

## Faculty Affairs Committee // Annual Report AY 2020/21

The Faculty Affairs Committee met five times during the academic year 2020/21 in Zoomland. One of these meetings was a joint one with the Curriculum and Instruction Committee.

In the Fall, FAC met with CIC & Interim Provost Laurie Clabo and Associate Provost Boris Baltes to discuss the **interdisciplinary hiring program**. While appreciating the efforts to energize interdisciplinary opportunities across schools and colleges, both FAC & CIC are concerned about the ways in which decisions for both the annual themes and, subsequently, new faculty hires are made. The main problem is that, at a time when many departments do not have the possibility to hire new faculty at all, and are prevented from doing so years and years in a row, they are expected to make space for and support new faculty that they may not see as the most urgently needed for their programs. Even if departmental search committees are involved in the interdisciplinary hiring process, departments are effectively left in a “take it or leave it” situation in which hiring priorities are set from the outside and not based on the needs of departments as felt by the faculty and chairs working within them.

The FAC was pleased to learn that Provost Clabo is committed to passing on these concerns to the incoming Provost—the interdisciplinary hiring program has been on hold during the pandemic year 2020/21—and to ensuring that the program will be revised and the process improved. She further agreed that faculty hiring should not be reduced to the program but that actual need in terms of both teaching and research in each department should be taken into consideration.

A second focus in Fall 2020, was the **experience of online/remote teaching**. Members expressed many concerns about students’ ability to keep up with their work, manage their time, and maintain their energy levels. Faculty have similar experiences and some feel very dissatisfied with the lack of connection and effective class discussions. In the course of the year, members informally expressed frustration with “invisible” students, as well as growing numbers of academic misconduct incidents, especially cheating on exams and cases of flagrant plagiarism. The FAC is, furthermore, concerned with the increased and increasing workloads that faculty have taken on and the lack of serious attention on the part of the administration to faculty and academic staff well-being, as manifested by the request for the latter to be present for struggling students during the various “mental health days” during this difficult year.

The FAC also met with Naida Simon, academic advising in the Provost’s Office and Chair of the Students Affairs Committee, and Associate Provost Boris Baltes to discuss the revised Phoenix or **Phoenix 2.0 program**, originally designed to allow undergraduate students leaving the university without a degree to come back for a second chance. The terms of the program clash with the Warrior Way Back program implemented more recently. The revised Phoenix program appears to solve the problems generated by the co-existence of two incommensurable programs. Since there was no quorum during this meeting, the members present took a straw vote and approved the changes to Phoenix 2.0.

FAC additionally met with Sara Kacin, the new Assistant **Provost** for Faculty Development and Faculty Success in the Office of the Provost, to reflect upon the implications of COVID-19. The

FAC members generally appreciate the way in which the University has dealt with the pandemic, especially in terms of public health and safety, but also expressed concern about the lack of attention for faculty and academic staff as compared to measures and activities undertaken on behalf of students. The committee further felt that it falls on the administration to keep up faculty and staff morale and enthusiasm and, when possible, to create possibilities for faculty and staff to connect, discuss problems and best practices, and socialize.

The FAC approved the proposal (via Darin Ellis, Associate Provost for Academic Programs and Associate Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness) to extend the **pass/no pass option** for the Winter 2021 term, with the stipulation that students will be adequately informed about its implications.

FAC started off Winter term by meeting with Ashley Flintoff, Director of Planning and Space Management, to be updated on the **renovation of State Hall**. While overall pleased with the plans as conveyed, some members expressed concern about the need to renovate the fourth floor.

Another issue discussed was the result of the Climate Survey that suggests that faculty generally do not know where to turn —outside departments and colleges—with their concerns. The question was additionally discussed on Policy Committee with Interim Provost Clabo, who has committed to re-thinking the role of the **Ombudsperson**. The FAC contributed member Thomas Pedroni to serve on the committee that is charged with this task.

Another topic provided by the Policy Committee is the intended formation of an Academic Senate **standing committee on DEI** (diversity, equity, and inclusion). This will be an ad hoc committee until Fall 2021. renée c. hoogland and Scott Tainsky volunteered to serve on this committee until this time. The committee will seek to work collaboratively with departmental and college DEI initiatives and respond to the recommendation made by the largely administratively driven Social Justice Action Committee.

FAC has been tasked with examining and making recommendations on the ways in which **Emeritus Status** is granted. A subcommittee has prepared a memo, which was discussed in full committee, amended, approved, and sent on to the Policy Committee.

The FAC was, furthermore, charged by the Policy Committee to form working groups and report and advise on the consequences and effects of the pandemic on the academic enterprise as a whole, i.e., to think through what the so-called **post-pandemic university** will be. Recommendations for and reflections on the future of the University need specifically to take into account the question of what it means for WSU to be a “premier public research university.” The FAC formed three working groups, each focusing on specific tasks / topics to address, as delineated in the document provided by the Policy Committee: online education, faculty, and research. The working groups will work through the Summer and aim to generate a memo on each of these areas before Fall 2021.

FAC met with the coordinators/leaders of WSU-GEARS, a project that aims at hiring, retaining, and promoting women and other underrepresented groups at WSU. FAC had some concerns

about the narrow focus on STEM subjects, but was reassured by the fact that the project at least includes the social and behavioral sciences, even if the arts and the humanities appear, once again, to be excluded by the terms of the NSF-mandate. The FAC was reassured by the measures taken to ensure anonymity in this project and was willing to offer its support overall.

The committee addressed the **Career Insights Widget** that appears on the main WSU website. The widget appears to direct students who are undecided to “engineering” or “business” regardless of the answers they provide to the questionnaire (several of the committee members test-drove the widget). The widget actively directs students away from the arts and the humanities, thus reinforcing the idea that college is some (highly expensive) job training. This is in flagrant opposition to most faculty members’ experience that the majority of students do not have critical thinking skills or the ability to think abstractly, more generally. The FAC overall recommends that the widget be removed from the university website. The chair of FAC will draft a memo to this effect and send it to Policy.

The final meeting of this year focused on, first, the **Emeritus memo** prepared by the subcommittee. There was no universal agreement about the draft memo, but FAC came to a preliminary conclusion and voted to forward the memo to Policy.

The other two issues discussed were the **C&IT budget planning** discussion (slide show available to the Chair but not released for general distribution). The Chair expressed her concerns that in all these deliberations, faculty were and are essentially ignored. It is as if the system works by itself, without actually involving, let alone consulting, the people (faculty and academic staff) doing the labor of educating and getting students through college.

Similar concerns were expressed about set-up and functioning of the Social Justice Planning Committee. The administration appears to have cherry-picked two (junior) faculty members and “populated” the rest of the committee-space with (higher-level) administrators who have not seen a classroom since they graduated for college. The FAC Union liaison is bringing this issue to the AAUP-AFT.

Many of the concerns and areas of work for the FAC will continue to be on the agenda AY 2021/22. The pandemic has made incisive changes to the ways in which the committee and its members are capable of thinking about things. Hence, TBC.

Respectfully submitted,

renée c. hoogland, Chair