Minutes of the Dornsife Faculty Council Meeting

Date: March 1, 2023
Time: 2:00 - 4:00 pm (PST)
Location: Zoom meeting

Present (15): Jim Clements (president), Leslie Berntsen (vice-president), Anastassia Tzoytzyrakos (secretary), Douglas Becker, Tracie Mayfield, Sylvain Barbot, Monalisa Chatterjee, Tanvi Patel, Thomas Bertolini, Andrea Parra, Ashley Cohen, Daniel Lainer-Vos, Steve Hsu, Goretti Prieto Botana, Bob Girandola

Absent (4): Vahe Peroomian, Timothy Armstrong, Ludovico Pizzati, Sri Narayan

Guests (5): Dean Emily Anderson, Dean Amber Miller, Lisa Itagaki, Renee Perez, Rebecca Lemon

APPROVAL OF FEBRUARY MINUTES:
Jim Clements welcomed everyone to the meeting and shared the agenda. Dan Lainer-Vos made a motion to approve the February minutes, seconded by Doug Becker, and approved by a vote of 12, 0 opposing, 0 abstaining.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:
Jim Clements reminded everyone of the upcoming DFC elections and encouraged all to self-nominate or nominate other faculty.
Doug Becker asked if we know what is the largest department in Dornsife that is not represented on the DFC. He suggested to reach out to those larger departments.
Lisa Berntsen reminded all that if they are serving on their second term but would like to come back, they should fill out the form emailed to all to go up for re-election. The term is a 2-year term. She added that we are looking for nominations from natural sciences particularly since we don’t have enough representation from that department.
Jim Clements encouraged faculty to drop in faculty meetings to announce DFC elections and to also nominate anyone who would be able to make a good contribution to the DFC.
Andrea Parra inquired about the latest developments with RTPC faculty ranks, salary compression and merit evaluations; she wanted to know what type of recommendations or guidelines chairs receive on.
Steve Hsu, on the same topic, asked about the situation where a part-time faculty member gets hired as full-time; would they be hired at the lecturer rank or the new instructor rank? Jim Clements responded that in his understanding, even though they currently are at the Lecturer rank, they would be considered a new hire as full-time and enter at the lower rank of Instructor (if this proposed structured gets approved and adopted).

COUNCIL BUSINESS:
Dean Miller’s Comments on the Merit Review Report and Meetings/Correspondence with the DFC Executive Board:
Dean Miller thanked the DFC for their work and proceeded to share an update on important developments on the merit review process:

She stated that for a specific set of recommendations that live in the jurisdiction of the departments, she will work on connecting the DFC with department chairs and directors. She then shared her thoughts on a set of items identified that can be addressed within the Dean’s office as follows:

- **The issue of student evaluations and how to evaluate teaching in the most effective way.**
  A few years back, the Dean’s office received a mandate from the Provost’s office on how to use student evaluations in the merit review process, which gave them a tight window to respond and enforce these mandates; at the time Andy Stott and Amber Miller’s office worked on reaching an equilibrium that worked temporarily; she shared how they now need to start re-evaluating the process and that Emily Anderson is going to work with Jim Clements and the DFC on this robust project.

- **The issue of the merit review score and the relationship between its components (merit /equity).**
  Amber first asked Jim Clements to share his thoughts. Jim Clements reminded members that the DFC passed a resolution asking for a stated explanation of how the final score/evaluation is being calculated.

Amber Miller added that this type of explicit breakdown would be difficult to mandate given the way our merit review scores are being calculated. She brought up the School of Cinematic Arts as an example. According to Amber Miller, SCA has a rigid merit review process that they perform every year; generally, most faculty start with a meritorious score of 3; in addition, anyone who would get a 4 or 5 in SCA would have to be doing something exceptional for that year, and if they don’t perform similarly the next year, they would not get the 4 or 5 again. This also results in only a few receiving higher merit review scores. Finally, equity is added to this calculation. Amber Miller said that she has no objections following this system, but that she anticipates a lot of pushback from some departments that may not want to put a limit to how many faculty get a 5, for instance.

One suggestion Amber Miller had was to announce a general pool; second suggestion, which as she mentioned shined a light to its importance, is to come up with rubrics on what these scores mean. A score of 3, 4, or 5 will be explained and faculty will have a better understanding of what the expectations are.

Another thing that was discussed at the senior leadership meeting that Amber Miller shared with the DFC, was to have separate numbers for each component of service (teaching/service vs. teaching/research/service).
Another item Amber Miller shared is to include the DEI training and bias/discrimination awareness in the evaluation process. According to Amber Miller, this makes sense in the context of the merit review as well as in the context of the community more broadly; we should incorporate these practices holistically and across the board; she shared their plan to take this on with Quade French (newly appointed Associate Dean and Chief Diversity Officer for Dornsife).

Q & A with Amber Miller
Doug Becker thanked Amber Miller for her comments; he asked about the role of the Dean’s office overseeing the different departments with regards to the merit review process, and especially in the case when they may not be following the strict direction of the dean. Amber Miller answered that her office have the responsibility to oversee the process for each department, but that it would be necessary for information to be shared with the Dean’s office if there are specific concerns for specific departments. She understands that this may be difficult for some faculty to report such issues. Doug inquired who to contact in such a scenario, and Amber said it would be Lisa Itagaki.

