

## Minutes of the Dornsife Faculty Council Meeting

Date: November 4, 2020

Location: Zoom meeting

Present (17): Douglas Becker, Jasmine Bryant, Julia Chamberlin, Monalisa Chatterjee, Marianna Chodorowska-Pilch, Jim Clements, David Crombeque, Melissa Daniels-Rauterkus, Jerry Davison, David Ginsburg, Andrea Parra, Stephanie Renee Payne, Gioia Polidori (*president*), Matthew Pratt, Alisa Sánchez (*secretary*), John Vidale, Emily Zeamer (*vice-president*)

Absent (2): Tracie Mayfield, Sri Narayan

Guest (1): Maggie Switek, Assistant Professor of the Practice of Economics

### *Approval of minutes from previous meetings:*

October 2020 14 of the DFC present vote to approve, zero oppose, and one abstains

### *Discussion of Senate Resolution and Future DFC Actions*

- **Gioia** reported on the Senate resolution: changes in language suggested by the DFC were incorporated into the resolution, namely the first point on transparency and language on salary compression and inversion. During the Senate meeting, additional significant changes were made: that the Senate objects to the pauses in merit increases and retirement benefits and expects these to be restored. **Jerry** emphasized that the DFC played a significant role in shaping the language for the Senate resolution, crafting it to be a much stronger resolution than the first draft.
- **Gioia** opened discussion on the DFC's next steps. The Provost will attend the next Senate meeting on November 18 and will probably discuss the resolution. If the Provost does not respond adequately, the DFC could proceed with its petition. Jim Moore, the Viterbi Faculty Council President, would likely support the petition. What are thoughts on DFC next steps?
- **David G** endorsed hearing the Provost's response, if the Provost does address the resolution in the next meeting, as important for determining next steps. **Monalisa** asked what type of response we can expect from the Provost during the Senate meeting; what would the DFC consider a satisfactory response? **Gioia** amplified the question: what actions would we like the administration to take and under what conditions do we move forward with our petition?
- **Emily** called for a response beyond a commitment to transparency, which can be a slippery concept. **Emily** asked for a detailed and specific plan about faculty compensation not being enduringly altered and addressing inequities currently being

exacerbated. **Monalisa** agreed. **Marianna** said an adequate response would address the specific points of the resolution – responses to a, b, c, and so on. **Jim** called for a pledge of greater faculty involvement in financial decision-making. **Jerry** asked for the administration’s specific answer to whether the administration has approached the Board of Trustees about using earnings from restricted endowments. If the administration is serious about shared governance with faculty, they should be able to answer this question. **Jerry** noted that Harvard is drawing on endowment earnings and **Melissa** added that Northwestern is, as well. **Jim** observed that while the resolution urges the administration to greater transparency also on the endowment payouts, a request to use the endowment earnings did not make it into the resolution and wondered whether the Provost would address this question. **Julia** considered whether the lack of transparency on using endowment earnings was driven in part by the Board of Trustees.

- **Melissa** observed the low morale among faculty and the need for a concrete response from the administration, adding that faculty up for tenure may be worried about speaking up. **Jerry** reflected that both RTPC faculty and faculty up for tenure should be careful in speaking, that this responsibility lies more with secure faculty. **Jasmine** noted the Senate dismissal of anonymous questions during the previous Senate meeting (discussing the resolution) was tone deaf to this concern: that RTPC faculty may want to ask questions anonymously, and even anonymously asked questions with over thirty upvotes were still dismissed. **Marianna** echoed these points and recommended collaborating with the Concerned Faculty group, since most are tenured and distinguished faculty; that they could raise concern about retirement contributions. **Melissa** and **Gioia** agreed. **John** affirmed that faculty should be involved in the budget, acknowledging that while it is unclear whether there are funds that can be used to restore faculty compensation, the DFC can express how disillusioned faculty are so that the administration responds.
- **Jim** suggested rather than conjecturing about the kind of responses the DFC would accept, that we evaluate immediately afterwards. **Stephanie** recommended making an action plan, what the DFC would do if a, b, or c, to be prepared to act immediately following the administration’s response.
- **Emily** proposed soliciting faculty input on these questions, for example consulting the whole faculty about cuts. **Emily** considered that the administration does not seem to be aware of the low morale among USC faculty and that concrete input from faculty, as well as a petition, could be a two-prong strategy to amplify faculty voices. **Alisa** remarked that the university-wide FEEC faculty survey currently in progress would offer some insight into faculty morale and that faculty councils would receive school-specific data. **Gioia** stated the DFC would circulate its petition to other faculty councils and the Concerned Faculty group.

*Additional Points of Discussion:*

- *Breach of contract:* **Gioia** previously discussed this point with Jim Moore from Viterbi and, during the senate meeting she asked whether faculty from Gould would be able to explain whether the suspension of retirement benefits constituted a breach of contract. Rebecca Lonergan responded that she had informally discussed this with colleagues who thought the suspension was not a contract violation. Jim Moore from Viterbi asked the

Senate Executive Board if the Senate could hire lawyers and Paul responded that there is no budget to retain a lawyer. **Maggie** noted this would be a matter of civil litigation; while not a lawyer, from her experience working on breach of contract and litigation consulting, **Maggie** expected some lawyers would evaluate this as a breach and others would not. **Gioia** relayed that Jim Moore expressed concerns that if the Senate indicated agreement with the retirement benefits, it could harm lawsuits. **Jasmine** pointed out the much more transparent contracts at public universities in contrast to the vague language of the USC employment letter. At the end, since the final version of the resolution opposes the retirement cuts, the problem does not persist.

