

**FACULTY ASSEMBLY MEETING**  
**Wednesday, January 10, 2024, 3 p.m.**  
**HYBRID**  
**2700 Posvar Hall and VIA ZOOM**

**1. Call to Order**

President Robin Kear called the meeting to order at 3:01 pm.

**2. Approval of Faculty Assembly Minutes of November 29, 2023**

On a motion duly made (Stoner) and seconded (Parker) the minutes of the November 29 2023, Faculty Assembly Meeting were approved.

**3. Introduction of Items of New Business**

None

**4. Report of the President, Robin Kear**

Welcome back to the spring term, I hope you have had a promising start to the term. I am hearing about all kinds of sicknesses, colds, RSV, covid, flu, so I hope you are staying healthy.

**Provost's memo on DEI and CES in Tenure & Promotion**

- I am very, very happy to make this announcement. 18 months ago, Faculty Assembly passed guidance related to Community Engaged Scholarship and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in promotion & tenure processes. I doggedly followed up on it. In the intervening time period, agreement has been achieved with the union on this guidance, with no changes.
- Interim Provost McCarthy has shared a Provost's memo with the Academic Leadership Team, including Deans and other units, that schools and units can now work on implementing this guidance into their schools, departments, and areas through their shared governance processes.
- I am going to quote Interim Provost McCarthy in the memo:
  - "Both DEI and CES work advance the mission of the university and the Plan for Pitt but are often unacknowledged in annual reviews and promotion and tenure procedures. Both kinds of work can consume a significant amount of faculty members' time, carry a risk of failure, and often are not adequately recognized or rewarded.
  - I am now directing that deans and presidents use their governance processes to revise key documents to acknowledge faculty members efforts in both CES and DEI work (in teaching, scholarship, or service). Such documents might include: promotion and tenure guidelines, annual review documents, and CV templates. This is not an effort to require that your faculty engage in CES or DEI work, but to properly recognize it, where it exists. The two recommendations are well-considered and can serve as resources for your schools and campuses as you evaluate the efforts of faculty who engage in these academically important pursuits."
- These recommendations will need time to be fully implemented, but this is a huge step forward for Pitt and should be recognized as such.

### **Testing Accommodations Issues**

- For the past 18 months, the DRS (Disability and Resource Services) Testing Center has been at capacity, especially during common times for tests (mid-terms, finals) during the term. There was a 31% increase in use of testing services in the fall of 2023 from the year before. During peak use times, overflow space is often requested from the Registrar and used. Relatedly, there has been a 250% increase in overall DRS accommodations since 2000. You may have noticed an increase in DRS notifications in your own classes.
- Earlier this week, there was information and resources sent to the top 50 classes that use the services of the testing center detailing short-term options to relieve pressure on the testing center. The suggestions and options described in those emails are not mandatory and were meant to find any flexibility among these high-use areas. Departments and faculty can respond with explanations of why this is not tenable for their class or area.
- Kris, Lori, and I met with Leigh Culley, Director of DRS, earlier this afternoon to gather more information and understand the situation. DRS has been working with the Teaching Center. I also emailed with the Provost's office about the current communication and the overall demand.
- We discussed that a common accommodation is the lengthening of the test time, and most often, timed testing leads to the need for testing length accommodation. Other accommodations that are less common may include breaks requirement, assistive technology, accessible tables, audio exams, and assistance with scantron forms.
- The abilities of schools, departments, and individual faculty to meet these testing needs varies widely. The need for institutional support for a Testing Center will not ever completely go away.
- I think we need to give thought to supporting more resources for the Testing Center, examine what kind of resources Pitt gives to Universal Design in the classroom design overall, and other potential solutions for the short and long term view. I am going to discuss this further with the Educational Policies Committee to potentially work with administration and DRS.

