GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY
MINUTES OF THE FACULTY SENATE MEETING
March 22, 2023
Electronic Meeting, 3:00-4:15 p.m.

Number of attendees: 132 (List of names)

I. Call to Order: Chair Melissa Broeckelman-Post (MBP) called the meeting to order at 3:02pm.

II. Approval of the Minutes of March 1, 2023: Approved as posted.

III. Opening Remarks – none.

IV. Special Orders
President Washington addressed the Faculty Senate
  • Things continue to progress reasonably well, but there are also challenges ahead
  • We continue to fuel the enrollment growth in the state, one of the fastest growing R1s in the country.
  • Major awards across multiple fields; recently partnered with congressional delegation to receive support for humanities research.
  • Partnered with state and federal government for congressional support, receiving $5m, the largest in state.
  • Credit rating just upgraded to AA- by S&P, which is good news.
  • Expanded partnership with Amazon.
  • Challenges
    o Presidential metrics for the year – meeting most, but a few are still in progress and may not meet some.
      ▪ Dramatically increased application volume, except for in-state
      ▪ We still don’t have a state budget, although both House and Senate are recommending a 7% increase so we’re likely to see that. The Senate side is more favorable to the university - $20 million in additional resources vs about $6 million on the House side. No increase in financial aid from the House.
        • The House has a lot less to spend than the Senate because they are incorporating a billion-dollar tax cut proposed by the Governor.
      ▪ So, the budget situation is still a little murky at the moment.
    o Our growth in tuition over the past 5 years has been less than inflation. The increase in resources from the State has helped us and we have given significant resources to faculty and staff as well as financial aid.
      ▪ We have had significant increases in salary, more than any other institution in the state.
- We have done our part in finding resources at university level but have reached the limit on our end. We are currently right at break-even – we are not in a position where we can continue to grow unless we get the additional resources from the state or raise tuition. There is a reasonable chance we will not get either, which will impact our growth.
- We are not instituting a hiring freeze, but we will be asking units to hold back on hires that may not be necessary and review hiring plans. We will be working with units to help them manage these processes.
- We don’t want to find ourselves in the position of some peer institutions that have hired and then not got the resources, and then had to cut staff or rescind offers.
  - Our students are dealing with significant mental health challenges. We recently lost two students in our community. This is an important and serious challenge.
  - We are currently in a battle to keep our men’s basketball coach, who is being pursued by another college. Not necessarily at the same level as some of the other challenges highlighted but a challenge, nonetheless.
- We do have a host of people in our community who want to support us. Later this month you’ll hear more about our Billion Dollar campaign where we will be seeking support going forward.
- Questions
  - Working conditions and rights for custodians – in November 2020 and January 2021 workers complained about wage theft and intimidation from their contractor related to their attempts to organize. This was resolved by NLRB. We recently learned another of our subcontractors was rebuked by NLRB for similar issues. This is troubling and embarrassing to the university. When will the university agree to hire responsible contractors that respect workers’ rights to organize?
    - We have been going through a process to look at how we identify and hire new contractors. These are external contractors. We have put in place lots of mechanisms to increase salaries and working conditions among contractors. I’m not tracking on latest allegations and will need to look into it, but back in 2021 we promptly removed and replaced a contractor when we learned about problems and will continue to do that. It is a difficult time to hire people, this is a work in progress, and we are clearly not where we want to be but will continue to improve.
  - ’Soft hiring freeze’ issue – are you putting retirement/replacement hires in the same category as growth hires? We have a lot of people retiring in our unit who will need to be replaced.
    - We will be working with units to figure out where the line is. In general, things like important teaching needs could be considered
replacements (e.g., if a professor retires who teaches a key class) – this would likely be considered a need. The question becomes what will you not be able to do if you aren’t able to hire? The second question is what were you doing beforehand? In this example, you had someone teaching, now you don’t – that position likely gets replaced. But if you were starting a new class that represents an area of significant growth, we might suggest you hold off until we have a better understanding of our financial direction.

- Work with individual heads to figure out where the line is.
  - Trying to avoid a situation where the position is there but the resources aren’t, because then you have to cut. I’d much rather delay a decision than make the decision to hire and then have to cut them. I don’t think that’s the best thing for our students or faculty/staff.

