

William Paterson University – FACULTY SENATE MINUTES – September 28, 2021
FACULTY SENATE WEB PAGE <http://www.wpunj.edu/senate>

PRESENT: Alford, Andreopoulos, Brillante, Christensen, Crick, Diamond, Duffy, Elleithy, Fuentes, Gazzillo Diaz, Hack, Helldobler, D. Hill, Hong, Jurado, Kaur, Kecojevic, Kollia, Marshall, McDonald, Monroe, Natrajan, Nyaboga, O'Donnell, Orr, Powers, Rosar, Schwartz, Simon, Snyder, Steinhart, Swanson, Tardi, Vega, Verdicchio, Wallace, Watad, M. Williams, S. Williams, Wright

ABSENT: Fuentes, Gonzalez, Kamara, Tosh

GUESTS: Alaya, Andrew, Bartle, Bowrin, A. Brown, G. Brown, Cammarata. Cannon, Cauthen, De Veyga, Diaz, Ferguson, Fuerst, Galetz, Ginsberg, Goldstein, Green, Griffin, Gritsch, Guenther, S Hill, Hirschorn, Jones, Lever, Lockhart, Lubeck, Magaldi, Matthew, Mattison, McLaughlin-Vignier, Miles, Milling, Nelson, Nesenjuk, Noonan, Obadike, Owusu-Ansah, Nassiripour, Panayides, Peek, Potacco, Rabbitt, Ricupero, Rosenberg, Ross, Schneider, Suess, Tiernan, Tormino, Torres, Tsiamtsiouris, Vasquez, Victorino, Waldburger, Weiner, C. Williams, C-L Williams, Zeleke

N.B. If you were in attendance and your name does not appear above, please e-mail the Secretary directly (duffy@wpunj.edu)

PROCEDURAL NOTE: Only senators and presenters should attend the meeting live in the Library Auditorium. Everyone else should join via Teams. When someone viewing remotely wishes to speak s/he should type SPEAK in the Chat box. Duffy will keep track of those desiring to speak and will recognize each in order. When recognized, the speaker will then unmute the microphone. Only the Chair's screen will be visible. The session will be recorded, but only the Secretary will have access to the recording.

PRELIMINARIES: Chairperson Wallace called the meeting to order at 12:37pm. Kecojevic and Orr moved acceptance of the Agenda, which was adopted without objection. Orr and S. Williams moved acceptance of the Minutes of the September 14th meeting, which were approved unanimously.

VICE-CHAIR'S REPORT: There were no programs for approval at this meeting.

Christensen announced that there are still a few council vacancies. In A&C there are faculty slots on Academic Standards and on Advisement and Registration. Among Adjuncts there are vacancies on Advisement and Registration and Graduate Programs.

CHAIR'S REPORT: [Her PowerPoint is archived in the Packet of this meeting.]

Since I anticipate that we have a lot to discuss today, I want to keep my Chair's report brief to allow as much time as possible for our discussion items.

The SEC met with the President and Provost last week and discussed the academic plans for Spring 2022 which will provide unvaccinated students with an online-only course option (and require a commitment from them not to come to campus). In addition, course modalities are being expanded to include online synchronous options. These offerings are being determined by both demand and performance, and Deans and Chairs have been asked to think about the courses that are best suited for these modalities.

We also discussed the plan to increase course caps. The SEC was vocal about avoiding a “one size fits all” model for course caps, and urged that we must consider the type of course, subject matter, modality, and nature of the course when determining appropriate numbers. The SEC also cautioned that increasing course caps could negatively impact faculty’s time devoted to students in each course and asked that this be seriously considered as well.

In the spirit of devotion to students, I want to share some reflections on a conversation that I had with a student last week. This student is a senior in her last semester and despite having never met me, was very candid about some of her experiences over the past year and her thoughts about the University as a whole. She has been paying close attention to the discussions around enrollment and retention and in our talk said something that has been rolling around in my head ever since. She said: “The university is worried about students who aren’t even here yet, and not about the ones who already are.”

Now, that made me pause. The overarching message this student shared was that she felt that there had been several changes made with the intention of attracting new students, without consideration for how those changes would affect the current student population. This stands out to me, because even as we think about *who we want to be* as a university, we must also

consider *who we have been* and *who we are* to the students walking around on campus *right now*.

This past week, we celebrated the opening of the Center for Latinidad, the second cultural center to open on campus resulting from a series of demands issued by the Black student body in 2018. Although this is a certainly admirable step on the path to fulfilling the “service” part of our MSI status, it is, as we know, just part of the work that we must do. In addition to providing spaces for Black, Latinx and other minoritized student groups, we must consider how, as an academic institution, we serve the needs and goals of our students.

Are we preparing them to succeed both inside and outside of this university or are we presenting them with more obstacles than we help to clear? Are we perpetuating the mistake of assuming that because our students are majority students of color, that they are underprepared, incapable, and undeserving of the kind of education that white students in this state are granted? Do we mistake the social and economic conditions which shape their lives as indicative of who they are, or do we understand that these conditions present them with greater obstacles but do not define them and their commitment to their education? Yes, we must provide students with the skills they need to be successful in the working world, but we must also provide them with the tools to become critical thinkers. Are we preparing them for labor, but not to be critical thinkers?

