Minutes of the Dornsife Faculty Council Meeting

Date: September 7, 2022
Time: 2:00 - 4:00 pm (PST)
Location: Zoom meeting

Present (16) Jim Clements (president), Leslie Berntsen (vice-president), Anastassia Tzoytzyrakos (secretary), Douglas Becker, Steve Hsu, Monalisa Chatterjee, Tanvi Patel, Thomas Bertolini, Andrea Parra, Bob Girandola, Tracie Mayfield, Goretti Prieto Botana, Sri Narayan

New members: Ashley Cohen, Timothy Armstrong, Daniel Lainer-Vos

Invited Guest (1): Stephanie Renee Payne

Absent (3) Sylvain Barbot, Vahe Peroomian, Ludovico Pizzati

Jim Clements opened the meeting at 2:00pm and established quorum.

The minutes from May 4, 2022 DFC meeting were approved by a majority vote and 3 abstentions.

The council members were asked to take an online poll to select their preference of meeting online, in person, or hybrid. The majority on the poll preferred the online option. Jim Clements motioned to hold meetings online, seconded by Leslie Berntsen and approved by all members.

Jim Clements reported on COVID protocols as a result of communication between the Executive Board and Emily Anderson. An email was sent from the Dean’s office with information on how faculty should be handling COVID cases and continuity of education. Jim Clements shared a summary of what was in the email and opened up the discussion on thoughts/concerns as to the content of the procedures.

Goretti Prieto Botana shared that as of now faculty have not been able to require documentation of illness. In general, this has been frustrating for faculty as accommodations always need to be provided. She expressed that it’s not that faculty are not willing to be flexible, but that they do need to have some discussion, as this is now the time to make some changes.

Ashley Cohen clarified that this is an issue primarily for missed exams from students without providing documentation. Jim Clements will bring this up with Emily Anderson for further instruction.

Leslie Berntsen highlighted the importance of offering workshops on inclusive instruction practices which help faculty understand how to be strategic while being equitable towards our students.
Jim Clements introduced the next item on the agenda— the USC Response to Sexual Assault in the Greek System. The DFC wrote a letter to President Carol Folt last year asking for new measures.

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1KfrnQOWBhBRI97nAfd3qfCV2UUIUXGyej1jY32Fz0hF/edit

The report produced created rules that fraternities would abide by. The council discussed these suggestions and were in agreement. However, in the time since that was brought into place, 8 of the 16 fraternities associated with USC have disaffiliated with USC.

The Executive Board met with Emily Sandoval who is the Associate Vice Provost for Student Affairs, Student Development and Engagement, and the liaison with the fraternity system. Leslie Berntsen offered a summary of the notes she took at the meeting with Emily Sandoval and Jim Clements. By virtue of affiliation with the university, the fraternities had access to all privileges with USC, like using the university name and brand for their events, etc. The university aimed to place these rules to deter serious crimes that could potentially be committed. The fraternities did not accept to abide by those rules and hence, disaffiliated. The question is what happens to the victims? The answer was that the university will still hold perpetrators accountable. In addition, the fraternities are still being held accountable to national fraternity organizations.

Monalisa Chatterjee shared that there are some benefits to being a part of a fraternity. She inquired about any plans the university may be considering to form new fraternities. Leslie Berntsen answered that the attitude of Student Affairs is that overtime the disaffiliated fraternities might wither away due to loss of status. Another point mentioned was that students tend to want to join fraternities for socialization. Yet, there are other avenues for students to connect and fraternities are not the only way for students to have a social life. Jim Clements is waiting for an email from Emily Sandoval with additional instruction for faculty to encourage students in taking advantage of different options.

Steve Hsu wanted to know if disaffiliated fraternities might be able to return to USC and reclaim their benefits. Jim Clements confirmed that it would be the case as long as they agree to abide by the rules.