### **New PostDoc Scholars and PostDoc Associates New Minimum Salary**

- On December 19, interim provost Joe McCarthy sent out a memo to the Academic Leadership Team announcing a new minimum salary and maintenance increase for University of Pittsburgh postdoctoral scholars and postdoctoral associates.
- Effective July 2025, the minimum salary for postdoctoral scholars and postdoctoral associates at the University of Pittsburgh will be set at the National Institutes of Health National Research Service Award (NIH NRSA) minimum annual salary—which is currently \$56,484—and adjusted annually.
- Although the new postdoctoral salary minimum and maintenance increases will be required starting in July 2025, it is strongly recommended that units implement the new minimum salary and maintenance increases in July 2024.
- Effective January 1, 2024, all new proposals for external funding for postdocs should use the NIH NRSA base level stipend and account for annual maintenance adjustments.

### **Pitt IT and Email Security**

- There is still great concern over the use of email forwarding (non-UPMC forwarding) from Pitt IT. I have been in discussions over alternatives, but those are hard to find, and the email forwarding and other fixes will be implemented with Alumni email accounts first.
- However, I am not optimistic on the possibility of keeping email forwarding for faculty. There will be more opportunity for feedback this spring, please let me know if you are interested in providing this.

### Senate Plenary

- Thursday March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023 in the William Pitt Union Assembly room starting at 12 noon.
- The topic will be, Bringing Disciplines Together to Solve Big Problems, focused on how this can and does happen here at Pitt and in the Pittsburgh education community. We are still working on the speakers and fuller description. If you have any ideas on this topic or interdisciplinary teams to approach, please let me know.

### Provost Search Committee

- The provost search is ongoing and in a confidential phase.

### Dependent Care Ad Hoc Committee Report

- Anna Wang-Erickson, Chair, presented the concluding report of the two-year Dependent Care Ad Hoc Committee at November's Faculty Assembly.
- There were 4 main recommendations from the report that I am following up on with HR and Financial Operations next week. With the departure of Hari Sastry, I am including the future interim CFO Thurman Wingrove in these discussions.
  - *Change FN28 to allow dependent care expenses from all available funding sources (internal and external)*
  - *Establish a new Dependent Care Voucher fringe benefit*
  - *Establish a Dependent Care Professional Development Grant*
  - *Add 1 FTE to Human Resources to administer these new Dependent Care programs. Many other universities have multiple staff dedicated to managing dependent care or work/life programs.*
- The final report is posted on the Senate website under Ad Hoc Committees.

### University Policy Open for Comment

- There are 2 Policies open for comment.
- **Assistance Animals, Therapy Animals, and Pets** - Available for comments from January 9, 2024 to February 7, 2024.
  - [Policy](#)
  - This policy will move through EIADAC before coming here.
- **FERPA: Access to and Disclosure of Education Records** - Available for comment from January 9, 2024 to February 7, 2024
  - [Policy](#)
  - [Procedure](#)
  - This policy will move through Educational Policies.

### Decommissioning Policy

- I shared Senate feedback on a proposal to decommission [Policy ER 04, Domestic Partner Benefits](#).
  - I shared this information directly with EIADAC and Benefits & Welfare for consideration and received feedback from EIADAC.
  - My feedback: “While we do not have concerns in the present climate at Pitt for the rescission of Domestic Partner benefits, we do have concerns about benefits for domestic same sex partners being changed in a future state or national climate that might be more hostile. Legal rights, such as those related to the legality of same-sex marriage, can change over time. The Domestic Partner Benefits policy was created in part to bring equity to same sex benefits before the legal right to same sex marriage became nationalized. A possible remedy is for the Senate to be consulted if there are any benefit changes for faculty, staff, and students regarding domestic partners in the future, through the Benefits & Welfare Committee, before they occur.”

### **Policy Revision**

- There was a revision in a Policy related to students in the armed services, related to automatic reenrollment after deployment. We were compliant in procedures but not in official Policy. The Department of Defense needed to see the change in our Policy, not just our procedures to be fully compliant. The change was posted on December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023 in the university catalog, admissions section, and with the office of veterans services.

### **OEDI and HEDS Climate Survey**

- The Senate Officers met with OEDI this week to discuss the high level results from the first HEDS survey on campus climate. There will be further public roll-out of the results, and OEDI will also be presenting this top-level information to EIADAC this spring.
- There were some areas for concern, and there will follow-up with focus groups to determine the nature, extent, and interventions that would be most beneficial. I invited OEDI to present the full package of results to us after the focus groups.