On the issue of merit/equity and merit review scores
Jim Clements inquired about the reason why the letter cannot address how the score is generated in terms of merit and equity. Amber Miller responded that the issue is with defining the merit piece. Typically, department chairs are given a pool to work with and are tasked to look at the overall scale of raises across the department. They now have to allocate this pool in different ways according to the need of the department. The merit is mixed in with the equity. The deans are also looking at other factors for equity and make additional adjustments as needed.

Jim Clements responded that he understands this reasoning; he then added that the issue with faculty is the need to see the correlation between work performance and the resulting raise. He further added that the lack of understanding may be demoralizing to faculty.

Amber Miller added that she can understand that some faculty may have an issue with this and that we need to have a robust conversation with the chairs group to address any concerns. She also added that if all parties are on board with this, she will support any changes. If there is a major issue with the faculty, she is more than happy to continue the conversation.

On the issue of bias in student evaluations
Tracy Mayfield then raised the issue of bias in student evaluations affecting merit scores; additionally, faculty may feel reluctant to complain out of fear for retaliation; what do we do about that?
Amber Miller responded that the suggestion from Jim and Leslie on adding a narrative from the faculty addressing such issues and making this a part of the merit review process would be a good solution.
On the merit review process

Tracy Mayfield shared that one of the problems as a faculty member is that in certain departments it is not clear who makes the final decision on the merit review raises; is the chairs or is the dean’s office?

Amber Miller clarified that the process starts with the chairs making a set of recommendations submitted to the Dean’s office for approval and possible further adjustments. They look at every faculty member’s salary carefully as well as other considerations regarding equity. The final step in the process is with the Provost’s office for final approvals.

Tracy Mayfield thanked her for sharing more about the process; she added that the use of a rubric to calculate the score should be part of the process.

Amber Miller agreed that we need to develop rubrics; but that the challenge is to avoid creating a rigid system that will be difficult to be adopted equally by every department; that this level of complexity is a challenge for Dornsife.

Jim Clements reiterated that arbitrary choices potentially by chairs or program directors about raises is why there is a need for more explanation as part of the final evaluation and score.

Amber Miller reassured the council that if the deans see evidence of arbitrary decisions, they deal with the situation accordingly; she added that she doesn’t think this happens often and that they look at the evidence very carefully before approving the final result.

Goretti Prieto Botana requested additional clarification in the connection between connection between a yearly review and a numerical score

Amber Miller responded that the numerical score is good for 3 years; if a faculty for instance publishes a book, in order for this score to be recalculated, the review should happen every year.

Andrea Parra was wondering what kind of instructions the chairs receive now to make their salary raises recommendations.

Amber Miller has been in contact with Lisa Itagaki who is asked to share with the DFC the memo that goes out to chairs on how to deal with the merit score recommendations.

On the RTPC changes in promotion ranks

Andrea Parra then added that faculty are concerned about adding rank at the bottom, especially those at higher ranks with no more opportunities for promotion.

Amber Miller expressed her concern about this; when it was initially proposed adding a rank at the top, it didn’t get approved by the Provost; Emily Anderson suggested the alternative of adding a rank at the bottom; but there is still a series of issues that need to be resolved; this proposal is still being discussed and has not been approved yet.

Amber had to go to another meeting. Jim Clements continued answering the last portion to Andrea’s question; he clarified that the addition of a rank at the bottom level is not benefiting the current faculty, only newly hired faculty who will have an additional rank for promotion.
Doug Becker shared his thoughts on the merit/equity issue; on one hand he can see the difficulty of creating a standardized score across the departments; he also understood that any raise tight to merit review is a very small percentage of those pools. Andrea Parra expressed concern about the possibility of raising the salary floor benefiting only the new hires and not many who have been with the university for many years and are only making a few thousands more than the base salary. Steve Hsu wanted to address the issue of lack of criteria for constituting raises, resulting in inequity in salaries; he added that this affects particularly those who have been with the university for many more years than a new hire. Jim Clements reiterated that we do need those criteria and Dean Miller sees the value in this. Tanvi Patel (in the chat) added that what we want is the transparency the department of Cinema has, but not necessarily their exact process. Ashley Cohen added that if we were to adopt the Cinematic Arts system, she doesn’t understand why we would have to do the merit review each year. She also added the issue of service not being recognized or compensated as equally as when a faculty publishes a book; one affects your merit review and subsequent raise more than the other. Leslie Berntsen suggested adding to the letter how individual scores relate to the overall range for the department. Jim Clements concluded that the dean is genuinely committed to address bias and discrimination in the merit review process; she is also pursuing the revision of criteria on how merit review process is done; these are positive things.

**Additional Issues and Comments**

**Graduate Student Union**
Leslie Berntsen shared some of the things happening at other institutions with graduate students; the university retaliated against students unionizing; if for some reason graduate students here go on strike, it’s going to be excessively problematic to faculty who rely on TAs; should we do anything as faculty council on this? What would students find helpful that we can do?

**Monalisa Chatterjee** was in a meeting with Andy Stott and the impression she got on this is that the contract negotiations will take some time; they are working with a specific group and what he recommended is for faculty not to have any conversations with graduate students about their contracts, etc.

**Douglas Becker** highlighted the importance of being aware of what is happening especially if this goes south and what happens if at one point the graduate students do go on strike; he expressed concern that faculty may be asked to pick up the slack in an effort to ensure that the students’ experience is as smooth as possible. He also brought up the issue of RTPC faculty nearly unionizing a few years ago and promises made at that point that were not implemented.

Meeting was adjourned at 3:35pm

Minutes respectfully submitted by Anastassia Tzoyzoyrakos