Next item on the agenda was the report on the meeting with the Executive Board and Dean Miller in regards to salaries, maintaining equity, and Dornsife funding. This discussion has been going on for a long time but was highlighted more last year when President Folt announced that salaries needed to be raised to an equitable level. However, this new commitment was presented in the absence of additional funds for the university. The higher taxes for Dornsife left us with a large deficit. The Executive Board at the meeting with the Dean requested a detailed budget. There will be a meeting in September with Dean Miller to receive and discuss the budget.

Essentially, we receive funds from tuition that comes in from undergraduate students. A lot of this money leaves in the form of taxation. About 20% goes back out again in form of tuition subsidies. Dornsife is taxed considerably higher than any other school at USC. Dean Miller is advocating for fairness.
Ashley Cohen shared how there are different populations when it comes to salaries and raised the issue of salary equity. New hires may be coming in at a substantially higher rate than existing faculty for example. Jim Clements added that this distinction is unfortunately not announced in how it is all broken down. The question of salary equity and transparency continues to be a problem. Sri Narayan added that any kind of transparency is what we all desire at this point.

Jim Clements will send out an email for the formation of the Faculty Salary and Compensation Committee.

Tanvi Patel inquired about salary equity across departments. Generally the line presented is that the administration cannot give information without revealing personal data, yet faculty need some information to bring more transparency in the situation.

Steve Hsu proposed looking into benchmarks from model institutions and added that he can provide data from previous work he completed on this topic.

Ashley Cohen brought up the point of high rate of inflation and salary compression.

Goretti Botana has been trying to narrow down what institutions may be the best ones to share data in order to get the administration’s attention on this issue.

The next item on the agenda was to recruit members for the 4 Caucuses.

Doug Becker and Tracie Mayfield (co-chairs) introduced the Teaching and Pedagogy Caucus and the main issues the Caucus will deal with this year. Issues include what we do in the classroom post pandemic, especially when faculty are told we are empowered to do whatever we think best in the classroom but without been given clear guidance. More issues will be addressed on this Caucus including guidance with dealing with OSAS issues, the effective use of technology in the classroom, and whether we are going to continue with Blackboard. Tracie added the issue of “going back to normal” and how it is no longer valid; further, addressing the course evaluation process and how to deal with student comments that are inappropriate and offensive, possibly affecting faculty professional careers and their merit evaluations. Doug Becker would like to bring this issue up with Emily Anderson.

The discussion on course evaluations continued with Leslie Berntsen suggesting an automated process to screen comments. Monalisa Chatterjee highlighted the importance of wording questions in a way that doesn’t confuse students, and Tanvi Patel proposed the addition of more options for evaluations rather than a single one for the entire university.

Jim encouraged faculty to sign up for the Teaching and Pedagogy Caucus, especially if any of the issues mentioned are of interest.

Monalisa Chatterjee next talked about the Faculty Affairs Caucus. The scope of the Caucus is broad. Monalisa was involved with the Merit Review Survey and Report. The report was shared with faculty, departments, and deans. The first task for the Caucus will be to look back at this survey and provide the Dean with more information on the results of the survey and the issues identified. There are other issues to be brought up. She encouraged all to email her with any additional topics they would like to see addressed by this Caucus.
Jim Clements shared notes form the Senior Leadership meeting he attended the day before; Dean Miller at that meeting requested to see this report on the Merit Review Process and it was shared again with the members present at that meeting.

Jim Clements continued listing the other 3 Caucuses:

Part Time Faculty Caucus – led by Gayle Stuart Fiedler- Vierma and Jessica Parr

Faculty Salary and Compensation Committee- brand new and not officially a part of DFC- led by Emily Zeamer

DEI Caucus- needs a new chair

Next, the members discussed the notion of the “return to normal”. Some faculty shared how they have witnessed a drop in the level of quality in education and the issue of continuing to provide accommodations for students with disabilities while recognizing the need to maintain a rigor to the education provided. Leslie Berntsen reiterated that rigor in classes and inclusive pedagogy are not mutually exclusive.

