

Faculty Senate Minutes
Thursday, April 2, 2020, Via WebEx 2:30 PM

I. Attendance

B. Lynch, K. Armbruster, J. Bohus, L. Cuille, P. Davis, S. Jensen, J. Lassetter, D. MacCartney, J. Palmer, KK Pease, T. Reilly, L. Risik, D. Smith.

II. Approval of Minutes – All

Upon motion by P. Davis, seconded by J. Bohus, the Senate approved the minutes of the February 27, 2020 Faculty Senate meeting with T. Reilly abstaining.

III. President's Report –B. Lynch

a. President Lynch asked all Senators in attendance if they would like to share how they were doing to adapting to teaching classes from home as well as how they were doing physically and emotionally.

b. President Lynch reported that he was on the Conservatory spring break trip to New York City. They left New York on the bus on March 12 and at their first stop, he heard that the City had been shut down due to the Covid19 virus. He found out the following Sunday that someone had tested positive for the virus and he went into 14 day isolation, but he seems to be doing fine. He is proud of the student's resilience and refuses to call this situation "the new normal."

c. President Lynch attended a President's Council meeting yesterday. The discussion was focused on the situations surrounding Covid19 – reactions and possible repercussions.

Pres. Lynch stated that the Spring 2 enrollment and fiscal numbers will be finished by next week.

The Board is meeting this week to approve a budget for the next fiscal year.

Senators discussed how there should be a contingency plan moving forward for emergencies such as Covid19 so that everything is more organized and there is equity among students concerning devices and access to technology resources.

IV. Old Business

a. Election update - C. Guehring

She stated that as of this morning, only 68 out of 185 voters had cast ballots for the Elected Committee Seats election and that only 18 people were running for those 31 open seats.

b. Handbook reform – Pres. Lynch

He stated the Senate needs to begin looking at committees. Do we need all of the committees that exist? Can some committees be reconstructed?

Pres. Lynch also stated that pre-Covid19, the administration was predisposed to working with the Senate to overhaul the Handbook. He is working with Jeanelle Wiley on getting job descriptions for administrative positions to be put in the Handbook. He stated that he would like the new Handbook to be presented to the administrative by December 2020 for approval. He asked the Senators to please look at least two committees before the next meeting for discussion.

Senators brought up ideas of possibly not having representation from every school/college on certain committees and that there are lecturers and instructors who have been at Webster for years who would like to take part in shared governance. Pres. Lynch stated that they could possibly be included on certain committees but there will have to be a cultural shift in the University in order for the administration to allow equity for adjuncts. It was also pointed out that some committees do not have set meeting days and times and that is very off-putting for many people who need to keep a schedule.

c. Salary and Fringe Benefit Committee Update – KK Pease

She stated that SFB had a productive meeting on March 23 with administration that was both accommodating and flexible. She said they do have an agreement for which she is NOT displeased, but it needs to be approved.

She stated that the upcoming Assembly meeting needs to be moved from April 14 to April 21, 2020 because the Board does not meet until April 16, 2020 for approval of the contract. We don't know what platform in which we will be able to conduct the Assembly meeting. It depends on how many people are interested in "attending." Maybe Carol could send out an invitation for the meeting so we can get a count. Or we could just have a vote to empower the Senate to make the decisions concerning the contract.

KK Pease also stated that she has not broached the subject of allowing the Senate to present the University financials to the Assembly if administrative does not want to or cannot attend the Assembly meeting. Pres. Lynch stated that the Senate needs more clarity of numbers in order to accomplish that and that the administration does need to attend the meetings more frequently.

A Senator stated that he has had inquiries from other professors concerning where the money that is not being spent on things like commencement and traveling is going as it is not being utilized. Pres. Lynch said he would inquire where these funds will be allocated.

A Senator asked if the administration had a clear policy concerning communication with faculty. Pres. Lynch stated there is no clear administrative philosophy on communicating with the faculty, but feels the faculty is in a better place now than in the recent past, to improve communication channels.

V. New Business

- a. Student Evaluation Proposal by Gwyneth Williams (Attachment A)– Pres. Lynch

Discussion ensued concerning the proposal. Some Senators believe that it would be beneficial, especially for those who are not comfortable with online teaching, and other Senators believe that evaluation and status quo is beneficial.

Pres. Lynch states that he does not believe that anyone serving on Committee to Review Faculty (CRF) will ever forget the circumstances surrounding Spring 2020. He believes that there will continue to be reasonable peer review and that this proposal addresses ambiguity. Faculty will continue to be allowed to have conversations with their direct supervisors and that there is the opportunity to flag evaluations for this semester.

Pres. Lynch will work with Academic Affairs to create a statement to faculty clarifying processes in this unique time.

VI. Other Business

- a. A Senator would like to state that there is much creativity going on in the art world at this time.

Meeting Adjourned at 3:58 PM

Dear Faculty Senate and Nancy,

I'm sending this to all of you so that quick consideration of my proposal can be taken in a timely manner. Like your compassionate and sensible action on student pass/fail, I believe my proposal can help in this difficult time.

I've heard through a number of channels that many universities have informed their faculty that **faculty members can choose whether or not this Spring's student evaluations will be part of their "formal records."** I propose that Webster U do the same for all faculty, full and part time.

Rationale:

Faculty, like students, have been thrown into a very difficult work situation, and also like most students, are working very hard to deliver their classes in an unfamiliar format. This is extremely stressful, both because of their desire to teach the best they can, and because teaching evaluations are important for status, promotion, yearly performance reviews, and renewals of contracts.

Many faculty will excel this semester, but many excellent teachers are not able to deliver the quality of class they had planned to teach. Furthermore, student evaluations are often a reflection of things extraneous to the actual class: time of day, temperature of classroom, race/gender of teacher, whether the class is in a student's major, etc. etc. Students are under extreme stress now and very unhappy about everything (as are we all): that is why we are allowing them to choose pass/fail. If faculty know that they will be able to choose whether their Spring evaluations will be part of their portfolios, it will relieve a great deal of stress. Faculty who are at the beginning of their careers, those going up for review/promotion soon, and adjuncts hoping they will be asked to teach at Webster again are all especially vulnerable.

I don't suggest suspending evaluations, because, like students who want letter grades, faculty who get great evaluations this Spring semester should be able to include them in their records.

Like pass/fail, letting faculty know immediately that they will have this option would allow everyone to take a deep breath.

Since I am in the later part of my career, I have only a tiny dog in this fight. I just want us to do what is best for all faculty as they struggle mightily to do what is best for their students.

I request that the Senate and Vice President of Academic Affairs take up consideration my proposal as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,

Gwyneth Williams