Absent (2): Antonio Idini; Sergio Sanudo-Wilhelmy

Approval of Minutes from Last Meeting

Trisha submits the minutes of the previous DFC meeting, on Feb. 7, for approval. All 14 members present at that time vote to approve.

Updates and Reports

I. Academic Senate Meeting

Trisha, Dan, P.T., and Gioia discuss updates from the February Academic Senate meeting. The first update is on the follow-up from the active shooter situation that occurred in the fall. The Senate President said that body would take up the issue of safety training for faculty. Dan notes that some small but important steps have been suggested, such as using full building names rather than abbreviations in any alerts sent out.

There is a discussion about faculty and the wider community being unaware and under-informed about security measures that have been taken or are available. Reports of grad students and university staff not knowing what to do during the situation in the Fall are brought up. A desire for more information and a clearer plan of action is firmly stated.

Gioia and Bob speak about issues relating to available counseling resources and their limitations, and how both faculty and staff should know more about what students have access to. Shannon says that teaching in different buildings and locations from semester to semester makes it difficult to know the procedures, policies, and resources where your classes are; she suggests giving faculty the chance to meet with DPS resource officers to learn such things before the semester starts.

Trisha gives a breakdown of the Vanderbilt Co-worker Reporting System, which has been implemented in Keck Hospitals. While developed in a medical context, the
school is trying to determine whether it would work in an educational setting. Gioia notes that the peer-to-peer component (where a similar ranking employee would be the first to speak to a colleague about a report) is an important and positive element. P.T. notes that the external processing of reports at Vanderbilt is another positive. Dan reiterates that there may be problems aligning this with educational structure and rules; he notes that the Ombuds office may be involved in reconciling this.

Trisha and Dan report on Viterbi piloting a childcare subsidy program, which provides gap funding to employees on the waiting list for childcare, whether at USC or other approved providers. David and P.T. add details and concerns brought up in the Senate meeting about the use of benefits pool money versus discretionary funds for such a program. Jessica, Gioia, and Trisha discuss questions of waiting lists and how much child care can be expanded.

II. Joint Provost-Academic Senate Retreat

Trisha leads the sharing of updates on the retreat, noting that a portion of the content came from discussions at recent Academic Senate meetings the council had already heard about. Provost Quick noted in his keynote speech two particular trainings for faculty are under-utilized: CET’s Difficult Conversations and the Implicit Bias Training. Concerns about a lack of awareness and knowledge related to that and other available resources are mentioned. Provost Quick also spoke about wanting to hear from employees, and that such engagement is a necessary part of improving the culture.

Trisha and Dan note that a focus of the retreat was the need to enhance values and culture, and that the experience for some at USC can be different from the stated goals and values. The work of the Task Force on Workplace Standards and Employee Wellness on identifying cultural problems; the next step is figuring out what to do about them.

III. Dornsife Undergraduate Experience Retreat

Trisha, Dan, and Rebecca discuss the retreat, which included departmental undergraduate curriculum coordinators, Dean’s office advisors, and admissions representatives. The goal was to identify how to make Dornsife the best and most forward-looking liberal arts experience within a wider university context. This was designed to be an early-stage “wish list” conversation, identifying both what Dornsife is doing well and what are the aspirations for improving.

Trisha notes that it was good to hear people acknowledge that substantive change through new policies and plans would take a long time, rather than aiming for quick fixes and easy answers. Dan specified that nothing specific was discussed about overhauling the curriculum.
Led by questions from Bob and Emily, a discussion ensues about what deficits have been perceived and what Dornsife seems to be doing well. The variety of learning opportunities is mentioned as a strength. The deficits question circled back to institutional problems inherent in a D1 research university. A discussion is had about tensions between the emphasis on teaching versus research and the connection with the valuing of tenure track and RTPC faculty.

IV. Other Updates

Trisha gives updates on a few issues stemming from earlier meetings. First, she notes that all council members were emailed about the mid-semester pilot for the new evaluations. These were implemented as a last test run before the new questions will be used at the end of the semester.

Next, Trisha reiterated the response she received from Varun Soni about the timetable for establishing the Ombuds office. The proposal for it has been submitted to the Office of the General Counsel; once they approve, the search for the ombudspersons can hopefully begin. Soni anticipates July 1 as the latest date when the office will be up and running.

Trisha also notes that she is still waiting on a reply from the business office about clarifying the computer policy. She will share information when she receives it.

V. Issues to Discuss with Dean Miller During April Meeting

A conversation is had about what topics and priorities should be discussed when Dean Miller visits next month. Topics suggested include: the implementation of RTPC mentorship recommendations; her interpretation of the Provost’s office memo about RTPC contracts; the status of research faculty within RTPC; general issues of communication and compliance; updates on Dean Miller’s thoughts on diversity town-hall meetings, the ensuing draft of the plan, and the Task Force report; her thoughts on the retreat and department surveys aimed partially at identifying what Dornsife is doing well and how currently disparate elements of the college can work together to be more productive.

VI. Election Update

Carolina, P.T., Trisha, and Dan update the council on the progress of the election. The council discusses this year’s efforts to reach out to faculty across Dornsife and ways to improve outreach going forward. Included in that discussion is an idea from Dan of having a communications caucus going forward that shares information while also organizing social events, as well as Emily’s suggestion that the college emphasize it as a form of service that helps bring issues from and to the department level. Related election issues include bylaw restrictions on the maximum number of representatives from one department and mandatory representation for
departments of a certain faculty size. P.T. and Dan note that these can be re-evaluated going forward.

**VII. Mentoring Proposal**

Gioia distributes the Research, Policies, and Documentation caucus’ report proposing three Directors of RTPC Faculty Development. Michael notes it should be read in the context of the Provost/Senate Mentoring Committee report from 2016-2017. Jessica, An-Min, Carolina, Assal, and Trisha engage in a conversation about the existing mentorship resources and the reporting structure for the proposed positions. Concerns are expressed about individuals sharing information selectively; Dan notes that centralizing the information in this way would hopefully stop such problems, with the new directors having the ability to intervene as necessary. Emily points to a focused two-page memo put out by MIT that provides clear information and deadlines, and asks if USC could provide a similar document. Gioia will update the proposal based on the feedback.

The meeting is adjourned at 5:00pm

Respectfully submitted,

P.T. McNiff, Secretary

The Dornsife Faculty Council