- *Football:* **Jasmine** noted that a previous budget presentation on potential budget cuts set aside the football program as “off the table” for budget cuts. **Jasmine** asked why faculty are taking retirement cuts if the Coliseum can’t be filled and games not aired on television, describing this as an example of little transparency about sources of deficits and decisions on cuts. **Jerry** discussed the recent USC football film which cost a great deal to make and then was pulled; and also the USC Athletic Director’s unsatisfying response to a question about repetitive brain injuries raised at the Senate. **Doug** wondered whether there would be a budgetary shortfall for the football program, given that the season started this week and games would be televised; **Doug** called for the football budget numbers to be shared with faculty.
- *Long-term impact of cuts:* **Jim** added that getting the exact figures on how budget cuts impact faculty would be valuable: right now interest rates are at about 5.5% on low risk 401ks; losing, say, \$1000 a month for a year is actually a loss of \$35,000 in twenty years time. **Emily** suggested asking the Budget and Finances Caucus to do some modeling exploring the long term impact of various cuts.
- *Board of Trustees:* **David C.** remarked that the Senate began pushing to reform the Board of Trustees two years prior, when asking then-president Max Nikias to resign from the Board. Faculty also critiqued the Board of Trustees for its lack of diversity on all axes and has a limited number of members with an academic background. **Julia** and **Doug** noted that Nikias remains a Life Trustee; **Stephanie** stated the structure of Life Trustees is problematic, especially given the egregious activities under Nikias’ tenor. **David C.** called for the DFC to advocate for reforming the Board of Trustees in the Senate, especially as the Board are the protectors of the endowment.
- **Gioia** concluded the discussion with the plan to report to the DFC following the Senate meeting, that she will look into the issue of the Board of Trustees and that the DFC could choose to pursue the petition depending on the administration’s response.

#### *Update from Caucuses*

- *DEI/Fighting anti-Blackness Caucus*
  - **Stephanie** reported the Caucus developed an action plan through a good first meeting:
  - **Stephanie** and **Alisa** are drafting a proposal for course releases for faculty training fellow faculty in antiracist and inclusive pedagogy. **David G** recommended contacting Lisa Itagaki in Faculty Affairs for guidance on developing the proposal.

- **Tracie** and another caucus member are discussing ways to archive the Black\_at\_USC Instagram account with the account administrators. There are concerns with canonizing the account at USC; the Caucus approaches this project emphasizing student ownership.
  - **Stephanie** reported that antiracist training for freshman orientation is not an option, according to Assistant Dean and Chief Diversity Officer Kimberly Freeman. The Caucus hopes to revisit this matter and demonstrate the need among faculty for students to participate in such training; for example, a Caucus member received Nazi propaganda from a student.
  - The Caucus is also seeking adding a component to the Merit Review process to strengthen cultural competency; supporting Dean Freeman's work on a DEI resources website; and exploring adding a question to student learning evaluations about whether their needs were met, especially considering students of color.
  - **Gioia** stated she is working with John Holland on mentoring guidelines and would like to share this work with the Caucus to consider how to incorporate guidelines specifically focused on promoting DEI. **Jim** noted that the RTPC Caucus is also addressing mentoring and would support this work.
- *Teaching and Curriculum Caucus*
    - **Julia** discussed a concern that graduate students are being coerced to teach on campus for Spring hybrid courses. **Gioia** remarked this is an issue to raise with the Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS).
    - **Doug** reported that a TA approached him about withdrawing from the TA-ship for a Spring hybrid course from concern about rising COVID cases. **Emily** wondered if it would be possible to officially state that an instructor or TA could change their mind about mode of instruction. **David G** noted this is possible, although **Gioia** added there is an expectation that faculty will stick with their chosen modes of instruction. **Monalisa** suggested that instructors could arrange the in-person portion of the course in varied ways, for example, at the end of the semester; it doesn't have to be a regular schedule. **Jim** clarified that the in-person portions of class cannot be mandatory and so instructors will have to devise in-person and online versions of some lessons. **Marianna** asked for other DUS to communicate this information with their departments.
    - The Caucus will explore faculty training for teaching hybrid classes. **David G** replied there will be training that has yet to be announced.
  - **Gioia** suggested that all caucuses develop a couple questions for a Dornsife faculty survey.

#### *DFC Budget*

- **Gioia** reported the DFC 2020-2021 budget is \$9500.

- **Alisa** introduced a request for \$500 from Amy Meyerson, Director of the Undergraduate Writer's Conference (UWC) to invite a virtual keynote speaker. The DFC has funded the UWC at this amount in past years. **Jim** explained the UWC brings together students from across the university to share and discuss their writing, win prizes, and attend a distinguished keynote. 13 of the DFC present vote to approve the funding request, zero oppose, zero abstain.
- **Gioia** invited the DFC to consider further uses of the budget. **David C** and **Alisa** noted continuing the Distinguished Service faculty awards started by the DFC last year; an award of \$500 each for two faculty.

The meeting is adjourned at 5:00pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Alisa Sánchez,  
Secretary  
The Dornsife Faculty Council