Faculty Council - Minutes of September 26, 2018

Location: 320 TL Library Director’s Conference Room

Present: Suzanne Selig, Marilyn McFarland, Mickey Doyle, Cathy Miller (CAC/BSP), Emily Newberry (Chair), James Schirmer (Secretary/Chair-Elect), Adam Lutzker, Ricardo Alfaro (Past Chair), Judy Haefner, Sy Banerjee, Aviva Dorfman

Absent: DJ Trela

Guest: Susan Alcock, Interim Provost

Meeting brought into session at 9:05am

Minutes of September 12 approved (S. Selig motion, M. Doyle second).

Faculty Council discussed formation of the academic year’s university committees as well as the national search for a provost. C. Miller asked about the most recent faculty code; E. Newberry replied that the code was last updated in May 2018. J. Schirmer noted upcoming changes include “College of Health Sciences” and “Enrollment Management Committee.”

AAAC update

M. McFarland shared the draft of a memo from AAAC regarding the academic calendar, noting that AAAC had no sight on the calendar and that the provost is looking into the matter. M. McFarland also noted that, given the incorrect wording from the chancellor, the draft memo is intended to be a statement of facts regarding AAAC’s process and work on the academic calendar.

A. Lutzker asked if the university might encounter trouble with HLC, given the 13-week calendar. M. McFarland acknowledged the validity of the question, given AAAC time and energy spent. J. Haefner asked if this might merely be a goof. M. McFarland replied that this is the second year in a row that there have been issues with the academic calendar, that the chancellor has not been transparent, that AAAC did not have an opportunity to review. E. Newberry summarized a conversation with V. Larsen, chair of AAAC, the shift or outright absence of certain language when comparing announcement letters from years past about the academic calendar and its vetting by faculty.
S. Selig asked if the faculty code states that AAAC is supposed to review the academic calendar. E. Newberry replied that AAAC is charged with reviewing. S. Selig emphasized that this is important to know, that “preparation of the calendar” is a starting point and open to interpretation. S. Banerjee suggested that if the code does mention review, there may not be a procedural violation. S. Selig noted that if review of the calendar is just courtesy, there remains a question of why a shift in language. E. Newberry noted, too, that it is an interesting omission. R. Alfaro mentioned an email sent to the chancellor, requesting information on which faculty group did see the academic calendar as submitted but with no reply.

Standing committee documentation
E. Newberry introduced a new agenda item, but one connected to the academic calendar in the sense that university committees perform advisory roles that have perhaps shifted. Work associated with an advisory role may not be acknowledged or respected, depending on how “advisory” is interpreted. So, E. Newberry suggested that standing committees be tasked with developing internal documentation and guidance for new members as the language in the faculty code is of limited use.

S. Selig suggested that “advisory” is highly variable in reception and always open to interpretation, that perhaps faculty might go about changing the language. E. Newberry replied that faculty might want more specific ideas of the work of a given committee, that documentation might provide education. S. Banerjee asked if standing committees face a choice between assigning work priorities or seeking greater authority. E. Newberry noted the absence of an easy answer, due in part to low morale and even exhaustion among standing committee members. A. Dorfman concurred with S. Banerjee, that committees could attempt changing their roles, that some deference to process and procedure in writing could be productive. S. Selig noted that procedure differs whether it is in an advisory capacity or not, that there may be concerns about advice not always taken, but the expectation that advice should or will always be taken is also concerning. A. Dorfman replied that committees are in a position to describe intent, to communicate to outside personalities what committees do and how its work gets done. A. Lutzker suggested that it is worth codifying the contributions to shared governance made by standing committees “in consultation with” administrators, given how the regents delegate power to the units. E. Newberry noted that having documentation may be a way to establish expectations in addition to the faculty code. M. McFarland said that AAAC discussed similar matters.

Provost visit
Following introductions, interim provost S. Alcock shared an interest in working
closely with faculty, taking good care in partnering with relevant committees and groups on campus. S. Alcock also mentioned seeking ideas to develop opportunities in academic affairs, that the door is open to Faculty Council.

S. Selig provided S. Alcock with a summary of Faculty Council’s discussion so far that morning regarding the university’s strong tradition of faculty governance and service and more recent troubles in those areas. S. Selig also asked if S. Alcock might be able to clarify and signal service as a good investment of faculty time, if it might be possible to refine our language so faculty aren’t frustrated. S. Alcock replied that she has heard similar issues raised many times elsewhere, but that she wanted to emphasize the importance of process, how process spares us all pain. S. Alcock also said that our time is valuable, that she hates wasting it, that she seeks working collectively (and that includes coordinating another longer meeting with Faculty Council).

CAC/BSP update
C. Miller said that CAC/BSP is at work on a budget and finance FAQ, one intended to be a living document with continual updates. C. Miller also said that strategic planning is an agenda item at a future CAC/BSP meeting. A. Lutzker asked if there was anything interesting from FSB. C. Miller replied that, beyond cash reserves being another agenda item, there was not.

Matters arising
S. Selig asked if all standing committees are fully staffed. E. Newberry replied that Faculty Council is, but that we still need an ombuds and a graduate program director to serve on Graduate Board.

E. Newberry also noted that an updated 201.96 should be available soon. E. Newberry also emailed the chancellor about a standing appointment for the semester, but no reply yet.

S. Selig asked about the status of SACUA and the Tri Campus Task Force. E. Newberry said there were no results or minutes available, but will email university representatives. R. Alfaro mentioned an article from the Michigan Times that related motions on the floor but mentioned no vote.

E. Newberry noted the next Faculty Council meeting on October 10 will be run by J. Schirmer, Secretary/Chair-Elect.

Meeting adjourned at 9:44am