

Report to the Faculty
Sara Freeman, Chair of Faculty Senate
February 26, 2019

Dear Colleagues:

I admit that with the snow days, my rhythm was thrown off in February, especially because of losing rehearsal days for the show I am directing. But, inexorably, *Threepenny Opera* opens on March 1, my cadences are getting back on track, and I am looking forward to our meeting on March 6. And, there are things to celebrate: I offer heartfelt congratulations to all the colleagues who have received promotions or tenure as part of the action taken during the February meeting of the Board of Trustees.

As I observed to Board President when I met with him and President Crawford during their meeting on campus, things are moving fast. Pohlada, President Crawford, ASUPS President Collin Noble and I had a discussion about the stress of “aggressive timelines” and the need to appreciate the way faculty are engaging in the business of the university. A great deal of work has happened and is ongoing: my report focuses on the business of our faculty meeting, the activities of Faculty Senate, the Board of Trustees meeting, and the work of the CTF.

Business of the Faculty Meeting

In preparation, I would like to outline the first major order of business on the agenda, which is the motion to amend the code language about tenure and promotion. The language for this motion was created by the Senate across last year and revised after discussion with the full faculty last spring and this fall. We amended the code in the fall to allow for phased implementation of changes like this, though that does not mean we have to approve this change. We had a first reading of this motion in February. It comes back before us to discuss and decide how to proceed. After discussion, our basic options are:

1. Vote on the Motion. It passes and we change the code.
2. Vote on the Motion. It doesn't pass, the code remains as is, and we continue on our way.
3. Amend the motion, then vote on it. Pass or not pass consequences as above.
4. Table the motion and bring it back for vote later.

We will, at some point, need to vote on the motion to take it off our agenda. If we vote down this motion (or an amended version of it), Senate will need to evaluate if that indicates that the faculty wants to take no action regarding the code language, or if it indicates that Senate or another subcommittee should take another pass at revising the code language to address the concerns about service at the level of full, phases in career focus, and frames about scholarly and creative accomplishment after tenure that prompted this proposed revision.

Faculty Senate Business

Despite the snow, Senate met twice since our last full faculty meeting. The meetings focused on:

- responding to and endorsing the revision of the Student Integrity Code undertaken by the Division of Student Affairs;
- the idea of an ad hoc committee about the status of continuing contingent faculty on campus;
- a proposal from the Academic Standards Committee about changing from pass/fail option to a credit/no credit option for some classes to encourage exploration;
- hearing a report from the Committee on Diversity.

Looking ahead, Senate will be hearing about information gathering already underway about continuing contingent faculty, preparing for elections after spring break, receiving the report of the Faculty Salary Committee, and checking in on efforts to evaluate the impact of the common hour.

Two innovations that are underway in Senate are that we are now going to receive reports from the Faculty Reps to the Board of Trustees committees as a matter of course after Board meetings and that we are initiating a once or twice a year joint meeting among the chairs of standing committees to facilitate communication and coordination. We will organize the first meeting of standing committee chairs as a meeting with the chairs of the Curriculum Task Force.

Last, Ueli Stadler of the Bookstore and John Hickey opened a conversation with me about the Bookstore's desire to support faculty in addressing the types of concerns raised in the Provost's January 15 email about students concerned with textbook affordability. They look to be in more communication with all of us.

Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees meeting in February featured a discussion between Trustees and a faculty and staff panel about Johnathan Haidt and Greg Lukianoff's book *The Coddling of the American Mind*. This book offers a range of diagnoses about the state of contemporary college students as they navigate and critique current educational and socio-economic systems. Haidt and Lukianoff confirm the reality of political polarization and rising rates of mental health distress after 2013 as producing a measurably different context for college students now. Meanwhile, they critique contemporary parenting and cultures of "safetyism" as guiding young people through those challenges in the wrong ways, such that three "great untruths" have come to dominate on college campuses. They define the great untruths as fragility (what doesn't kill you makes you weaker), emotional reasoning (always trust your feelings), and us vs. them mindsets (life is a battle between good people and evil people). They propose that campuses and the culture at large must do more to combat these untruths.

I agreed to speak on this panel expecting things to get a little ugly in wrestling with these ideas, because the book can be used to confirm reactionary ideas about the activism of young people and the work of higher education, stoking ideas that "trigger warnings" and ideological witch hunts and the equation of words and violence are maligning the real pursuit of justice, wisdom, and truth. I don't know what my colleagues on the panel anticipated, but I sensed that we all —

Seth Weinberger, Sue Owen, Sarah Shives from the Dean of Students Office, and Libby Baldwin and Charee who are co-Interim Directors of CHWS — came prepared.

I realized during the panel that the Trustees experienced the book not in terms of the debates I see about it among my friends who are scholars, but as a very vivid depiction of the complicated dynamics faculty and staff deal with every day on our campus. They could not get enough of hearing about how we as faculty and staff experience our jobs: what we do when we're teaching and what we think our students need. In the discussion, over meals, and in other sessions, Trustees continued to come up to me to say how much they want to hear about what we're doing in the classroom and the ways to better support students, because it really impacts how they think about their work related to finance and facilities, academic and student affairs, and donor and alumni relations. I'm not going to pretend that there are not disconnects between some of the problem-solving frames and vocabularies of the Trustees on the one hand and the faculty on the other. But the conversation means faculty can continue to make a case for the structures and supports that make a difference.

In the Trustees business meeting, I was asked to expand on my report especially about the activities of the CTF and Chair Pohlrad offered deep thanks to the faculty for their work in the last two years on the strategic plan and now on the process of curriculum revision.

Curriculum Task Force

The work of the curriculum task force continues apace. Every week we look at more data and feedback; we form and reform subgroups, engage in backward design, and make models. The listening sessions so far have yielded really rich conversation. I can't help but observe how well we all do when we talk to each other, multiple times, and allow our ideas and visions to spread. A large part of our March 6 meeting will be devoted to CTF process and discussion with the full faculty. On Monday before the meeting a substantial report and set of prompts from the CTF will circulate via facultycoms for review before the meeting. I invite everyone to read it and really dig in to the questions the CTF poses: those are our prompts to building consensus for carrying out a curriculum revision that is driven by our educational goals and values.

In late January, I read a *New Yorker* article about decision-making flagged as coming from the "Department of First Principles" that I find myself thinking about a lot as I go to CTF meetings and prepare to moderate full faculty meetings. It's called "The Art of Decision Making" (<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/01/21/the-art-of-decision-making>). Often, author Joshua Rothman notes, we make our biggest decisions without being able to know every aspect of how that decision will change us. The research he reviews redefines "aspiration" as a fundamental imagining process related to self-transformation, not an act of materialistic or status-driven desire. I want us to continue to have that type of aspiration in our curriculum revision process.

Sincerely,

Sara