A final note: A few days after my conversation with the aforementioned student, she emailed me to thank me for listening to her. She said that she’d shared some of these ideas in various spaces but felt as if her concerns had always been dismissed. This served as a reminder for me that even as we plan for the future, we must be mindful of the present in order to better serve our students today.

STUDENT SUPPORT: Lubeck, Dean of Students, presented a PowerPoint [archived in the Packet of this meeting] detailing the issues and challenges that WPU students face and some of

the resources available to assist them. When asked what the turn-around time is when a faculty member reports that a student needs help, she said the goal for a true emergency is the same day.

Wallace raised several questions submitted by faculty regarding COVID, contact tracing, classroom conduct, etc. Powers reviewed current COVID protocols. Christensen asked what percentage of students have vaccine exemptions. Helldobler responded that 617 students had medical and religious exemptions, and 84 faculty have exemptions.

Brillante, Gazzillo-Diaz, Kaur, Watad, Alford, Christensen, Snyder, Kecojevic, Tardi, Lubeck and Powers also commented. Alford reiterated the need to have a faculty member on the COVID task force.

BRANDING AND IDENTITY: Since the COVID discussion ran long, Helldobler requested that his presentation on branding and identity be postponed until the next Senate meeting. Upon Natrajan's suggestion, a general discussion of those topics took place.

Tardi said that social justice is at the core of what we aim for at WPU and hopes that it is reflected in course syllabi. She believes our branding should appeal to a large percentage of students. She quoted Ross regarding our having an unstable population, partly due to our acceptance rate. She suggested guaranteeing parents that their children will get a degree, will have a faculty mentor from day one, which will lead to greater social mobility. It would be a mistake to focus our branding only on social justice

Helldobler noted that Lubeck pointed out some of the destabilizing factors our students face (financial instability, unemployment, lack of medical care, underfunded high schools, food insecurity, etc.). We must educate and graduate them. He wasn't suggesting that we brand the entire university on the social justice lens. We should be more intentional about moving social justice into a systemic part of the University's core curriculum. Students need to see themselves reflected in the UCC.

M. Williams noted that the UCC already has a civic engagement component which can encompass social justice but can also include other types of civic engagement. We should advertise what we already have and already do well.

Ross clarified that he spoke of enrollments being unstable, not students. Natrajan applauded that statement. [Verdicchio asked that the Secretary review the recording of the previous meeting to verify exactly what Ross said. Duffy replayed the entirety of Ross' presentation several times and found that Ross never used the word "unstable."]

Wright, Monroe and Andreopoulos mentioned how their department approached these issues. Andreopoulos further noted that location and getting jobs are the primary reasons students come here. For parents the job is more important than social justice. A way to address social justice for students would be to discuss tuition and provide good support.

Hong noted that the student perspective must be considered as any rebranding takes place.

Helldobler noted that WPU is better tuition-wise than our peers for commuter students (but cost more than MSU for resident students). He said that contractual obligations for increments and salary increases for the next three years, it's \$9,000,000.00. The State will provide no additional money. To cover those expenses without additional money we'd have to increase tuition and fees by 13% -- and we'd be out of the market. When the federal government distributed COVID-related money, it did it strictly on an FTE basis and did not consider which populations were more severely affected by the pandemic.

D. Hill suggested changing unstable populations to unstable conditions. Our mentoring must be culturally relevant. We can educate students for jobs but also to produce people who will change the world.

Simon says that we do address social justice, but most students choose a school based on getting a degree and getting a job. With the high school demographics so grim, she suggests we go after older students (e.g., completers) and teach things relevant to their lives and careers. We need to provide tutoring, mentoring, etc. to help students to succeed. If we market ourselves as a social justice college, we won't get the outcome we want. Choose the words carefully as you market the product.

Christensen said that the Undergraduate, Graduate and UCC councils are all looking at how to update course standards and how new courses are proposed. She also noted that terms like social justice have evolved over time. She agreed that it is a social justice issue to support our students and make sure they're retained.

Natrajan quoted a survey that reported that 9 out of 10 Americans would give up part of their salary to get a more meaningful job (as much as 23% of their future earnings). Of course, our students want jobs, but we need to educate them with the capacity not only to get meaningful jobs, but to maintain them. We need to have a distinctive brand that says our students come with values. He detects a feeling that promoting social justice may turn away some folks. He dares the Senate to have that discussion.

Alford agreed that there is an unspoken fear of social justice. We must educate citizens who are aware of their responsibilities. The University needs working definitions of what social justice and inclusion and decolonizing the curriculum actually mean. These terms mean different things to different people. We need to come up with definitions that we may not all agree upon but which we can work with.

Helldobler noted that when one brands, one attracts some populations and turn off others. A student who wants NJIT won't be interested in Ramapo. How do we focus our identity? We continue to be uncomfortable about having discussions about social justice and race.

ADJOURNMENT: The Senate adjourned at 1:46pm.

The next meeting of the Faculty Senate will be held on Tuesday, October 28th at 12:30pm in the **Valley Road Auditorium.**

Since seating is limited to around 100 persons – fewer with social distancing – **only senators and presenters will be permitted in the Auditorium.** The meeting will also be livestreamed. The Teams link will be sent out prior to the meeting.

Please “check in” as early as possible (ideally, before 12:30 so the secretaries can confirm attendance). Those attending remotely should “check in” via the Chat.

Respectfully Submitted: Bill Duffy, Secretary