### **LRDC (Learning Research and Development Center) Director Search**

- The Senate is assisting with the voting to elect four members of the search committee for the next LRDC Director.
- Only those identified in this unit will be self-nominating, running for and voting on these spots. This should conclude this month.

**The February 7<sup>th</sup> Faculty Assembly will be completely virtual.** This is because the room here in Posvar is unavailable due to Board of Trustees meetings that week.

Thank you all for your service and dedication to shared governance.

Any questions or comments on my report?

Songer: The increase in request for accommodations for tests suggests that some more campus-wide and multi-component solutions should be found, and the testing center should not rely on the faculty.

Kear: I agree, since many faculty or departments do not always have the resources to implement these accommodations. The solutions could include more support for the testing center in the short term.

Stoner: Question about the rationale for the increase in postdoc salaries.

Kear: The provost's notice specifically mentioned that it was done in order to remain competitive and retain postdocs at the University – since there is a shortage of postdocs at the moment.

## **5. Reports by and Announcements of Special and Standing Committees of the Senate**

### Access to and Use of University Computing Resources Policy

Ms. Angie Zack, CITC Chair

The policy was amended following the discussion at the previous Faculty Assembly meeting in November when concerns were raised about political activity. This is an update of an existing policy.

Kear: are there any questions about the changes in the language that we requested concerning political activity?

No questions or comments

Vote: Yes 43; No 0; Abstain 1.

The policy is approved.

### CS 29 Vaccinations and Immunizations Requirements

Professor Tom Songer, Faculty Affairs Committee

Most of the policy deals with longstanding issues related to vaccination that existed prior to the pandemic. Several previous policies were consolidated into this one policy. The essence of the policy reflects those previous policies. Student vaccination and blood borne pathogens policies are combined in this policy. Details of the requirements for each of these categories can be found in the Appendices. The exemption process is now included in more detail in this policy, along with the contact details for any questions. This was discussed in Faculty Affairs and there was broad approval. There was discussion about COVID 19 vaccination and this is not included in this policy, especially since the end of the public health emergency and the discontinuation of the vaccine requirement for COVID-19. It was approved by the committee

Kear: Thank you. It was also discussed by Benefits and welfare and approved by that committee.

Stoner: Who tracks the information as to who is vaccinated?

Hitter: On the student side the vaccine information is tracked by student health.

Tashbook: Is there anything in the policy that gives flexibility to require additional vaccination in the event of a pandemic?

Hitter: Yes, there is language for both students and staff that states additional requirements may be mandated if circumstances demand

McCormick: Is there any accommodation given to international students providing proof of vaccination in another language?

Hitter: Student health deals with this all of the time.

Tashbook: How about staff?

Hitter: this is handled by the unit and environmental health.

Reed: Was there supposed to be a link to more information concerning exemptions

Hitter: The link is not yet ready, but it will be added to the text

Kear: it might be good to add the text of the link also.

Falcione: Were the requirements for the type B meningitis vaccine discussed? There are two vaccines for meningitis, the quadrivalent vaccine and the newer type B vaccine. Some colleges are requiring the newer vaccine.

Hitter: The committee did not discuss adding this requirement. This policy would authorize student health to add the requirement. The Type B vaccine is required for staff working with the bacteria. The student requirement is based on the PA state requirement, and that was the basis for this policy.

Kear: No more questions. I heard a request that the URL for information be spelled out. We can now move to a vote.

Vote: Yes 38; No 1; Abstain 2.

The policy is approved

## **6. Unfinished Business and/or New Business**

### LGBTQIA+ Steering Committee

Ms. Angie Bedford-Jack and Professor Todd Reeser

Bedford-Jack: The goal of the steering committee is to share, report, learn and assess the opportunities to advance efforts to improve the climate and culture for the LGBTQ+ community on campus. There was a LGBTQ Task Force prior to this, which was an ad-hoc group of faculty staff and students, that provided a grounding document for this committee. We also want to acknowledge the experiences of the LGBTQ community over the past year and acknowledge that a committee does not solve these issues. We need to something to address the issues the community if facing. This is a top-down committee charged by SVC Pickett to make improvements. We have met with EIDAC and other LGBTQ groups over the past year to get feedback and identify needs.