Doug suggested that the better way to frame this is that there is no going back: this is a new normal. One specific example is the expectation of continuation of hybrid instruction. Many faculty still cannot teach successfully with a hybrid model; he urges students to come to class as often as possible because the class experience is essential to students. The bimodal experience may not be ideal for all students involved. So, the question is what are faculty expected to do? Dealing with the hybrid modality is on the top of the list here and how we move forward.

Tracie Mayfield offered to share a plan she created for her own classes to help faculty with the use of the hybrid instructional model. She also shared feedback from students whom she spent a good amount of time with in the field. Students were saying that they feel they are not getting trained as well as students before them. They fear their skills won’t measure up after they complete the program. In general, students who came from different universities were sharing that they needed more accountability and stricter class policies to help them achieve more and be better trained.

Leslie Berntsen added to Tracie’s point that she also has sensed that students desire for faculty to be more “strict”, but that we still need to define what that means. Daniel-Lainer Vos highlighted the complexity of the situation and that we have to consider the diversity of different students and what needs they have.

Jim Clements added that we should be looking closely at what we are doing and how we do it and to investigate how the current changes in the educational environments affect our teaching practice.

Gorretti Botana posed the question: Are we going to uphold these standards or be okay with finding alternative solutions for students to meet those standards?

Monalisa Chatterjee noted the importance of a more flexible component since we are also dealing with mental health issues.
Ashley Cohen has observed that her first year students come in with a lack of understanding of what is expected of them since they have been taught online for the most part the last couple of years of high-school.

Jim Clements reiterated that the default is maintaining standards but also defining them and encouraged faculty to share ideas on what we could do dealing with the issue of standards, accommodations, also considering our own merit review and how course evaluations affect it.

Goretti emphasized the importance of adding opportunities that are sustainable. Flexibility with a line in the sand.

Next, Jim Clements introduced Stephanie Payne who was with the DFC for several years and also co-chair of the DEI Caucus with Tracie Mayfield.

Stephanie and Tracie submitted a proposal for the creation of an interdisciplinary Cross-Cultural Learning Community, faculty-led peer-to-peer learning collective aiming to serve as a resource for faculty to consult with a Cultural Awareness Trainer (also a peer faculty member).

The proposal was submitted with Emily Anderson who has been helping craft it in a way that it can be more effective. Stephanie shared a little bit of background on what they aimed to see. For instance, they want to see syllabi design that incorporates how faculty deal with DEI issues. In addition, they are requesting a compensation component attached to this, as well as training. Jim Clements shared a concern that Emily Anderson had:

According to Emily Anderson, the terminology of Cultural Awareness Trainer in the proposal falls against the peer-to-peer approach.

[in chat] Leslie suggested the term “Faculty Fellow in Inclusive Teaching” as an alternative title for this position.
Ashley Cohen shared her experience in her department with regards to an effort of revising their curricula making it more inclusive; many faculty felt clueless as to how to proceed.
Jim Clements raised the issue of finding the right individual(s) for this task following the peer-to-peer approach, but also inviting individuals with expertise. Stephanie Payne agreed with the need to bring in individuals that know how to support this effort and added how we need a structure where colleagues are trained.
Leslie suggested departmental presentations from these Faculty Fellows.

Jim Clements raised the following questions: how do we find these individuals, how do we train them, and how do we compensate them?

Stephanie responded that the compensation question has been discussed with Christopher Manning and the issue of how to structure this with Lisa Itagaki. Stephanie has also had conversations with many of the parties involved including Emily Anderson; there is a bit of frustration stemming from the Provost office, who don’t know how to use the Chief of
Inclusion and Diversity Officer (Christopher Manning) in shaping DEI initiatives and move forward.

Stephanie shared how she is prepared to propose a plan of action, also looking at other institutions as good models. She further noted that if Christopher Manning supports this and makes it university wide, we will have access to more funding opportunities outside Dorsife. Her desire is to see this coming to fruition and see USC being proactive with this very important issue.

Jim Clements will set up a meeting with Emily Anderson to discuss the proposal further.

Meeting was adjourned at 4:00pm.