

## Minutes of the Dornsife Faculty Council Meeting

Date: December 2, 2020

Location: Zoom meeting

Present (18): Douglas Becker, Jasmine Bryant, Julia Chamberlin, 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*), Tracie Mayfield, Sri Narayan

Absent (1): Monalisa Chatterjee

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

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

November 2020      16 of the DFC present vote to approve, zero oppose, and two abstain

### *Discussion of retirement suspension*

**Gioia** celebrated the Provost's response to the Senate Resolution on the suspension of retirement benefits announcing that the University would not suspend all retirement contributions, as had been planned starting January 2021. The University's new plan is to continue matching up to 5% of employees' elected retirement contributions; and suspending the 5% non-elected (automatic) retirement contribution for employees. **Sri** expressed concern about faculty who do not normally contribute 5% towards retirement. **Maggie** noted that this type of matching is what most companies do (not contributing to retirement unless the employee does) and that this approach towards matching is understandable in times of crisis, for a limited period of time. **Matt** clarified that employees can change their elections for retirement contribution at any time, not only during open enrollment. **John** emphasized that people who cannot afford to make retirement contributions are most affected by this policy change. **Sri** emphasized that the non-elected contribution towards retirement has been one of the benefits of USC employment. **Stephanie** added that some employees, especially among RTPC faculty, may have accepted a lower salary because of the 5% non-elected retirement contribution.

**Jerry** suggested that it is probably the surprisingly strong Fall student enrollment which has enabled the University to continue some contributions towards retirement. **John** and **Gioia** concurred; **Gioia** noted that tuition comprises 85% of the Dornsife budget.

**Jerry** also stated that strong faculty advocacy was critical to achieving the new plan. **Gioia** concurred that the petition drafted by the Dornsife Faculty Council and shared with Senate President Paul Adler was instrumental in voicing faculty's concerns and arguing for a joint

resolution on the retirement benefit suspension. The strategy to work with the Senate before distributing the petition paid off as Paul Adler demonstrated great leadership when incorporating our amendments to the Senate's resolution. The decision to reinstate a 5% retirement match was clearly in response to the final Senate resolution. **Tracie** recognized that the faculty had been making good arguments; that faculty were not being unreasonable in asking for retirement benefits to continue. **Jim** noted how often it had been stated that "this ship has sailed" regarding continuing retirement benefits and that this success was a lesson to continue pressing on issues, to follow our instincts. **Gioia** concluded that another lesson is the importance of communication and working together across the schools and Senate. It is encouraging to see the Senate acquiring a stronger voice.

### *Board of Trustees*

**Emily** recommended that we push for including faculty on the Board of Trustees (BoT). **Doug** shared that the University of Connecticut not only has a faculty member on the BoT but also a student representative. **Emily** added that the University of Pennsylvania BoT holds open meetings; USC faculty could ask the BoT to have at least one annual open meeting. **Stephanie** wondered if open meetings would be required in California, as they are in other states, even from private institutions. **Andrea** questioned how one becomes a trustee, recalling this was a question during recent scandals; members responded that large donations are significant for gaining BoT membership. **Stephanie** noted that fundraising does not have to rely on the rich and powerful and that a range of members is desirable for boards and their organizations. **Stephanie** shared that discussions of BoT term limits and other ways to restructure the BoT are taking place.

**Gioia** related that some Senate Executive Board members are attending BoT meetings as observers and giving input. **Gioia** also reported that former USC President Max L. Nikias is a life trustee and not a voting member. **Marianna** emphasized that having faculty members on the BoT would add the perspective we share as faculty working for USC; this issue was raised when Nikias was supposed to step down as USC president.

**Gioia** summarized that the DFC would support increased faculty participation in the BoT and would ask Paul Adler to include this matter on the Senate agenda.

### *DEI work in the DFC*

**Alisa** shared that she, **Gioia**, and **Emily** had been discussing how to bring antiracist and antibias training within the DFC. The goals motivating this are: a) to prevent instances of racism and other forms of bias and discrimination within the DFC forum; b) to equip ourselves for how to address such instances when/if they occur; c) to enact our commitment to antiracist, inclusive values through collectively, collaboratively doing this work, and d) serving as a model for other faculty peer spaces on campus. Overall, the hope is to make antiracism and inclusion a part of our collective foundation, so that as we discuss and tackle issues, we have touchstones to reference and build upon. **Alisa** related that interested members could help shape the exact form this type of learning would take and that during this process, the DFC could benefit from

leadership of members with expertise and experience, while also recognizing all of us as bringing knowledge and a responsibility to learn. The goal is to have something ready for early Spring 2021. **Gioia** and **Emily** expressed personal reflections supporting this work within the DFC.

**Emily** and **Julia** shared examples from teaching which have prompted their reflection: on how to better intervene with faculty peers when encountering colleagues' harmful pedagogical practices; and how to communicate to one's students that they can share their experiences of racialized bias and trauma with their professor, especially as these affect the students' learning. **Emily** asserted that all faculty must grapple with their positionality, especially white faculty, and there is a lack of templates for these conversations; that these skills must be learned and practiced. **Stephanie** noted that we can't assume that if racial bias isn't voiced, it isn't happening; we have to be extra careful in our classrooms when our students aren't saying anything – students at PWI (predominately white institutions) get used to dealing with microaggressions and often try to just get through it. **Gioia** added that the goal is to normalize conversation about these issues; to acknowledge where we haven't confronted them and to be more engaged.

**Stephanie** shared that with the DEI and Fighting anti-Blackness Caucus, she is putting together a program for faculty peer-to-peer community learning on antiracist and inclusive pedagogy. **Stephanie** advised it is important to build class community from the first day for students to see that the professor is available to them; it is not a given for historically oppressed students that their professors will be available to them. **Stephanie** observed how students are moment-driven and engaged in current events, and how many are eager for space to engage racial justice following the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor.