The overall goals of the committee are:

1. Strategic review of initiatives suggested by the Task Force
2. Who are the folks on the committee and how the work can be moved forward?
3. Provide recommendations for allocation of budget. We do not know what this is yet, ., but we working to secure a budget through the appropriate channels.
4. Develop and implement an allies program.

Reeser: We are trying to put an intersectional group of folks, representing different experiences and roles in the university. There are only two members of the committee right now, Angie and myself. There will be three sources of members; one will be form the shared governance process and we are talking to Robin about this appointment; we are working with different groups to identify members, including FA, staff and student LGBTQIA groups, academic programs and community members; there will be appointments from OEDI. We are looking for folks who are interested in this area and who is interested in working on this.

Posed question to the group as to what the biggest LGBTQ issues to be addressed by this committee.

Stoner: I am glad to hear that the Allies training is making a comeback. The problem previously was that some people were well informed, and others felt that it was being imposed. I wonder, if there are better ways to inform people, using online modules, as the landscape has been changing over the years

Tashbook: It is important to do an examination of our benefits package, to see if certain health procedures are covered, so that we attract workers and students in the LGTBQ community. We can investigate this in our Benefits and Welfare committee. We can work with you to explore these issues.

Reeser: We have heard this a lot in our discussions with people, in particular we have heard complaints from the trans community as it is hard to find all the care they need in one place.

Stoner: it may be important to have contact person with the union to make sure these issues are included.

Kear: I like the idea of including the community in this committee.

Maier: I like the idea of including the community, and you may need to find ways to compensate them for their time. We, in the medical school, connected with the Community Vitality Collaborative when we wanted community input on the Steering Committee for curriculum reform. It was established before the pandemic and was a way to connect people in the community to people at Pitt around vaccination issues. Now the committee has broader interests and is a good way to connect community members to individuals at the university. I will give you the contact information and you can contact them in

Songer: are there models in other universities?

Reeser: this is probably the first thing we will do once the committee is formed

Bedford-Jack: That is a lot of what the previous task force did so we have a lot pf benchmarking already done.

Parker: It would be useful to have a staff member on this committee. Also, you may need a grad student researcher who could aid the committee and it would also be useful for them.

Reeser: that would be useful. Staff are central to what we are doing, and we are talking about how they can use their time to do the work

McCormick: Are you planning to look at the services being provided by existing entities at Pitt, such as HR, student services etc?

Bedford-Jack: Yes we will be doing that.

Kear Thank you for your presentation and taking input from us.

## **7. Announcements**

None

## **8. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 4:10 pm

Documents from the meeting are available at the University Senate website:

<http://www.univsenate.pitt.edu/faculty-assembly>

Respectfully submitted,

Penelope (Penny) Morel  
Secretary, University Senate

Members attending: Adams, Almarza, Balaban, Bircher, Boulder, Burton, Caldwell, Dallal, Damiani, DiCesaro, Epitropoulos, Falcione, Ferdinand, Flick, Glynn, Good, Guterman, Hall, Heffernan, Holding, Jenkins, Jones, Kanthak, Kear, Keown, Kohanbash, Kovacs, Maier, Massanelli, Mattern, McCormick, Molinaro, Morel, Nguyen, Parker, Pitetti, Reed, Schmidt, Schuster, Scott, Shephard, Songer, Stoner, Swigonova, Tashbook, Tudorascu, Wiggins, Wood, Yates, Zack

Members not attending: Archibald, Bell, Bove, Cutsumbis, Dietz, Fort, Glass, Jacobs, Khader, Lemery, Lewin, Mahboobin, Mauk, Melnick, Morris, Murtazashvili, Paljug, Potoski, Salcido, Shafiq, Skledar, Taboas, Wert, Williams

\*Excused attendance: Bonneau, Cousins

Others attending: Bedford-Jack, Bindus, Conner, France, Frieze, Graham, Hart, Hitter, Jones S., Reeser, SantaCasa, Schuckers, Tuttle, Wells

\*Notified Senate Office