- The one goal where we’re falling short is the US News rankings. These rankings are also facing a loss of their reputation as more institutions suggest that they measure money, wealthy students, institutions, etc. This doesn’t necessarily reflect our values. Is it worth abandoning this goal?
  - There are many different ranking frameworks, US News is just one of them. The mistake I made with this goal was being so narrow with the ranking protocol we choose to use. The reality is that if rankings weren’t important to students, faculty, industry supporters and employers of our students I would pull back, but these rankings are important. It’s much harder for an institution of our size and stature to do this compared to a small or more niche institution. But we can start to find rankings and metrics that are more aligned with our values – there are entities that look more at areas we deem important, like access, student outcomes on society, etc.
  - I do believe we’re going to see a reckoning and change with US News, but regardless of that we need to be more comprehensive about how we look at rankings, so we have a more representative rating in line with our values.

- Some units already have hiring going on. Will these still move forward, or will they be evaluated on a case-by-case basis?
  - People are at various stages of hiring and we will ask entities to evaluate these. My gut tells me that the majority will move forward, but it will be on an individual basis. Deans will have to be thoughtful here. The crucial question is whether hiring now is critical to moving the institution forward, and how were we managing before the hire. In some cases, this is really clear.
  - Our growth over the last couple of years has been astronomical. It may be good for us to take that growth and digest it to see how it
changes how we operate, ensure that the resources are there to support these positions going forward. Some entities in the state government are clearly telling us that this may not be the case.

- The easiest thing would be to let you hire and then cut if needed, but we don’t want to do that. It would result in less consternation on the front end, but much more on the back end.

  - Is ChatGPT included in the strategic plan? It may be related to future hiring – currently being considered to potentially replace some teaching assistants and even faculty teaching. Could you elaborate on your thoughts on how this might be incorporated?
    - This is where the speed of change matters. When we started putting the strategic plan in place a year and a half ago this technology was not in existence in the form it’s currently in. ChatGPT reached 100m users in 2 months, the fastest of any technology ever invented.
    - I do not see this as a replacement for faculty. I do see it as an aid – last week I met with a group of computer science students from Columbia who gave me a tutorial on how they were using ChatGPT to develop code. They were using it as a helper to get feedback on code they had already developed, information on how to move it to the next step. I also saw it used as part of a Socratic teaching method to prompt students and guide them towards an answer. So, it is a teaching method professors can use.
    - I think there will be significant and perhaps unintended consequences, both positive and negative, of ChatGPT and we will have to work through them over time. I don’t think teacher replacement is an intended consequence, but teacher support certainly is. It’s exciting, but we don’t know all the unintended consequences yet.
    - Check out ABC news interview with founders of OpenAI, who created ChatGPT – one of the most enlightening interviews I’ve seen. The founders have a healthy fear and concern about the direction it can go.
    - This is a topic we’ll easily be talking about for the next couple of years.

- MBP: Reminder that there is a Presidential town hall next Tuesday at 3pm if there are further questions.

V. Committee Reports

   Senate Standing Committees

   - Executive Committee – no report, business will be covered in other committee reports.
   - Academic Policies
• Juneteenth holiday
  ▪ Faculty member raised issue that Juneteenth holiday was missing from the calendar – motion on the table to add it.
  ▪ Previous Senate chair noted that this was already voted on in October 2021 so it is not necessary to vote again.
  ▪ We will be working with the Registrar to add it to the calendar. Also noticed that Independence Day is also not showing on all summer session calendars so we will be adding them and ensuring the appropriate number of contact hours is maintained.

• Budget and Resources
  o Faculty salary data from November is available and up on website. We have put in a request for February data with updates post-market adjustment raises.
  o If anyone has any issues or notices disparities, contact Kumar Mehta or Delton Daigle.

• Faculty Matters
  o Ben Steger can no longer serve as co-chair of the committee; committee has voted to appoint Mohan Venigalla as co-chair.
  o FEA survey will be coming from Gallup on April 3. Partnering with faculty-staff engagement survey (biannual) – FEA will be annual. Survey will be open for 3 weeks. Look out for it. Gallup will also be providing the report – excited for partnership and support for evidence-based institutional change.
  o Questions
    ▪ FEA used to have a comments section that needed to be reviewed and analyzed before being presented publicly. Will faculty still be involved in that?
      ▪ Gallup will handle this. This takes faculty out of the process to make it more objective, provide more protection. But it will be the same survey we’ve always had, just administered and analyzed by Gallup.

• Nominations
  o Call for representatives to BOV committees came out – encourage faculty to check out and consider self-nominating.
  o Similar calls will be coming out for university standing committees soon.
  o Have almost all representatives for grading task force, just waiting for a couple more colleges.
  o Keep an eye out for internal college/school calls for elections. CHSS has just put out its nominations call, for example. Encourage colleagues to nominate themselves, renominate yourself if Senate term is about to expire and you want to continue.