**Gioia** shared that she, **Emily**, **Stephanie** will present the peer learning proposal to incoming Dean of Undergraduate Education Emily Anderson – proposing to have two faculty members receive an overload in order to train other faculty in antiracist and inclusive pedagogy, in a biweekly cohort model. **Stephanie** emphasized that this approach is proactive rather than reactive, providing tools that faculty can use in their classrooms; that it will include a certificate and be specific to each department.

**Andrea** related that many faculty do not realize the privilege they bring to classroom and do not know how to react when students bring it up, concurring that all faculty need training to be more aware of their privilege. **Andrea** also noted how little feedback faculty tend to receive on assignments and that the departmental structures do not incentivize supervising RTPC faculty on syllabi and assignment development. **Stephanie** agreed that chairs and directors may not know how to supervise or support faculty in inclusive course practices. **Emily** concurred that all faculty need more peer-to-peer support and considered that the DFC may advocate revisiting the Merit Review process to reward faculty for practicing equitable and inclusive pedagogy.

**Gioia** also raised a concern about the limits of the Student Conduct Code in how to address a student who wrote an essay supporting white supremacy. **Stephanie** added that the faculty member receiving this essay was told this was a free speech matter and noted the absence of a protocol in place to deal with this type of rhetoric.

### *Senate Committee on RTPC Faculty*

**Gioia** reported updates from the Senate Committee on RTPC faculty: they are working on instituting a continuing appointment for RTPC faculty; there are at least two faculty in Dornsife who might be eligible. **Andrea** asked if criteria would be clearly established for this type of appointment and questioned whether faculty would need more of a tenure-track profile; **Alisa** added that clarifying and publicizing criteria is a basic matter of equity and **Marianna** called for clear criteria that would be followed by all departments. **Julia** shared that she served on this committee a few years ago and the committee found some tenure track faculty resistant to instituting a continuing appointment for RTPC faculty. Both **Andrea** and **Julia** identified potential additional faculty who might be eligible; **Gioia** responded that she will email all RTPC full professors individually.

**Emily** clarified that RTPC faculty full professors currently hold five-year contracts and a continuing appointment would be a continuity of employment contract. **Emily** noted a comparable appointment at UCLA; **Julia** suggested contacting Jeff Chisum, who previously chaired the RTPC Committee, to obtain a comparison of peer institutions' appointments for non-tenure track faculty. **David G** described the continuing appointment as a guarantee of a contract – RTPC faculty would still carry primarily teaching obligations, but would not have to go through contract renewal.

### *COVID impact document to include in tenure-track faculty evaluations*

**Gioia** reported on the Dornsife divisional deans' proposal for a document which tenure-track faculty could use to describe the impact of COVID on their productivity; this document would be included in faculty review files such as the promotion dossier and potentially Merit Review. Thus far, the document is contemplated for TT faculty given the up-or-out nature of TT tenure promotions. . Schools have been giving feedback on the specifics of the document; it has not yet been approved at the provost level. Discussion has included whether the document should be opt-in or opt-out; should be written by the faculty member under review or the department chair; whether to have a similar document for RTPC faculty; and whether to include in Merit Review or only promotion dossiers.

**Sri** related that the Research Caucus has identified this as an important issue, since faculty have been losing time and also funding. From conversations, this seems a rampant issue in both the sciences and humanities. **Andrea** recalled that tenure clock had been extended for TT faculty and **Gioia** explained that this document could address productivity issues beyond the one-year extension.

**Doug** shared that the International Studies Association has an ongoing research project to detail the challenges and practical effects of the pandemic on academic productivity and wondered if other fields are compiling the empirical data as well. **Doug** noted the ISA project very much addresses issues of gender and child care.

**Matt** expressed approval for such a proposal and inquired if there were any issues of concern. **Gioia** responded that concerns that had been shared were a potential lack of uniformity across departments; that some faculty may choose not to share how COVID affected their productivity; or that it could be a slippery slope for accommodating less productivity among faculty. **Matt** considered that if the COVID impact document was not optional, then a faculty member could state it simply didn't affect them, if that was the case. **Alisa** agreed that the default should be including the COVID impact statement to encourage faculty to share this information and added that this document will be relevant for faculty evaluations in future years as junior faculty eventually come up for tenure.

**Alisa** cautioned that “decreasing rigor” is language to look out for in contexts of hiring and evaluating faculty; such language has been documented as examples of bias, as justifications for turning away candidates who do not conform to the status quo, especially in terms of race and gender. **Alisa** also advocated for shifting away from the language of “accommodations” – following the lead of disability studies, to shift perspective to evaluating how systems are working rather than considering individuals as the problem or issue. **Gioia** remarked that Dean Bradforth had recognized that faculty of color and women have been most affected by COVID. **Gioia** planned to request an invitation for Dean Bradforth to share the COVID impact document proposal at an upcoming Senate meeting.

#### *Issues raised concerning teaching*

**Marianna** asked about messages to faculty that they need to take CET (Center for Excellence in Teaching) workshops again. **David G** explained that faculty are not required to retake the CET courses, although some might be interested to learn about new software and technical discoveries. **Doug** mentioned that he and **Julia** have discussed teaching software in the Teaching Caucus. **Jasmine** noted that the contract with Blackboard was renewed last year without faculty input.

**Andrea** remarked on the uneven experiences of faculty undergoing teaching observations – there is a lack of guidance or procedures on whether and how to observe faculty in the Zoom environment.

The meeting is adjourned at 5:00pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Alisa Sánchez,  
Secretary  
The Dornsife Faculty Council