

Minutes of the Dornsife Faculty Council Meeting (Oct 3, 2018)

Date: October 3, 2018

Room: Irani Hall, Rm. 321

Present (16): Brian Bernards; Iva Bozovic; Jessica Cantiello; Marianna Chodorowska-Pilch; David Crombecque; Gerald Davison; Bob Girandola; Devin Griffiths (*vice-president*); Assal Habibi; Yuka Kumagai; P.T. McNiff (*secretary*); Joe Palacios; Jessica Parr; Dan Pecchenino (*president*); Sergio Sanudo-Wilhelmy; An-Min Wu

Absent (3): Shannon Gibson; Sri Narayan; Michael Petitti

Approval of Minutes from Previous Meetings

P.T. submits the minutes of the May 2 DFC meeting for discussion and approval. **Jessica C.** motions to approve; **Devin** seconds. 14 members present vote to approve them, with zero nays and abstentions.

P.T. then submits the minutes of the Sep. 5 DFC meeting for discussion and approval. **Jessica P.** motions to approve; **Iva** seconds. 14 members present vote to approve them, with zero nays and abstentions.

Discussion of Teaching Assessment Issues

Dan gives a rundown of the developments on this front. He updates on his efforts to reach out to the chairs and directors of Dornsife departments; 24 programs (about 2/3 of the college) responded, giving a range of responses regarding the amount of conversation about the issue and opinions about the recent developments. The stances ranged from those wanting changes to how assessment has been handled in the past (though with strong reservations with the proposed changes and tools coming from recent CET documents, which create issues related to both logistics and bias) to others who are very angry about proposed changes, specifically due to issues of academic freedom and top-down governing within the university.

The council discusses feedback members had received after Senate president Yaniv Bar-Cohen's email about the issue, which encouraged people to contact Senators. Some faculty have shared outrage and feelings of betrayal that student evaluations are still included in the equation at all (per Andy Stott's update on the merit review process), given that USC had touted its decision to move away from them due to implicit bias issues. Other faculty included some defenses for student evaluations as a preferred tool for teaching assessment, especially for large classes. The council discusses the changes to the recent "learning experience" evaluations, the gaps between reactions from TT and RTPC faculty, and questions related to how promotion and pay might be affected by these changes. **Dan** notes that these are issues the DFC task force on assessment will be looking into further, starting with

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collecting information on how departments in Dornsife handle assessment currently.

Report on Academic Senate Meeting

Leading from the previous topic, **Dan** breaks down the hour-long discussion held about assessment issues with Provost Michael Quick and Assistant Vice Provost Ginger Clark at the recent Senate meeting. The Provost made it clear there that the driving force behind the change were numerous studies showing notable bias in course evaluations. While there was agreement that this is an issue, people remain divided on how to handle it. A letter was read on behalf of the Dornsife chairs rejecting “the CET mandate.” Quick and Clark stated that the goal was always for schools and departments to have final say on how changes are implemented, with CET materials offered only as suggestions. Final questions about what needs to actually be done to ensure that departmental practices are deemed worthy were answered with an appeal to determining “best practices.”

The council tries to break down this concept, trying to define what best practices are under discussion (concluding it is the ones for assessment, not teaching). Concerns are raised that needing to provide research-based evidence to support any approaches not already approved by CET will be burdensome for departments, potentially creating roadblocks to any individualized or divergent practices.

Devin speaks about the research he conducted into the faculty groups that have been name-checked as helping to develop the new CET guidelines. He notes that almost all their work was focused on reforming student evaluations, with only the final group beginning to discuss overall peer review teaching assessment issues. Questions are raised about the gaps without any such faculty groups working on this issue, as well as issues of representation within those groups (with a notable number of Rossier faculty working on them).

The discussion shifts to questions around the apparent urgency and implementation of these changes. It is noted that no one has mentioned a budget being made for rewarding good teaching; instead, the system seems designed to punish rather than reward. These issues are related to the lack of increase in teaching faculty salaries as well as tangible benefits for TT faculty in relation to teaching. It is noted that faculty do not have an infinite amount of energy to do extra administrative work, especially without any clear outcome for it. Questions about why the assessment of faculty must be both granular and competitive are brought up, with the suggestion that merit review be turned into a pass/no-pass binary. A discussion about the differences between promotions on the tenure and RTPC tracks follows, roping in how adjusted teaching assessments might affect each constituency. All of these issues are related to the core need for improved transparency and shared governance between the administration and the faculty, both within the college and also at the Senate-level, to ensure clarity in how task force reports become university policy.