• Organization and Operations
  o **Bylaws revisions**
    ▪ Third and hopefully final reading of bylaws changes.
Three areas of revision we want to focus on

- Clarify and remind that President and Sergeant at arms ensure that only senators vote (IV.2.b)
- Clarified IV.4.a – we removed language about websites etc., as we don’t know what this will look like in future.
- Section 7 – divided voting language into two pieces to cover public voting vs secret ballot. Wanted to give examples that allow us to meet in person, digitally etc. without committing to a specific platform. Split secret ballot section into a separate article.

Questions:

- “Inconclusive” is subjective. Should we say as determined by presiding officer or someone?
  o Keith Renshaw as Parliamentarian: this seems to be standard language
- Follow up – can Senators request a secret ballot? Can they suggest it’s inconclusive even if the presiding officer doesn’t think so?
  o Robert Rules 29.133 does suggest that anyone should be able to do this. Move to amend language in 7a “Whenever a member doubts the result of a public vote – either because the result appears close or because they doubt that a representative number of the members present have voted – they can call for a method that allows for precise counting of votes (e.g. an electronic vote).”
  o Discussion on this amendment:
    - 1A of the document states that we follow Roberts Rules unless the bylaws are in contravention, so do we need to bring in this language from Roberts Rules?
      - Good idea, as long as parliamentarian knows what they are doing
    - Would it be simpler to just keep the language in part b that says any senator can request a secret ballot be taken? Calling for an amendment to the amendment: Any Senator who believes the vote is inconclusive may call for voting by a method that allows for precise counting of votes (e.g. an electronic vote).
    - Discussion on the amendment to the amendment
      - Most recent version of Roberts was released early in the pandemic and is
not really set up for electronic meetings. Would not recommend.

- Support this amendment because it doesn’t necessarily mean a secret ballot. Could also be a show of hands.
- Agree – this is the electronic equivalent of dividing the floor.
  - **Vote: amendment to the amendment passed by acclamation**
  - Vote on the original amendment: do we want to make this change (as amended) to the bylaws?
    - Amendment proposed – insert the word “voice” before “vote” in “believes the vote is inconclusive”
  - Further amended – say “public” instead of “voice” to keep it consistent with prior language.
    - But only voice vote where this would be an issue.
    - Response from committee: We tried to keep this very broad.
  - **Vote by acclamation to include “public” instead of “voice” was not conclusive. MBP decided we could try reaction buttons (yes and no) in Zoom as a method of digitally counting votes – ayes have it.**
  - **Vote on the amendment to include the new sentence – passed by acclamation**

**VI. Adjournment:** All of the business described above concluded at 4:17pm, with several substantial agenda items remaining. A motion was passed to adjourn and continue Senate business at the spillover meeting scheduled for March 29, 2023.

Respectfully submitted,
Charlotte Gill, PhD
Faculty Senate Secretary
APPENDIX A  
SENATE STANDING COMMITTEES

Academic Policies

Motion:

Modify the academic calendar for Summer Sessions A and B to include June 19 as an official holiday to align with the HR calendar which observes and honors Juneteenth as a holiday.
March 22, 2023
LIST OF ATTENDEES

129 Total Listed Attendees (43 Senators and 86 Visitors)
3 Additional Visitors attended who chose not to be listed

43 Senators present: Alan Abramson, K. L. Akerlof, Jatin Ambegaonkar, Dominique Banville, Alok Berry, Lisa Billingham, Virginia Blair, Michelle Boardman, Melissa Broeckelman-Post, Meagan Call-Cummings, Jamie Clark, Richard Craig, Delton Daigle, Doug Eyman, Daniel Garrison, Tim Gibson, Charlotte Gill, Victoria Grady, Liling Huang, Bijan Jabbari, Kerri LaCharite, Tamara Maddox, Alexandra Masterson, Kumar Mehta, Laura L. (Laurie) Miller, Marvin Powell, Keith Renshaw, Pierre Rodgers, Esperanza Román Mendoza, Catherine Sausville, Jessica Scarlata, Zachary Schrag, Gene Shuman, Solon Simmons, Cristiana Stan, Benjamin Stecker, Kun Sun, Rebecca Sutter, Matt Theeke, Mohan Venigalla, Anne Verhoeven, David Wong, Jie Zhang.