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The council pivots to discussing what the goals of the task force would be in light of all of this. The plan includes gathering models from departments that feel their work, getting input from those trying to change their approach, and then providing information the departments that want to abstain from these changes. Questions of necessary culture changes, both within the departments and across the college, are discussed.

Updates on DFC Caucuses

Breaking down the response to the call for volunteers, **Dan** notes that the Teaching/Practice Track, Curriculum, and Diversity & Inclusion caucuses generated a lot of interest. The Research Track and Part-Time Faculty caucuses have sufficient members. Very few people volunteered for Tenure-Track and Elections. The desire to have more involvement from TT faculty, especially for the caucus dedicated to their interests, is noted.

Report on Meeting with Dean Steven Finkel

Devin and **Dan** discuss their meeting with Dean of Graduate and Professional Education, Steven Finkel, about the soft launch of the Ph.D. Academy. The pilot of 60 graduate students (20 per division) will meet regularly to learn about how to function as graduate students, learn to better explain their research, network with people outside their programs, and explore career options outside academia. The DFC and some of the related caucuses (Curriculum and Tenure-Track) have an opportunity to help shape this program and its curriculum. Some DFC members express reservations about the effectiveness of such a program with such vague goals; others say that emphasizing career options and giving students a chance to interact with people outside the cultures of their departments appear likely to be quite beneficial.

Report on Meeting with Associate Dean Kimberly Freeman

Dan speaks on a meeting he and **Devin** had with Kimberly Freeman about diversity issues. Topics include needing to diversity post-doc and fellowship pools, using the ranks of RTPC faculty as potential candidates for TT positions, and re-assessing promotion and tenure guidelines. Looking into structural changes as well as cultural/value-based ones will be important. The council notes the need for the college and departments to ensure fair and improved mentoring to go along with revised guidelines.

Brian reports on the diversity-in-hiring training he attended and had emailed the DFC members about. He found the training useful, particularly the break-out groups where people could discuss issues that tended to block diversity in the hiring process. There is a discussion about how the training encouraged those on hiring committees to act on behalf of USC and deciding how to approach hiring, including

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an emphasis on diversity and a willingness to extend or re-start a search if not enough diversity is included in the initial work. Other members note that the culture around this issue has not changed, with funding available to hire white male candidates without regard for qualified under-represented ones. Past instances are noted where search committees are harsher and openly hostile to minority candidates, without any recourse to reverse the outcome during or after the search. The discussion notes a lack of clarity on guidelines as well as issues where faculty of color are pressed into more service, hindering their case for tenure. Expanding the purview of where we worry about diversity is emphasized.

Dan relays that Dean Freeman is going to share the contact information of diversity liaisons from all departments, as well as updated and clearer data about diversity issues across Dornsife. She is also looking into how many searches are happening across the college right now, and what approval processes exist for job ads. These are issues the Diversity & Inclusion Caucus will work on with her.

Upcoming Meeting with Dean Amber Miller

Dan pivots to ask what topics should be discussed with Dean Miller in our next meeting. Topics listed include diversity hiring questions, her priorities on the teaching assessment debate, clarification about the Dornsife Experience concept, questions related to the minimum expectations of leadership in Dornsife (connecting that to culture problems at both the departmental and college levels), movement between the RTPC and TT ranks, and issues of expanded faculty governance.

DFC Bylaw Amendments

P.T. distributes a draft of potential amendments to the DFC bylaws, aiming to clarify phrasing and terminology, align bylaws with established practice, and remove ambiguities regarding election issues. The most prominent proposed change would be an alteration of the “Rule of 23,” changing the minimum size a department must be in order to be guaranteed representation on the council. This is proposed in order to ensure more representatives would be selected by the ballot as opposed to bylaw decree. Council members are encouraged to review and share the proposed changes; a formal proposal and subsequent vote is planned for later in the academic year.

The meeting is adjourned at 5:00pm

Respectfully submitted,

P.T. McNiff, Secretary

The Dornsife Faculty Council